**The Remaking of Archival Values**

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**Dedication**

For Raymond Builth (1930-2021)

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**Preface: A Note on Position**

I research and write from my position as a white, cisgender, queer, middle class woman from the North of England. This situates my perspective as an archivist and a historian, an academic and a public history practitioner – it gives me privilege from which I have benefited throughout my life. I have almost always been an insider, working, researching, and writing in spaces where I am perceived to belong and where I experience acceptance. I have benefited from ease of access to people, places, and institutions. Some people – those who identify as archivists, for example - have felt able to say things to me that they might not otherwise have shared. Between 2013 and 2017 I was securely employed as City Archivist with Explore York Libraries and Archives, managing the city’s archival collections and a team of staff delivering archives services and developing public history activities. While this provided me with insight and access to my field site in York that would otherwise have been impossible, it also presented (and continues to present) ethical challenges to the presentation of my work. That challenge is further compounded by the advantages and limitations which I now have as a permanent staff member of a UK Russell Group university, in a neoliberal context of marketisation and impact agendas.[[1]](#footnote-1) Throughout this book - and underlying my thinking about the remaking of archival values - is a growing awareness of the remaking of my own values, which was initiated by this research nearly ten years ago. This remaking is a continual process: as I become aware of how I am implicated in the discursive systems that I write about, as I move through a world of normative values without friction even as I critique them. I recognise that this freedom to critique is also a privilege and a function of power. In doing this work I have tried to be attentive to inequity through practices of reflexivity and mutual negotiation with my research participants and collaborators, but I have not always been successful. I borrow from feminist geographer Farhana Sultana in recognising that knowledge is produced “within the context of our[my] intersubjectivities and the places we[I] occupy[ied] at that moment (physically and spatially as well as socially, politically and institutionally.)”[[2]](#footnote-2) Although publishing an academic monograph feels like an act of completion, it is only a beginning.

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I owe a huge debt of thanks to my coresearchers and participants, but particularly to those who threw themselves into the research projects with great enthusiasm. Members of York Past and Present Facebook group and of the York LGBTQ+ archives group gave their time and their energy to contribute to this research over a number of years. I am forever grateful to Lianne Brigham, Richard Brigham, and Helen Graham for our many stimulating conversations about archives, cultural heritage, and the principles and practice of co-productive inquiry.

Heidi Lowther and the team at Routledge have been patient and understanding of how long it has taken me to finish this project under pandemic conditions and the additional pressures that has brought. The editorial support and rigorous feedback provided by James Lowry has made the writing process a pleasure. Any remaining errors and omissions are entirely my own.

My friends Danna, Megan, Nic, Niall, and Alex have been there when I needed them and patient with my absences. I couldn’t have made it through the last two years of work and writing without Charlotte, Hannah, and Leigh. My family and especially my parents have continually offered their love and support. My grandad Raymond, who passed away before this book could be finished, never failed to ask me how my research was progressing and was always my greatest academic champion. My dog Juno kept me company through many long days at my desk and made me go outside even when it was raining. She and this book were both born in a cold November in 2013 and have matured together.

Finally, Esther deserves special thanks for encouraging me, reassuring me, and listening to me chatter about archives and heritage discourse every day for eight years.

List of Abbreviations

AHD - Authorised Heritage Discourse

AHRC - Arts and Humanities Research Council

ARA - Archives and Records Association

CAAP - Community Access to Archives Project

CADG - Community Archives Development Group

CAHG - Community Archives and Heritage Group

CDA - Critical Discourse Analysis

CYC - City of York Council

DCMS - Department of Culture, Media and Sport

Explore - Explore York Libraries and Archives

FOYCA - Friends of York City Archives

HLF - Heritage Lottery Fund (now NLHF)

ICA - International Council on Archives

MLA - Museums, Libraries and Archives Council

NLHF - National Lottery Heritage Fund (formerly HLF)

OED - Oxford English Dictionary

PRO - Public Record Office (now TNA)

RCHM - Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts

TNA - The National Archives for the UK Government, and England and

Wales (formerly PRO)

WYHC - West Yorkshire History Centre

YPP - York Past and Present Facebook group

Hector: Brother, she is not worth what she doth cost

The holding.

Troilus: What’s aught but as ‘tis valued?[[3]](#footnote-3)

**Chapter One:**

Archives, Values, People, Public Histories

Archival Studies is “a field on fire,” amid a radical and liberatory challenge to its core principles galvanised by twenty years of critical approaches to dominant epistemologies.[[4]](#footnote-4) This challenge has been led, in part, by archival scholars and practitioners, particularly those working in postcolonial and settler colonial contexts, where the injustices and inequities of what are often called ‘traditional’ archival practices have been acutely felt.[[5]](#footnote-5) Historians of imperialism, colonialism, gender, and race have also been central in demonstrating how nineteenth and twentieth century notions and technologies of the archive contributed to making empires thinkable, to the justification of atrocities, and to the perpetuation of racialised oppression.[[6]](#footnote-6) Both strands of scholarship have roots in an epistemological scepticism about the relationship between archives, truth and the past originating in postmodern thought, and, further back still, in the movement for ‘history from below’ that emerged in the 1960s. Archival infrastructures and systems established in Western contexts and as part of colonial projects have been further unsettled by the archival and public turns of the early twenty-first century.[[7]](#footnote-7) New ways of knowing about archives – and about the past as it speaks to the present and future – have orientated us increasingly towards equity and justice, drawing on intellectual genealogies of feminism, gender theory, critical race theory, human rights, postcolonial and decolonial thinking, and community activism.

The consequence is a remaking of archival values which has far-reaching, profound, and practical consequences. As Michelle Caswell writes, it is a way of knowing “that not only reveals how power is imbricated in archival theory and practice but seeks to create a transformative praxis that liberates rather than oppresses.”[[8]](#footnote-8) This praxis is a shift to placing “people over stuff”, the needs of communities before the needs of archives, with all of the ethical and moral responsibilities that implies.[[9]](#footnote-9) It is changing the recognition, identification and selection of archives; their description and digitisation; the provision of access and engagement with what has been collected; and the production and consumption of histories in all forms. Under new models, power, expertise, authority, and labour are redistributed (at least, in theory) through participatory, co-productive, and post-custodial approaches. Most recently the acknowledgement of endemic white supremacy, systemic racism, and other forms of structural inequality within archival spaces has stimulated calls for inclusivity and decolonisation.[[10]](#footnote-10) These interventions put the work of archivists under a bright spotlight. Beyond the academic journals and conference panels, practitioners are grappling with what this means for them as individuals and for the institutions they work for and with. How do they show up every day, do their jobs, work with the same archival collections, follow the same procedures, in line, for the most part, with the same fundamental principles, in the face of these profound changes?

The remaking of archival values is not like flipping a switch, nor a straightforward exchange of one way of thinking, talking, and acting to another. ‘Traditional’ perspectives have not disappeared from the field; indeed, they continue to frame archival education, international standards, and strategic documentation as well as day-to-day work. In some quarters, critical ways of thinking and working are consciously resisted. More often they are bolted on to pre-existing systems, sometimes with enthusiasm, sometimes with reluctance.[[11]](#footnote-11) So that archives are, more than ever, sites of contestation and dissonance, where old and new ways of thinking co-exist, are combined, navigated, accommodated, disputed and in dispute. The change process is especially fraught in the context of government funded institutions and in higher education, where much paid archival work still takes place, and which operate within neoliberal structures of marketisation and privatisation, metrics and performance that privilege dominant subjectivities. Organisational and political agendas that instrumentalise archives become entangled with new values in ways that limit their activation; limitations which are further compounded by the realities of under-resourcing, precarious contracts for archival labour, and short-term project budgets. In universities, the drive for public-private partnerships, and for economic, social, and cultural ‘impact’, shape the kinds of archival practices and research that are both possible and desirable. In government archives and publicly funded history places (such as museums, heritage sites and monuments), at both national and local levels in the UK and the Anglophone world more generally, the need to align with policy objectives, and to maintain a position of apparent ‘impartiality’, constrains action. In these environments, dominant epistemologies of archives are primed to persist; they are liable to be circulated and reinforced even as they are being challenged and disrupted. Circulated and reinforced even by people who claim or aim to challenge and disrupt them. Subsequently, while archival studies is theoretically “a field on fire”, it is also a field frozen by the impossibility of simultaneously maintaining and dismantling the status quo in practice. In this book, I explore how and why that might be, and I begin to suggest how we move on from it.

The acute necessity of action to bring about the systemic changes demanded by critical praxis was made clear in the UK in early June 2020, when global protests and activism for Black Lives Matter (impelled by the killing of George Floyd by police in Minneapolis, USA) prompted a heated and divisive ‘debate’ about white supremacy and racism within the archival community. It played out in several fora, but most publicly and visibly via a series of emails and responses sent to the NRA-Archives email list, a primary communication channel for archivists and records practitioners in the UK.[[12]](#footnote-12) It was initiated by a post made on 10 June called ‘thinking about statues…’, which was inspired by the toppling of the monument to the slave trader Edward Colston (1636-1721). Protesters had pushed the late Victorian statue of Colston into Bristol harbour three days earlier, following years of thwarted attempts to have it removed or reinterpreted in light of his leading role in the Royal African Company.[[13]](#footnote-13) The post suggested that statues could be seen as archives and posited, therefore, that “it will be important [for archivists] to find ways to simultaneously commit wholeheartedly to struggles for equality and respect for life, while at the same time also committing to the preservation of records, their integrity and their authenticity.”[[14]](#footnote-14) This statement juxtaposed the language and logics of both traditional and new thinking; a compact discursive microcosm, I suggest, of the dichotomy at the heart of this book. On the one hand, the author strongly (‘wholeheartedly’) espoused a critical typology of archival values oriented towards equity and justice; on the other, they asserted traditional, dominant evidential values, invoked by recourse to the preservation of integrity and authenticity. It was phrased so as to acknowledge that such ways of thinking pull away from each other - that they are in tension – even while the author yearned to reconcile them. The challenge was posed as one of finding a point of balance between the two positions; a sweet spot that would harmonise ‘equality and respect for life’ with ‘integrity’ and ‘authenticity’.

There were 59 responses to the post over the next 48 hours, an almost unprecedented level of activity. It revealed deep fissures amongst UK practitioners, who read more into the subtext of the proposition than its author may have intended, opening up broader discussion of archives and race. A minority saw it as an attack on their professionalism. Amongst the replies were absolute denials of racism and ‘whataboutery’ attempts to divert debates towards injustice experienced by white people and by people of colour in other parts of the world. For others the original post did not go far enough towards tackling the salient issues. Respondents asked, pointedly, why UK archivists were talking about statues, over which they had no say, rather than the archives of which they were custodians. Why debate media-inflamed culture wars rather than the white supremacy, oppression, and perpetuation of systemic racism in their own institutions? These voices were, in turn, accused of “virtue signalling,” being “Stalinist,” having “the logic of witch burners,” and pursuing “divisive, unpleasant and bullying woke politics.”[[15]](#footnote-15) This episode was by no means the first time that racism and anti-racism had visibly clashed in the UK archival profession. In 2019, a person of colour spoke out about the racism and the lack of inclusion at the UK Archives and Records Association conference, only to be refuted on social media by the Association’s public relations officer, ultimately leading to his resignation.[[16]](#footnote-16) This prompted the formation of a group of practitioners who created a pledge to ‘End structural racism in the archives sector’ on Change.org, which garnered 1700 signatories before it closed in mid-June 2020, shortly after the mailing list discussion.[[17]](#footnote-17)

The email exchange highlighted not only the personal and professional failures of some archivists to confront white supremacy, but also the extent to which responses were shaped by an ongoing battle for what I identify as archival values. While, on the surface, the original statement may have appeared uncontroversial, perhaps even common sensical, its two propositions derived from different intellectual taproots which, when juxtaposed, generated conflict and dissonance. This book is about that conflict, and about how that dissonance is being managed. It makes uses of an ontological understanding of values borrowed from Critical Heritage Studies to unpack multiple and dynamic beliefs about archives; and to explain how different communities of people consciously or subconsciously think, and act, based upon them. It is an attempt to make visible the ascription and articulation of values at a critical moment in the conversation about archival practice. Not in the context of grassroots history-making, community archives, and liberatory theory which has prompted their remaking (and on which there is already a rich and growing scholarship) but in the institutional settings where most archives are still held and in which most archivists and historians do their work. My aim has been to map how change from ‘traditional’ to radical is being understood, adopted, and (to some extent) undermined in these contexts. I use Laurajane Smith’s theory of the Authorised Heritage Discourse as an intellectual entry point, to interrogate the interlocking and mutually reinforcing discourses that structure the management and use of archives within established systems of power, even as individuals within those systems seek to respond to critical archival thinking. I consider national and local archival institutions; professional organisations and associations; national and international standards, legislation, and declarations; and communities of professionalised practice (archivists, historians and others) to operate as systems of power in this way. By making systems of values visible in context – as articulated in the documentation, language, histories, and logics that underpin practice – we render that discourse available to deep analysis and deep reflection, both of which are required for systemic change.

**Who do archives think they are?**

The notion of the ‘archive’ has become notoriously busy over the last half century; a shifting, amorphous concept that now spans a wide range of disciplines.[[18]](#footnote-18) In archival studies, a voluminous technical and theoretical literature has sought to distinguish and characterise what constitutes an archive, building nuanced definitions.[[19]](#footnote-19) The most persistently identified feature has been the transactional interconnectedness of archives, centralising their creation, context and relationships. Thus, documents – “archival traces of an act or event” – become records when they are handled in accordance with processes that “preserve their content and structure, link them to related documents, and record information about related social and organisational activities.”[[20]](#footnote-20) These records become archival when they are managed “in frameworks that enable them to function as individual, group and corporate memory,” with the archival institution offering the framework par excellence.[[21]](#footnote-21) This has led to the development of specialist and expert practices to document and manage the provenance, order, and custody of archival materials, and to the international standardisation of systems of control. Anne Gilliland calls the resulting configuration of assumptions, principles and practices, the “archival paradigm.”[[22]](#footnote-22) Developed in Europe throughout the nineteenth century and codified in manuals for archival work in the early twentieth century, it is a way of understanding what archives are and do with roots in the empiricist and judicial logics of the Western nation state.

While dominant throughout the last century and persistent in this one, the paradigm is not monolithic – its assumptions have long been challenged. In a keynote speech at the annual meeting of the Society of American Archivists in 1970, historian Howard Zinn, argued that material produced by dominant social groups - records created by governments, businesses, or other forms of structured activity – was being unfairly privileged, while things generated by marginalised and minoritized populations were undervalued.[[23]](#footnote-23) As Hannah Ishmael has recently shown, this awareness was not new: Arturo Schomburg, writing about the paucity of African-American records, challenged the status quo as early as the 1930s.[[24]](#footnote-24) Throughout the 1980s, a trickle of publications acknowledged that records that were created through community activity, or that were fluid, oral, or non-traditional in format, were not recognised as archival and were excluded from the collections of archival institutions. This had significant impact on the survival of material relating to people of colour, to LGBTQ+ communities and women, as well as records of activist movements and others marginalised in society such as Gypsy, Roma and traveller communities.[[25]](#footnote-25) Where materials did survive, they were often hostile, derogatory or oppressive, produced from dominant social, political and cultural perspectives. In the latter part of the twentieth century BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Colour) and LGBTQ+ communities founded their own archives in response including, in the UK, the Black Cultural Archives (1981), the Hall-Carpenter Archive (1982), and the George Padmore Institute (1991). However, it was not until the mid-1990s that a reflexive turn in archival studies - underpinned by the increased traction of postmodernist thinking over course of the decade - began to systematically expose the inequalities of power at the roots of the archival paradigm.[[26]](#footnote-26)

Subsequently, archives were theorised not as the transactional by-products of activities but as “consciously constructed and actively mediated archivalisations of social memory.”[[27]](#footnote-27) Motivated in part by a desire to extend the reach and relevance of archives to public audiences and to collect a variety of cultural expressions and experiences, a wider range of first tangible and then intangible records were admitted into scope. Writing in the context of the Caribbean, Jeanette Bastian suggested that the archive might be most productively understood as “everything that comprises complex cultural community expression” including the “mobile, transient, ephemeral – dances, oral performances, costume, folk-lore…”[[28]](#footnote-28) Sue McKemmish, accounting for Indigenous archives in Australia, concurred that they may encompass “oral and written records, literature, dance, art, the built environment, and artefacts.”[[29]](#footnote-29) This expansion of the forms that archives might take began to trouble assumptions about provenance, permanence, and custody as immutable archival qualities.

The growing interest in, and recognition of, independent and grassroots community archives over the last twenty years is one manifestation of this unsettling. The first study of such archives defined the material that they produce and collect as “the products of their [the community’s] attempts to document the history of their commonality,” unrestricted by format or provenance.[[30]](#footnote-30) Thus community archives may contain ephemera without context; copies of material held elsewhere; mass produced secondary sources; objects and archaeological finds; as well as memories and stories captured specifically for the purpose of archiving. In this way community archives are understood to counteract the “symbolic annihilation” of marginalised and minoritized experiences within mainstream collections.[[31]](#footnote-31) That which is “considered worthless by one ‘regime of value’” – that of the traditional “archival paradigm” – “is retrieved and re-envisioned by another.”[[32]](#footnote-32) From this perspective archives are no longer defined by their qualities but are identified by the values ascribed to them. As human geographer and poet Tim Cresswell puts it: “In the process of gathering things that are valued, an archive comes into being.”[[33]](#footnote-33)

Verne Harris affirmed this perspective when he wrote that archives “are what they are becoming. They open out of the future. We can, at best, mark their movements and engage their energies.”[[34]](#footnote-34) Rather than fixed and findable, he conceived of archives as things in flux. Even those held within institutional systems of control were responsive to the changing meanings, needs and purposes - individual and societal - that they could be put to at any given moment. Harris was extrapolating from Derrida, whose thinking became influential after the publication of *Archives Fever* in English translation in 1995. In common with Foucault, Derrida proposed a conceptualisation of the archive that was broader than either an accrual of transactional documentation or a repository of communally valued things. According to Foucault the archive was all-encompassing, foundational, and ultimate, “the assemblage of all discursive formations existing in a given society.”[[35]](#footnote-35) For Derrida (as interpreted by Harris) it was “all things that generate our point of departure in the present – the canon of Western philosophy, literature, tradition, context.”[[36]](#footnote-36) Thus, everything we have and everything we are originates in, is produced by and is a product of the archive.

This archive – which we might call the ‘discursive archive’ - is widely invoked in history, memory studies, feminist theory, gender studies, art theory and work on nationalism and identity, and is the root of the archival turn in these disciplines and others. The turn focuses attention away from archives/Archives as things or places to archives as never-ending processes of cultural determination. Historian Ann Laura Stoler (writing of the colonial archive) identified it as “a metaphoric invocation for any corpus of selective collections and the longings that the acquisitive quests for the primary, the originary, and untouched entail.”[[37]](#footnote-37) No longer static but constantly changing, the archive is “a place of reactivation as much as a space of preservation.”[[38]](#footnote-38)

When I write about archives, I draw on a conceptualisation inflected by all three paradigms: the ‘archival paradigm’ of provenance, order, and custody, arising in dominant Western epistemologies of the nineteenth century; the paradigm of the archive-of-valued-things, which expands archival designations and opens up new ways of knowing; and the discursive archive, which invokes meanings rather than objects. The first because, keeping in mind my position as a white British woman and a traditionally trained practitioner, I realise I cannot entirely divest myself of that logic, much as I might like to. The latter two because I consciously work to reflect and recalibrate my perspective. This means that, to me, archives are at once things of and in the world, freighted with the baggage of their histories, and things brought into and out of being by ideas about them, from one moment to the next. They are valued things: accumulations of the tangible and intangible to which values have been ascribed, whether by archival institutions, archivists, historians, or communities; by nations, organisations, or individuals. The question of what is and what is not archival is determined with reference to these ascribed values; and values equally shape the objectives, aims, sense of purpose, and identity of any Archive as an organisation, place, or project.

**“What’s aught but as ‘tis valued?”**

Like the archive, value is a slippery concept; if my deployment of the former required clarification, my use of the latter certainly does. Common usage relates to equivalency: value is “the material or monetary worth of something” in the context of an exchange.[[39]](#footnote-39) “To value” is to make an estimation of that worth. This implies that value is quantifiable, that it is measurable, and that it is embodied by whatever is being exchanged. While this may be more true with regards to economic value within a capitalist system, measuring and defining other forms of value proves challenging because “our language is unable to distinguish between monetary estimation and the idea of something above and beyond calculation.”[[40]](#footnote-40) Thus when used in relation to art, culture or heritage, ‘value’ is often prefaced by a modifying adjective – ‘social value’, ‘historical value’, ‘aesthetic value’ - which tells us what kind of value is available to be measured and exchanged. These are what Lennox calls “benefit values,” where the value in question describes the apparent effects that a thing has in the world.[[41]](#footnote-41) This language is part of the repertoire of neoliberalism, where values become measures of ‘impact’, central to metrics that can be used to monitor productivity, efficiency, and outcomes. It is also familiar to the utilization of the term in the archival field, where value is often conceived as a measure of quality, usefulness or impact.[[42]](#footnote-42) Efforts have been made to define and identify the informational, evidential, and historical value of archives; and to understand the relationship between value and uses of the archive.[[43]](#footnote-43) Value is a way of describing the worth of archives, for example: the value of archives for meeting policy agendas; answering a historical question; communicating with a public audience; or supporting community identity. Methodologies for assessing value have been developed to support decisions for acquisition, appraisal, and preservation with these benefits in mind. Critically, value is conceived to flow from the archive into the world, providing justification for investment in archival labour because of promised outcomes.

This contrasts to how values have been theorised in critical heritage studies, where they are understood not as measurable benefits but as the feelings of worth or esteem that a person or community of people associates with or projects onto something, be it tangible or intangible. In this conception, values do not flow from a thing into the world, but instead flow into the thing from people and imbue it with importance and significance. These “ontological values” are human-centred rather than object-focused and constructed from feelings and experiences, meaning they are “non-truth dependent, plural and individual.”[[44]](#footnote-44) While they can be learned and shared between people, they are not inherent or self-evident. Although they arise from the discursive systems in which we operate (and which may position them as inherent) ontological values are subjective, responsive, and dynamic and cannot, by definition, be objective or fixed.

Schofield suggests that the recognition of ontological values must lead us to conclude that: “Heritage is everywhere, heritage is for everyone and we are all heritage experts.”[[45]](#footnote-45) Assumptions about hierarchies of value, based on the criteria established by fields of expertise, are disrupted and the authority of institutions and organisations established to police those criteria is destabilised. Notions of “universal” or “outstanding” value no longer have precedence over the localised, communal and individual values that are all around us and arise from the specificities of context.[[46]](#footnote-46) Consequently, the role of communities and publics in “identifying and caring for what is valued collectively” is enhanced, if not prioritised.[[47]](#footnote-47) This collective valuing may focus on social values, which Benton and Cecil have defined as the capacity to act as “sources of identity, distinctiveness, social interaction and coherence.”[[48]](#footnote-48) They may arise from affective values; from the feelings, emotions and embodied responses that a place, an object or a memory provoke. Such values may have no direct relationship to the evidential, historical, or aesthetic value of a thing, but grow up from the meaning derived from personal and collective experience. They may be modest, highly localised, and change rapidly depending on circumstances.[[49]](#footnote-49) Such values are also “decentred” in that no single meaning is attributed to the place or object, and individual memories and local stories are given as much weight as official assessments of significance based on legislation or standard rubrics.[[50]](#footnote-50) While benefits values are most likely to resonate with the logics of the archival paradigm, ontological values align more closely – at least in theory - to the archive-as-valued-thing and the archive that is always ‘becoming.’ Schofield’s three core principles could as easily relate to archives, whether we consider them to function primarily as heritage or not. The idea of experts (in this case archivists) divesting themselves of power to share the attribution of values with communities and publics reflects critical archival studies and approaches to community archives. Thinking about the shift in archival thinking as underpinned by values therefore provides us with an approach and a language that can move between scholarship and practice.

Also borrowed from the critical heritage field, Laurajane Smith’s theory of the Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD) provides my starting point for thinking about how ontological values are (and have been) ascribed, circulated, and naturalised within the archival field. Smith conceived the AHD as an underlying hegemonic framework that ‘naturalizes a range of assumptions about the nature and meaning of heritage’ in the West.[[51]](#footnote-51) Grounded in Foucault’s *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, discourse in this instance is understood to function as a form of expertise, which constructs and represents knowledge about heritage and past in certain ways. It is maintained and reinforced by internationally authorised bodies such as UNESCO, and by state-sponsored agencies and organisations like Historic England, the National Trust, the British Museum, The National Archives, and so on. Smith detects its origins in the nineteenth century European concern with nationalist identity and the development of a Western “conservation ethic” which appointed small groups of experts to act as “trustees of the material past.”[[52]](#footnote-52) The social and aesthetic values of these trustees, who came from elite groups in society, became normalised and internalised as the criteria by which heritage should be judged. Abstract concepts such as “truth, beauty and goodness” were normatively applied to things so that they appeared to be inherent qualities rather than dominant subjectivities.[[53]](#footnote-53) The edifying and civilising effects of heritage encounters were emphasised, and a distinction made between those who were qualified to make judgements about heritage and those who learned from and were improved by it. The power dynamic of the discourse positions heritage practitioners and other experts, such as historians, as the active agents and everyone else as passive recipients who are enlightened, improved and educated. Practices are constructed to stress the distance between experts and others; and where non-experts are able to achieve influence it is through managed programmes of co-option to authorised ways of thinking, such as organised volunteering. This co-option teaches participants to ascribe normative values according to established rules and standards whilst delegitimising other values.

Forms of heritage which are difficult to control by the principles of the discourse – for example ugly, abandoned, or marginal sites - become loci of professional anxiety and discomfort.[[54]](#footnote-54) In contrast, places and things which conform to dominant ideals and can be connected to long-standing intellectual, cultural, and national traditions are centralised. Rodney Harrison has identified ‘listing’ or conservation protection orders, both in local and international contexts, as the regulatory process par excellence whereby heritage is defined, standardised, and categorised according to these ideals and traditions.[[55]](#footnote-55) The apogee is the conferring of World Heritage status, which is given to sites of “outstanding universal value.” There is an archival equivalent, the Memory of the World Register, which inscribes documentary heritage on the same basis. This, Harrison argues, is “a totalising discourse representing a global hierarchy of value.”[[56]](#footnote-56)

*The Remaking of Archival Values* argues that the values ascribed to archives in dominant Western epistemologies share roots with the AHD, although the ‘authorised archival discourse’ that I propose has different emphases and priorities. The traditional modes of archival management, which were established during the context of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, serve the same function of naturalising certain subjectivities and forms of expertise over others. The recognition of the AHD in critical heritage studies, and subsequent attempts to dismantle it, runs in parallel to the emergence of critical archival studies, which also seeks to disrupt dominant paradigms. In the context of efforts to counteract the symbolic annihilation of minoritized people and to de-colonialize archival praxis, critical archival scholars engage with ideas and approaches that find synergy with values-based approaches to disrupting the authorised heritage discourse.[[57]](#footnote-57)

These parallel interventions are now so persistent as to be increasingly acknowledged by authorising bodies themselves, expressed in their policies and procedures, and to be taught to the next generation of experts. Even as it was being theorised the AHD appeared to have been overtaken by the emergence of participatory approaches to heritage management embodied in the Council of Europe’s Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society, better known as the Faro Convention.[[58]](#footnote-58) At the same time UNESCO, as well as national bodies such as Historic England and the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA), began to shift their rhetoric towards public participation, audience development, and community engagement. Community programmes at heritage sites, museums and archives in England and Wales were peaking, as was funding for such activity. In the 2005/6 financial year the largest heritage funder in the UK, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF; now the National Lottery Heritage Fund or NLHF), committed £322.6m to capital and revenue projects in the sector.[[59]](#footnote-59) Their 2002-2007 strategy had undertaken to “listen carefully to the changing ways in which an evolving society values the past,” and stressed its aim to engage people not only in visiting heritage but in identifying, looking after, and managing it in accordance with their own values.[[60]](#footnote-60) The same shift in activity can also be seen in archival work over the last 20 years, in the development of community archive networks and partnerships, participatory and co-productive public histories, and the introduction of more inclusive approaches to collecting, cataloguing and working with materials.

However, I argue that these changes are not as inhospitable to the authorised archival discourse as they may appear. On the contrary, the discourse is powerfully adaptive in the face of such challenges. Outreach agendas and engagement practices are too often assimilationist and top down, focusing on how audiences can be recruited to moderately adapted existing practices rather than on recognising the fundamental disruption of new, radical values. Undertakings by institutions and professional organisations to diversify, include, and decolonise can be extensions and continuations of the discourse rather than subversions.[[61]](#footnote-61) This is especially the case where initiatives are closely linked to political rhetoric about the benefits value of archives (and heritage more generally) in solving a range of social challenges from homelessness to radicalisation.[[62]](#footnote-62)

A neoliberal discourse of benefit value gained traction in Britain after the election of the first New Labour government in May 1997, when political rhetoric began to call on social science theories of ‘public value’ to talk about social inclusion, civic engagement, sustainability, and resilience. First defined by Mark H. Moore, ‘public value’ was proposed as a tool to measure the importance and impact of government interventions in communities, as an equivalent to shareholder value in the private sector.[[63]](#footnote-63) It was subsequently extended to encompass a broader range of so-called ‘common good’ activities, specifically the work of cultural and heritage organisations, including archival institutions. In public value theory, value is created through the interconnections of a matrix of relationships, social structures, authorised actions, and community engagement. It encompasses the rights, responsibilities and experiences produced by the interaction of the state, business or organisation and the individual. For the last twenty-five years it has been mobilised as a way for cultural and heritage organisations to express and justify their work to authorising bodies, such as funders and government at both local and national levels.[[64]](#footnote-64)

The critical language of value was rapidly absorbed into the documentation and practice of organisations, but as a descriptor of impact and worth. In 2002, the HLF shifted its criteria for grants from outputs and outcomes to values and impact.[[65]](#footnote-65) Subsequently, a report commissioned in 2005 sought to establish the significance of the Funds’ projects by developing a values-based evaluation framework that explicitly drew on the idea of public value.[[66]](#footnote-66) The report cited Tessa Jowell’s essay *Government and the Value of Culture* as a turning point in so-called “value-based approaches,” suggesting that the word ‘culture’ could be readily replaced with ‘heritage’. Then Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, Jowell galvanised debate by asking “How, in going beyond targets, can we best capture the value of culture?”[[67]](#footnote-67) In 2006, English Heritage organised a conference of consultants, decision-makers and practitioners to discuss the challenge of using value to create “a new language to describe the importance of the historic environment.”[[68]](#footnote-68) At the event two leading theorists, John Holden and Robert Hewison, argued that: “the discourse of heritage has become almost exclusively a conversation – even an argument – between the professionals and the politicians, and one overwhelmingly concerned with instrumental values.”[[69]](#footnote-69) A political discourse of local and place-based identity, of resilience, and diversity, located the value of heritage in the capacity to generate curated narratives about the past to underpin community cohesion and national unity. This responded to a challenge facing government, namely how “to lead and to develop a shared vision or common purpose out of diversity” in an increasingly networked and fractured society.[[70]](#footnote-70) Heritage policy co-opted practitioners into delivering solutions to this challenge, binding the value of heritage and heritage work to its apparent ability to deliver social harmony.

The research on which *The Remaking of Archival Values* is based was originally designed with the intention of reinforcing this logic. A collaborative project between the University of York and the City of York Council (a local government authority), funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (a government research funding agency) provided for three doctoral students to engage in ‘close critical assessment of heritage values’ as they related to three specific areas: world heritage, community heritage and archives. Specifically the students were to consider the “social values” of heritage with regards to “identity, social inclusion and community coherence,” which were key policy priorities at that time.[[71]](#footnote-71) The archival strand of the project was intended to consider how emerging thinking on the affective values of archives could “inform and shape national strategic priorities.”[[72]](#footnote-72) Outcomes of the project were intended to have practical application in influencing the city’s approach to its own archives, developing ways to instrumentalise and operationalise them to contribute to agendas for communities. Here we see how ideas about public value became entangled with emerging concepts of values in critical heritage studies in the early 2000s, although they are ideologically and theoretically different propositions. Ontological values were collapsed into the rhetoric of public value so that they could be instrumentalised.[[73]](#footnote-73) This book shows the same adaptive process in the context of archival practice, as new critical archival values find traction in authorised archival contexts and are absorbed in ways that adjust (and even strengthen) rather than dismantle the dominant values system.

**People Before Archives**

If the ascription of values is the socially and culturally mediated process whereby archives come into being, then people always come before archives by definition. Although individuals can and do ascribe their personal values to archives, my own interest has been in groups who generate and express values collectively, as communities, on the understanding that it is these values which shape how archives are subsequently identified, managed, and used. I include in this professional and scholarly communities, specifically archivists and historians, whose collective ascriptions of value are often seen as neutral, normative and inherent rather than equally as subjective.

Archival theorists have long recognised the ambiguity and dynamism of the concept of community and have grappled to define it. Evans, for example, has suggested that community may be used “to refer broadly to groups which form around shared beliefs, values, experiences and interests, who come to have a shared sense of identity.”[[74]](#footnote-74) Flinn, Stevens and Shepherd have offered an alternative definition based on self-determination: “A community is any group of people who come together and present themselves as such…”[[75]](#footnote-75) Communities have thus been conceived as units of collectivity that “make decisions about what is of enduring value to them and control the means through which stories about their past are constructed.”[[76]](#footnote-76) However, the liberal and uncritical way in which ‘community’ is used, by institutions, by members of the public and especially by politicians, is deeply problematic. In England the term has been heavily and persistently politicised since the mid-1990s, as the focus of public value activity. Community has been used as a shorthand to identify groups in need of intervention, and as a focus for policy in what a leading sociologist has called an “infatuation with community.”[[77]](#footnote-77) In response, community has emerged as a keyword for bodies such as the NLHF (formerly HLF) and Arts Council England (ACE), upon whom many archival institutions in the UK are still dependent for funding for their public programmes. Throughout the 2000s, policies to create “sustainable” and “living communities” implicated heritage organisations and therefore archives in generating feelings of belonging and an identification with place.[[78]](#footnote-78) “Community cohesion” was further seen to be generated through “finding the collective memory.”[[79]](#footnote-79) This has led to heritage practices “filtered through notions of community” which are, nevertheless, led by institutions and government agencies.[[80]](#footnote-80) The use of the term by heritage organisations and practitioners has “obvious links to many social relations of power” and may be misappropriated to manage categories of otherness. [[81]](#footnote-81) Rather than being liberatory, it can be used to delimit and thus control multivalent, shifting and conflicted groups, such as LGBTQ+ people, and turn them into “bland, homogenous collectives.”[[82]](#footnote-82) Waterton and Smith offer an alternative definition that is based not on shared characteristics such as sexuality or ethnicity but on interactions, and which I use here. From this point of view community is better understood as a deeply contested set of evolving relationships that are constantly reshaped and defined by the individuals involved.[[83]](#footnote-83) If the community is dynamic and always in the process of creation then there is a clear tension inherent any activity that seeks to define and essentialise it. Archival practice with communities has to acknowledge and navigate this challenge.

**Archival Values and Public History**

If concepts of archive, values and community are the fundamental building blocks of *The Remaking of Archival Values*, then public history is the juncture where they intersect. An understanding of the relationship between archives, values and communities is critical to the development of public history as a central function of archival practice, of the “parallel efforts of both archivists and historians to realize common goals of social equity through…opening paths to broader and more accessible understandings of history and heritage.”[[84]](#footnote-84) Engagement, outreach, inclusion, diversity, participation, and co-production – these are all words increasingly familiar in the professional lexicon. The use of exhibitions, social media, videos and podcasts, interactive digital platforms, crowdsourcing, volunteering, and partnerships is well-established (although often linked to project funding rather than to core activities). Such public history work is understood as an opportunity for “democratizing history” and for addressing the power dynamics identified by the archival turn through participatory approaches to memory and the past.[[85]](#footnote-85) But it can also be seen as fundamental to the neoliberal justification of archives as institutions of benefit value – focused on short-term goals and on integrating archival labour into government and funder agendas for impact.[[86]](#footnote-86) The same tension can be found in the public turn in history as a discipline. Public history is both a way of fulfilling Raphael Samuel’s vision for ‘history from below’, rooted in “a radical tradition of labour, local, oral and community history” while, at the same time, driven by the marketisation of the university and impact agenda, to “go public”, to engage non-academic audiences and work with external partners.[[87]](#footnote-87) I use public history activity, and more broadly the relationship between archives and history, as a way of exploring the authorisation and disruption of archival discourse through the book.

The relationship between archives and the past is a central epistemic tenet of history, based on the conceit “that even if history is written as a narrative, the past itself is not a fantasy and archives present one potential way to access it.”[[88]](#footnote-88) The connection was entrenched during the early nineteenth century, based on an understanding of knowledge production that fixed upon archives as the objects on which truth claims about the past could be made, tested and validated.[[89]](#footnote-89) The codification of traditional archival principles such as provenance, original order and custody, and the development of practices to defend such qualities later in the century, is related:

…the claims of the archival profession to present historical materials of evidentiary value, constituted through this conceptual nexus [of provenance, original order, custody etc], are part of a broader epistemological framework validating archives as sources of historical knowledge.[[90]](#footnote-90)

In some instances, records could be considered synonymous to the event or transaction they described, as in the case of dispositive records such as contracts and property deeds. Luciana Duranti, for example, has argued that such records should be considered “facts” in themselves, where “witnessable and extractable facts…become identical with the records.”[[91]](#footnote-91) More generally archives could be considered the “residues” of past events and thus the closest approximation to firsthand witness. [[92]](#footnote-92) Writing in the 1930s, Bloch suggested that although truth was never a given in any archival source “at least [it] has not been specially designed to deceive posterity.”[[93]](#footnote-93) Documentary sources could be assigned value based on dominant theories of history and perspectives of the past and be systematically investigated. On this basis, archives remain the principal answer to history’s “obligatory relationship to citable evidence,”[[94]](#footnote-94) an “epistemic tradition of…empiricism” that is central to the logics of historical thinking and which, like archival management, depends upon the performance of certain forms of expertise.[[95]](#footnote-95) This expertise is conferred though recognised training, including in archive research skills, and is confirmed by the use of scholarly apparatus very like that employed in an academic monograph.

Consequently, the values ascribed to archives by historians and archivists have been closely linked, as practitioners have responded to changes in orientations to the academic study of the past. In the UK, for example, increasing emphasis on regional and local studies in the immediate post-war period coincided with the foundation of many county record offices, establishing a sense of shared purpose and territory. Writing in 1960, Barnes described these local archival institutions as sites of apprenticeship for ‘raw recruits to the discipline,’ encouraging archival practitioners to respond by collecting useful records of local government, landed estates and legal institutions.[[96]](#footnote-96) Barnes intended that studying such records would prepare the apprentice historian to graduate to the archives of national government held at the Public Record Office. Later, from the 1970s onwards, ‘history from below,’ subaltern history and feminist history shifted the ascription of value to archival sources. Archives that made visible “the little platoons rather than the great society which commands attention” and engaged “the spirit of place rather than that of the common law or the institutions of representative government” began to gain traction.[[97]](#footnote-97) Unofficial forms of knowledge such as oral traditions and popular memory were rehabilitated as valid tools in history-making, disrupting assumptions about what constituted “citable evidence.” Archives began to collect materials which recovered marginalised narratives, sometimes referred to as ‘hidden histories,’ at the same time as historical work came to be seen as having “application to the needs of contemporary life.”[[98]](#footnote-98) As the past was reformulated as a “suite of possibilities” that could respond to the subjective needs of a given community, archives sought to become “historicopia” of diverse available pasts.[[99]](#footnote-99)

The ‘public turn’ embraced the notion of history as “a social form of knowledge; the work, in any given instance of a thousand different hands.”[[100]](#footnote-100) It was, Raphael Samuel suggested, a vision of historical practice as multivalent, distributed, democratic, open to debate and, by implication, non-specialist. This highlighted a dichotomy between what he perceived to be the “esoteric form” of history practised by professional historians on the one hand and grassroots and community manifestations of the past on the other.[[101]](#footnote-101) The former he saw as founded on a historiographical tradition that “fetishized” archival research and documentary sources, while the latter emerged through personal and localized forms of knowledge.[[102]](#footnote-102) The archive – as it existed and was understood in the early 1990s, under institutional conditions – was positively hostile to these grassroots forms of knowledge, in ways that echo the distinctions between traditional archival collections and community archives. The work of constructing and sharing the past as history was increasingly dispersed through all spheres, from popular television to community activism, from family history to heritage tourism. This was happening alongside a shift in the dimensions through which the past was popularly understood, away from economics, politics, and causality – the territories of experts; of archives - towards narratives of social and cultural experience.[[103]](#footnote-103) Practically, it was made possible by the distribution of history-making resources and capabilities through digitisation and online platforms. People no longer required an expert intercessor in finding and interpreting the past through objects and places but instead could navigate and discover on their own terms. This represented a “challenge to the power structures of Western historical scholarship” similar to the challenge that community archives and liberatory archival approaches make to established archival institutions.[[104]](#footnote-104) Public history combines the parallel impulses of the remaking of both archival and historical values.

However, public history is not always (not even generally) a grassroots autonomous practice. State and state-sponsored organisations - museums and archival institutions principal amongst them - routinely use the past to shape public discourse about the nation. As the “prime organisers of public symbolism” through centenaries, commemorations and monuments they retain significant control over public time and public space.[[105]](#footnote-105) These historical narratives may be seen as components or products of authorised heritage discourse, generating an “instructive history which celebrates and enables nationhood” and supports political agendas.[[106]](#footnote-106) As Black has observed: “Professional history and the modern nation state grew up in partnership,” connecting the study of the past to the study of the state’s own records.[[107]](#footnote-107) In the UK this is facilitated by the structure of national archival provision because, unlike other major historical and cultural institutions (such as the British Museum and the British Library), The National Archives (TNA) is a non-ministerial government department. This means that although no government minister has direct oversight, it is accountable to Parliament through its sponsoring ministers and is staffed by civil servants. Questions arise from the lack of clarity and transparency about how this accountability operates and the extent to which practices are bound to align with prevailing government cultures.[[108]](#footnote-108)

**Archives, Communities, Values**

The subject of this book, then, is the operation of competing discourses of values - both authorised and critical - on and through archival institutions, and the ways in which they manifest through public history practices. I am to explore how and why radical and liberatory ambitions may be constrained by the interplay of dichotomous values, particularly the ways in which traditional beliefs and logics continue to be encoded in both archival and public history work. Chapter Two explores the character and persistence of the archival values of the dominant Western tradition. I argue that these values constitute an authorised archival discourse, which figures the archive as an organic, self-evident, and legitimate functioning system of meaning. The discourse positions archival principles and practices as neutral, normative, and necessary, and privileges the relationship between archives, institutions, and the state. Grounded in epistemologies of property, law, history, and governance that are underpinned by a typology of evidential values, the discourse is conceptually dependent on notions of authenticity, integrity, and uniqueness. This evidential orthodoxy has been central to the mutual development of both institutional structures and archival principles.  Thus, Western unilineal and teleological notions of evidence, time and change structure the ways in which the past can be imagined, and the ways that past can be presented to the public. The persistence of these ideas is traced through an analysis of key authorising texts of archival practice, starting from Hilary Jenkinson’s *Manual of Archives Administration* (1922) and subsequently focusing on the International Council on Archives’ (ICA) Declaration on Archives (endorsed by UNESCO in 2011) and the strategies of the UK National Archives from 1999 to 2019. The aim is (as Tony Bennett has done with the museum) “to illuminate the co-ordinates within which questions of policies and politics have been posed” in relation to archival institutions, offering insight into the ways they operate nationally and internationally.[[109]](#footnote-109)

In Chapter Three, I suggest that the radical remaking of archival values in the last twenty years has generated an alternative discursive system, drawing on feminism, critical race theory, human rights advocacy, and approaches to social justice to develop a new intellectual genealogy for archives practice. Considering different strands of critical thought, I consider to what extent these ideas can be conceived as compatible or sympathetic with the evidential orthodoxy that emerges in Chapter Two.  I argue that the new archival scholarship reflects a typology of values which are ascribed not by institutions and the state but through individual and communal encounters with archives. These values are primarily affective and social, centring people rather than records. They call upon notions of place, identity, agency, autonomy, and lived experience rather than evidence or authenticity as the basis for archival legitimacy. However, some strands of thought remain hospitable to the inclusion and negotiation of authorised values in institutional contexts, re-evaluating rather than rejecting the language of provenance, custody, and authenticity. Others seek to tear down the authorised discourse and rebuild from the ground, seeing institutional structures as incompatible with justice.  I use an analysis of fieldwork with an incipient community archive and a participatory action research project to explore how the interplay of these values can be observed on the ground.

Chapter Four examines how the remaking of values is currently manifested, drawing on in-depth interviews with 17 English and Welsh archival practitioners, to better understand how they express and ascribe traditional and new archival values in their daily work. A critical discourse analysis of the interviews reveals how practitioners are constrained by both the contexts in which they operate, and by the language, symbols and processes they use. The evidential system of values described in Chapter Two emerges not only as an approach and intellectual underpinning of archival practice, but as a universally valid form of rationality.  A shared conception of archives and of ‘doing’ archival practice operationalises the authorised archival discourse, which is further reinforced by the cultural and political contexts in which archival institutions operate. The discourse sets out disciplinary boundaries and professional identities which are embedded with each retelling.  Retellings are coded into archival education, daily tasks, and overarching narratives about archives, including instrumentalisation for delivering social and public policy agendas. At the same time, while the logics of the evidential values system are highly resistant to change, practitioners show an awareness of critical approaches and new values, especially with regards to social justice, diversity, and inclusion.

Chapter Five explores how evidential and affective values are manifested in programmes of public history, drawing on cases studies of three large scale archival projects in the north of England. I show how the praxis of these activities generates dissonance with the authorised discourse but does not absolutely displace it or lead to its conscious rejection. On the contrary, the dissonance is mitigated by repurposing traditional principles such as truth and neutrality in ways that reassert and protect established ways of knowing about the past. The idea of diverse subjectivities, as theorised in critical approaches, are made safe by reaffirming the necessity of an authorised way of knowing about archives within an evidential framework. In order to see the invisible significance that archives embody (i.e. the relationship between the object and the past) an individual must have access to the dominant orientation. This orientation determines how the object is presented and interpreted, and how it can be activated for public use.[[110]](#footnote-110) Differently oriented individuals and communities who do not ascribe the same or any values to archives, or who ascribe values to materials, places or ideas which are not acknowledged by the discourse, are excluded. This leads different communities to misapprehend one another’s archival modus operandi, and public history practices to fail or to become unsustainable.

Given the apparent capacity for authorised discourses of archival values to persist, Chapter Six asks: is the fundamental change demanded by critical archival theory possible in light of the authorised archival discourse? Where does change come from? In particular, what can archivists and historians do about it? Can the authorised archival discourse be dismantled without a radical disavowal of institutional and custodial models of archival work? Are we indeed in search of the balancing point invoked by the statues debate on the Archives-NRA email list, the median between values? Or is that a glorified form of fence-sitting? Whereas Laurajane Smith imagined an authorised discourse in opposition to an unauthorised (and thus more authentic) alternative, feminist philosopher Sara Ahmed suggests that this opposition is not straightforward.[[111]](#footnote-111) We are shaped by our proximity to things, the accessibility of particular ideas in light of our experiences. The direction we face and our orientation to any given phenomena – be it an archive or ideology - is situated.[[112]](#footnote-112) I conclude by suggesting that an interlocutionary approach to archival and public history practice, which draws on Vygotskian theory of knowledge production and centralises the critical identification of values in exchanges between communities, histories and archives, may provide a way forward.

The United Kingdom is my immediate focus throughout this book. The majority of critical archival scholarship (although certainly not all) is currently happening *elsewhere*, and there is an urgent need to consider how these ideas are being understood and operationalised in the UK, where responses have been relatively muted.[[113]](#footnote-113) There is an acute need to address questions of archival equity and justice in the metropole, at the colonial centre. The centenary of the publication of Sir Hilary Jenkinson’s 1922 *Manual of Archives Administration*, to which dominant archival practice remains closely committed, is a timely reminder of Britain’s role in the establishment of archival values at the height of its imperial power. This book is an opportunity to continue the unpicking of its enduring influence and legacy internationally.[[114]](#footnote-114) At the same time the UK, in common with many Anglophone nations, is in the grip of a protracted culture war over the meanings and uses of its heritage. Debates about the removal of statues are only the most recent manifestation. Notions of neutrality, objectivity, and authenticity – which are foundational to authorised archival discourse – continue to be used to characterise the anti-racist and justice-oriented work undertaken in archives, museums and cultural heritage organisations as partisan and politically motivated. Given the structure of the archival field in the UK, particularly the way funding is distributed and the ‘sector’ is managed, this sets the stage for a fundamental conflict between new archival values and critical ways of knowing about the past, and the institutions of those who work with and use archives. Whilst particularly acute in the UK, none of these circumstances are unique. The arguments made here can be understood as indicative of an international challenge, and the critical values-based approach can be replicated in other national and local contexts, especially in the Anglophone world.

Most of the fieldwork for this book took place in York, a small city in the North of England. Founded by Roman invaders in 71AD and now famous for its Viking archaeology and medieval architecture, it is a well-established heritage centre with a rich economy of archival institutions. It is home to fifteen formally constituted archival institutions including the York City Archives (presently managed by Explore York Libraries and Archives Mutual Ltd), the Borthwick Institute for Archives (at the University of York), the York Minster Archives and Search Engine, the Archive of the National Railway Museum. The city has recently seen significant investment in archives work. The £1.8m *York: Gateway to History* archives project (2012-2016) ran in parallel to the first three years of my research. This project saw the construction of an extension to the city library (currently known as York Explore Library and Archives) where the archives are now stored and accessed. Its aim was to create a “21st century Archive and Local History service for York – a service which serves and reflects all communities and cultures, past and present, in this ancient city.”[[115]](#footnote-115) A two year programme of public history activities was designed to “make the service and collections easier to use for everyone, whatever their previous level of experience with archives” and to “build a network of community links and outreach champions across a much wider range of York citizens than the service has ever engaged with before.”[[116]](#footnote-116) It was intended to transform the Archive from a niche venue for a minority of longstanding historical researchers to “a highly valued long-term community heritage asset.”[[117]](#footnote-117) The project, set in context, offered me the rare opportunity to research and explore the remaking of archival values during the remaking of an archival institution in the city. There are also numerous community archives and history groups in the city and the surrounding area, including 34 local history and archaeology societies.[[118]](#footnote-118) Two community history organisations are active in reappraising the heritage values of the city: the My Future York group and the York Past and Present Facebook group (YPP).[[119]](#footnote-119) The former combines heritage and personal narrative as a tool to generate collaborative community conversation about the city’s future.[[120]](#footnote-120) The latter is a “community-based history, heritage story-telling and archiving” group through which individuals share and discuss photographs, film, objects and memories of York’s past; as of November 2021 it had over 34,8000 members internationally.[[121]](#footnote-121) This range of activity provided a compact, diverse laboratory in which to engage with archival values as they were being circulated, ascribed and disputed by numerous agents.

**Chapter Two**

**The Evidential Orthodoxy**

In her book *Time’s Monster: History, Conscience and Britain’s Empire*, historian Priya Satia argues that “the historical discipline helped make empire by making it historically thinkable.”[[122]](#footnote-122) She sets out the ways that the discipline of history has been used to manage Britain’s conscience and memory, as a form of expertise that constructs notions of the past, present and future in order to naturalise some ways of thinking and silence others. Primarily, she argues, history has rationalized past injustices as necessary, inevitable steps towards a better present; a future-oriented view of the past made it possible to integrate reprehensible actions into a narrative of progress. These ways of thinking, these tools of silencing, are coded into the fabric of historical practice so that they become fundamentally entangled with the definition of history itself. So much so that it is questionable whether the discipline as it is widely understood even exists without them.

We take history to be an essentially worldly, secular, materialist, empirical discipline. We presume that the factors, human acts, dynamic forces that we invoke to explain why the world is the way it is are of this earth and objectively discernible. And yet the discipline emerged from a search for meaning that adopted the eschatological structure of religious belief. It was built to endow morally questionable events with purpose and meaning revealed in the narrative end of history.[[123]](#footnote-123)

Satia charts the rise of these foundational theories of history in the eighteenth century, grounded in Enlightenment ideas about time, agency and progress which were mobilised to underpin and justify nineteenth century imperialism and, subsequently, to safely manage memories of colonial atrocity. Archives and archival work have been, and continue to be, deeply implicated in this process. Not only in practical terms, in relation to the records of colonial, settler colonial and postcolonial societies, but because of a persistent alignment with and orientation towards the same sense-making stories about the world.

Records, as the “supreme technology of the late nineteenth century of the imperial state,” were both constructed by and constituent of these stories.[[124]](#footnote-124) Scholars of European colonialism and empire have produced detailed studies of the ways in which recordkeeping operated as a technology of power, mobilised to enforce racialised global hierarchies with white Europeans at the apex. Archival ‘science’ matured as an intellectual discipline and a practice - related to but distinct from the bureaucratic processes of recordkeeping or the philosophy and practice of history - within the same timeframe. Archival institutions became prime locations for the construction of national identity and collective memory because they “promised the nation the truth about its origins and provenance and because it confirmed the difference to, and often superiority over, neighbours.”[[125]](#footnote-125) The nineteenth century saw the professionalisation of archival work in this context, leading, in the early years of the twentieth century, to the production of instructional archives manuals.[[126]](#footnote-126)  These manuals set out how a new professional class of ‘archivists’ should go about arranging, describing, and facilitating access to archives. The same notions of time, linearity and progress which Satia observes in the development of historical thinking were evident, with archives conceived as fixed entities which reflect the past and provide a platform from which to build better futures.[[127]](#footnote-127) As Michelle Caswell has recently argued, common tropes of archival discourse – preserving the past for future generations and the importance of records in learning from our mistakes – arise from these historical claims about how change, cause and effect operate in the context of “white time.”[[128]](#footnote-128)

In this chapter I explore how twentieth century theory and processual guidance inscribed archives with values and qualities that universalised an understanding of what archives were (and are) and what functions they had (and have) in society. Such ascriptions, grounded in dominant theories of history and epistemologies of coloniality, generated a typology of values which constituted an archival orthodoxy, or recalling the language of Laurajane Smith, an “authorised archival discourse.” This discourse, which was closely associated with Western notions of law, property, and citizenship, was founded on an evidentiary paradigm that established apparently self-evident relationships between archives and reality, between archives and history, and between archives and the past. These relationships, while disrupted by the epistemic scepticism of both historians and archival scholars later in the century - and by the emergence of radical, alternate values in the twenty-first century - nevertheless remain encoded into archival practices today at the highest levels of governance, oversight, and advocacy. I explore how a conceptual dependency on concepts of evidentiality, authenticity, integrity and truth continue to underpin archival work both nationally and internationally. This persistent logic of evidentiality provides insight into why programmes of community engagement, diversification, inclusion, and decolonisation continue to meet not only ideological but discursive, systemic resistance.

**The Essential Qualities of Archives**

Sir Hilary Jenkinson’s *A Manual of Archive Administration*, first published in 1922 and subsequently revised in 1938 and reissued in 1935, is the preeminent foundational text of archival scholarship and education, certainly in Britain and arguably in the English-speaking world. While Hannah Ishmael’s recent work in contextualising its production has taught us the extent to which it arises out of immediate circumstances following the First World War, and research by Margaret Proctor questions the extent to which Jenkinson was a seminal thinker, the one-hundred-year-old book remains a touchstone of archival theory and identity.[[129]](#footnote-129) Whether it deserves this status the *Manual* nevertheless persists as a point of reference for those trained in archival practice, particularly in the UK, so axiomatic of the discipline that archival education is unthinkable without reference to its ideas. Since 2007 an annual Jenkinson Lecture has been held each year at UCL, where Jenkinson founded one of the first archives administration course in 1947, in which speakers grapple explicitly with the principles that he established and codified.[[130]](#footnote-130) Even amongst young professionals Jenkinson looms large, as a kind of grandfather or patron saint: in March 2018 a student asked for the location of his grave on the NRA-Archives mailing list with the intention of visiting him to honour finishing their training.[[131]](#footnote-131)

In the *Manual,* Jenkinson set out a definition of archives, which closely reflects that still in use in international standards and professional dictionaries.[[132]](#footnote-132) He stated that an archive was the by-product of “administrative or executive transaction[s] (whether public or private) of which itself formed a part.”[[133]](#footnote-133) Archives could further be identified by two “features of extraordinary value and importance”: *impartiality* and *authenticity*.[[134]](#footnote-134) It was these features that made them uniquely suitable for deployment for official and scholarly purposes. Impartiality was assured because, as he conceived them, archives were not consciously created to capture, collect, or collate information about the past or the present for the purposes of history-making or communal remembering. Instead, archives were generated by structured mechanisms and transactions to serve present concerns, whether in the context of a colonial administration, national government, town or parish council, charitable organisation, or business. He claimed: ‘Archives were not drawn up in the interest or the information of Posterity.’[[135]](#footnote-135) Authenticity was preserved by the subsequent retention of archives in “official custody and for official information only” by a “responsible person”.[[136]](#footnote-136) The central underlying tenet was that, if certain standardized conditions could be met, archives were disinterested, factual, and truthful representations of reality, and thus had credibility and value as evidence.

Published in the immediate aftermath of the war, the *Manual’s* codification of professional practice was, as Ishmael has observed, inextricable from colonialism and contemporary ideas about race.[[137]](#footnote-137) Her work to “re-tether” him as a civil servant within a colonial administration, helps us to understand “how the intellectual underpinning of Empire and categories of difference permeates Jenkinson’s world view.”[[138]](#footnote-138) And the role of the archivist in this Jenkinsonian worldview was to provide a “physical and moral defence of archives,” taking as “…His Creed, the Sanctity of Evidence.”[[139]](#footnote-139) Such a claim rested on ideas about objectivity and rationality built on a patriarchal and white supremacist construction of reality, and was authorised by the needs and demands of the systems of power that underpinned that reality. The *Manual* goes on to lay out, in detail, how archives should be practically stored, secured, handled, accessed, and repaired (even going so far as to specify the correct type of shelving, and options of boxes and envelopes for packaging). Jenkinson sets out what would become best practice for accessioning, arranging, describing, cataloguing (or inventorying, as he terms it) and referencing. For the latter he uses the example of the hierarchical ordering system at the Public Record Office, which is still in use at The National Archives today. His methods have enjoyed extraordinary longevity: When I first began working in an archival institution in 2006 I followed procedures copied directly from the Manual, down to the way in which I used paper slips to label folders.

The logic of core archival principles can be traced back to this conception of archives as “simple, stable, uncontested…” evidences that “…reflect reality.”[[140]](#footnote-140) Jenkinson’s assertion that the creed of the archivist should be “the sanctity of evidence” explicitly connected archival work with the ascription and subsequently guardianship (or gatekeeper-ship) of evidential values.[[141]](#footnote-141) A complex of qualities have developed to act as signifiers and measures of these values, which Victoria Lane and Jennie Hill identify as an “epistemological bedrock of our [English, and Western] archival practice.”[[142]](#footnote-142) In addition to impartiality and authenticity, discursive calling cards include “immutability, reliability… integrity, truth, authority, accuracy, order, uniqueness, and trustworthiness.”[[143]](#footnote-143) Jenkinson’s widely adopted methods of both intellectual control and physical preservation were developed for the purpose of ascribing and protecting these values.[[144]](#footnote-144)

The subsequent centralisation of the principles of context, provenance, custody, and original order are intellectually rooted in this value, which manifest in ubiquitous day-to-day practices from accession agreements to digitisation protocols. The principles require the management of archives within expert systems, designed to maintain archives’ impartiality and authenticity, their evidential qualities. As Albada, writing out of the European tradition seventy years after Jenkinson, affirmed:

…archival documents should be kept and studied in their original context, that content and context are integral to the scientific and legal value of an archival document, that no archives is without an original order and that order should form the backbone of any cataloguing activity.[[145]](#footnote-145)

Although Jenkinson’s position has been heavily challenged both practically and theoretically almost since the moment of the Manual’s publication, the underlying ascription of evidential value that he articulated and developed throughout his career has retained significant traction. We find it haunting and circulating through any text that engages with questions of authenticity, provenance, or custody, or which requires an appreciation of the intellectual origins of these concepts even where their purpose is to challenge them. Thus we find Jeanette Bastian affirming that the key archival values remain “evidence, authenticity and preservation,” upon which the bedrock principles of “custody” and intellectual control are founded.[[146]](#footnote-146) In Craig Gauld’s work we find a renewed commitment to a Jenkinsonian position in both digital and analogue contexts, in that “the basic remit of the archivist remains, in principle, the same…” in supporting “the principle of evidential credibility, based on the authentic and verifiable record.”[[147]](#footnote-147) This kind of statement (made, in this instance) by an established teacher on a UK archives course) goes some way to explaining why Jenkinson’s claim that archives tell the truth and that archivists are “the most selfless devotees of Truth the modern world produces” was echoed by several of the practitioners interviewed for this book.[[148]](#footnote-148) The primacy of evidential value is the subject position upon and against which subsequent thinking has been constructed.

Throughout the twentieth century, the challenge to Jenkinson’s *Manual* was not epistemological but grew from the impracticalities of his methods, particularly regarding the selection and appraisal of archives for preservation. He disavowed both, advocating that the practitioner should passively receive archives from their creators without interposing judgement. At the inaugural lecture of the UCL archival studies programme in 1947 Jenkinson explained:

Archives are not collected… They come together and reach their final arrangements by a natural process. They are a growth; almost you might say, as much an organism as a tree or an animal.[[149]](#footnote-149)

This ‘natural’ accumulation of material over time would represent the most trustworthy and evidential sources of information without partisan decision-making. However, this proved increasingly impractical considering the vast accumulations of records produced by governments and organisations during and after the Second World War. In 1956, American archivist T.R. Schellenberg put forward an alternative in *Modern Archives: Principles and Techniques*, describing how practitioners should actively decide what to keep from amidst the mass of survivals. Schellenberg advocated the appraisal of evidential and informational values, including potential historical value, to make decisions about what to keep and what to discard, ensuring the selection of the worthiest documents for preservation.[[150]](#footnote-150) This required archivists - as experts - to define, identify and manage value rather than simply guard it. Whereas for Jenkinson archival value was predetermined by originating bodies and was, in fact, contingent on non-interference, for Schellenberg value was quantified and activated by archival interventions. Values were identified and confirmed by methods of appraisal and selection.

The latter position was integrated in to practice in the UK context following the Grigg Report in 1954.[[151]](#footnote-151) This advocated for the identification of records of particular significance, leading ultimately to a list of governmental and institutional archives considered to be of national value, whose preservation was legally mandated by the Public Records Act 1958.[[152]](#footnote-152) However, this selection was still to be done by originating bodies as per Jenkinson rather than directly by archivists. But despite heated debate on the issue – leading Schellenberg to privately refer to Jenkinson as “an old fossil”[[153]](#footnote-153) - both positions were epistemologically compatible with “a belief in the organic nature of archives as explicit representations of organisational activity” and with the pre-eminence of evidentiality as a measure of quality.[[154]](#footnote-154)

Derrida posited that this connection between archives and evidence is as old as the archival concept itself, stemming from the house of the Greek magistrate, the arkheion.[[155]](#footnote-155) The documents kept there were tantamount to the word of law, and were given a place of privilege as part of “a patriarchic function without which no archive would come into play or appear as such.”[[156]](#footnote-156) In her ancient history of record-keeping, Duranti outlines a longer history still, arguing that early references to archival material in Mesopotamia in 4000BC positioned them as “guardians over the arsenals of law and administration.”[[157]](#footnote-157) In both Derrida’s theorisation and Duranti’s history, the archive is seen to play a fundamental role in the institutionalisation of power by governing systems. The evidential value of the archive is conferred by its ability to embody the rule of law, to fix and replicate an authorised reality. Once it is ascribed evidential value, the archive is legitimised and imbued with a signifying power to speak and tell which relegates other ways of knowing such as memory and testimony.

Recognition of this power was instrumental to the development of recordkeeping systems in the West. Clanchy, for example, has demonstrated the link between the emergence of documentation bureaucracies in twelfth century England and the development and perpetuation of secular and ecclesiastical power structures.[[158]](#footnote-158) Critically, a document, correctly produced and authorised, made it possible to establish continuities in the ownership of assets and the exploitation of privileges through space and time. It became the preeminent method of differentiating between competing claims on reality, as, for example, in the first references to a search of York’s civic “archiv” in 1473 to find evidence of a trading right which was being contested.[[159]](#footnote-159) Strategies for ensuring that documents were authentic and had not been tampered with were implemented to protect against the alternative narratives of forgeries.[[160]](#footnote-160) The genres of document most common to this period in Europe – such as the charter, deed and court roll – reproduced knowledge in textual format that replicated verbal understandings. Seals and signatures stood for the presence of living individuals. Such documents could be said to reproduce actual events so closely that they were tantamount to the speech act itself.[[161]](#footnote-161) To borrow Jenkinson’s perspective this meant that:

The perfect Archive is ex hypothesi an evidence which cannot lie to us: we may through laziness or other imperfections of our own misinterpret its statements or implications but itself it makes no attempt to convince us of fact or error, to persuade or dissuade, it just tells us.[[162]](#footnote-162)

In other words, archives are valued as having a capacity for objectivity and neutrality in the reproduction of reality which is only threatened by our fallible attempts to interpret them.

“To see clearly”: Evidence in Western epistemology

Evidence is a foundational concept in Western epistemology, central to both rationalism and empiricism, and deployed extensively in law, history, politics, and the sciences. It encompasses a set of ideas and ways of making sense of the world that span both academic and public discourses. The word stems from the Latin verb ‘evidere’ – “to see clearly” – and, although the philosophy of evidence is complex and contested, paradigmatically it is associated with clarity, truth and just argument.[[163]](#footnote-163) Its synonyms in English are legion: proof, confirmation, verification, substantiation, corroboration, affirmation, authentication and, perhaps most notably in this context, documentation.[[164]](#footnote-164) Evidence is that which justifies or makes reasonable a belief, although it is a paradox of evidence that the belief, hypothesis, or supposition that it validates can – sometimes must - pre-exist it.[[165]](#footnote-165) One of the earliest uses of the word, in the late fourteenth century, relates to “euydance” of the manifestation of God.[[166]](#footnote-166) A prior belief in God is generally a requisite for interpreting such evidence *as* evidence rather than as coincidence or scientific phenomenon. In 1996, an iridescent human-shaped water stain on the glass façade of an office building in Tampa Bay, Florida, was claimed as evidence of the presence of the Virgin Mary. Over the next three weeks, an estimated 500,000 people visited the stain for healing and two years later a Catholic mission bought the building to act as a ministry.[[167]](#footnote-167) In this case, a prior belief enabled the water stain to be perceived as evidence, while at the same time reaffirming that belief in a cycle of validation. In this way we can see that evidence is not inherent but is a value which is ascribed to phenomena, even though its evidential status may be considered inherent or intrinsic by those who believe it. Almost anything can be taken and valued as evidential in this way, as evidence is defined not by its form or physicality but rather by its application and effect. Evidence has almost always been something else before and after it is understood to be evidence: the water stain was a water stain before, during, and after it was proof of the presence of the Mother of God.

The principal effect of evidence is to establish a consensus about the nature of external reality, be it past or present. As critical archival scholar Kimberley Anderson argues, implicit in any ascription of evidence is an “understanding of a shared external world that has elements of truth.”[[168]](#footnote-168) Such truths are understood to be recoverable, describable, and shareable, if they can be evidenced. Evidence actualises suppositions and hypotheses, authenticating narratives about events, people, and things. It validates those narratives when they are made available to others, if the burden of proof is sufficient and those others have enough prior understanding to recognise what they are looking at as evidence. Once validated, evidenced narratives become the legitimated basis to produce further narratives. In this way evidence is both a way of knowing and the basis for the generation of new knowledge.

But not all evidence is equal. The evidential value of an object, and the credibility assigned to it, may be higher in some contexts or cases than others; or the burden of proof may be more or less exacting. In law, history, and archival practice there is an established systemic hierarchy. Although almost anything can be invoked as evidence, recourse to documents, and so to archives, is ubiquitous in the West. This is especially true when the issue at question is the past, whether that past is recent or increasingly distant. In law, original and authenticated documents (a category which includes photograph and film as well as text) are their own privileged class of evidence.[[169]](#footnote-169) In historical investigation, the archive is afforded similar status. While technologies and shifts in ideology have radically changed approaches to it, the document and thus the archive remains legal and historical evidence par excellence.

Instances of evidence that are understood to directly relate to an assertion, because they have been generated by a source close to the event they describe, are afforded the highest value. In the law, tests of authenticity are required for submission of documentary evidence: it should be first-hand and empirical, reflect facts not opinions or inferences, be the product of direct knowledge and relate to external truth.[[170]](#footnote-170) Other signifiers of authenticity include the witnessed signature and the seal, both of which stand to authorise the content of the document. There is also an emphasis on tangibility, reflecting the need to believe with both eyes and hands. In the same way, Carolyn Steedman suggests that a historian’s authority to speak to the past comes not only from the content of the documents themselves, but from “having been there” in the room with them, from making material contact.[[171]](#footnote-171) Manifestations of evidence that meet these conditions are ascribed privilege in argument; in other words, they are authorised.

Other instances of evidence are weaker because they are considered circumstantial or second hand. Though they may be applied in argument, they are unlikely to carry the same weight and require other forms of corroboration. Additional care, alternative methodologies, and more expertise is needed in their interpretation to meet the burden of proof. In any application of evidence there is a burden of proof, the measure of quality required to shift a deciding audience from a position of scepticism or neutrality to a position of positive belief, and it varies widely in different cultural and interpersonal contexts. In the instance of the water stain, devout Catholics may use a different measure of evidential authenticity, of authorisation, than a person who studies patterns of mineral build-up in porous coatings on glass. And it is possible to have belief in something with minimal corroboration if you have sufficient prior trust or confidence.[[172]](#footnote-172) We act on this trust every day. If we tell a friend that we travelled to meet them by train it is not necessary to present a ticket as evidence before proceeding with our conversation. Our testimony is sufficient. However, if the inspector on the journey home asks if we bought a ticket our testimony will be insufficient to convince her that we did. Evidence and the need for it thus “arises out of processes of social negotiation after the fact” and is culturally constructed.[[173]](#footnote-173)

Once ascribed and socially negotiated, the maintenance of evidential value takes further work. If an object is to function, as Sekula claims the archive does, as a “sealed space of authority” which “erase undecidability” and permits access to past or future realities in the present, then rules and measures are required to manage it.[[174]](#footnote-174) Evidence must be authenticated against underlying assumptions that ascribe it value and then placed in conditions that maintain that value. Jenkinson’s principles of archival practice are rooted in the service of these value-making, value-maintaining systems, which work through and in sympathy with existing power structures and make it possible to believe some things (and the assertions of some people) more readily than others. While the train ticket example is relatively benign, the admissibility and believability of evidence – the acceptance of something *as evidence* - is a privilege, is racialised and perpetuates societal oppression and legal discrimination.[[175]](#footnote-175)

It follows that if some forms of evidence are considered to provide more authentic access to the truth, it will be easier to sustain narratives that are produced and reinforced by these forms of evidence. This has significant implications for the types of events, experiences, presents, and pasts that can be verified. It also has an impact on the forms of record that are judged to have sufficient value to be perceived and identified as archives and for how they are treated once selected. The application of tests of relevance and authenticity require that legal practitioners, historians, and archivists are capable of recognising, evaluating, and interpreting evidentiality. Both the requirements and the tests are grounded, again, in social systems and institutions of Western culture, which are replicated in a framework of expertise. They assume the existence of a body of experts who, by definition, operate amidst a majority population of non-experts. A dichotomy between expert and non-expert is established, mirroring the distinction between high-value evidence (considered authentic) and low-value evidence (deemed inadmissible).

The identification of evidential authenticity in the West rests on the value judgements of experts, which have been normalised to appear self-evident. For example, although conceptualisations of evidence in the study of history have recently become more flexible and dynamic, especially in the light of postmodern approaches to the past, modern historiographical practice remains grounded in empirical techniques of investigation and interpretation.[[176]](#footnote-176) Von Ranke, often identified as the “founding father” of historical empiricism, advocated that a historian’s work should arise directly from the “primary sources” with no recourse to “intuition or grand a priori themes.”[[177]](#footnote-177) He considered that the past should be studied from the particular detail of documentary evidence rather than in pursuit of a general theory. Contemporary sources closest to events should be treated as superior to any others, casting suspicion on other forms of historical knowledge.

The articulation of this approach coincided with and subsequently fuelled a movement to preserve and make available certain categories of archives. The textual document is the ubiquitous form in Western cultures, available for a range of evidencing activity from the personal and mundane to the national and seminal: birth certificates and house deeds, Domesday and Magna Carta, bus tickets and shopping receipts, the correspondence of kings and the service files of intelligence operatives. The document is used to fix and externalise transactions and moments in time, so that they continue to exist by proxy in the future. Preserved as archives they enable a temporal disconnect, so that the pasts they represent can exist in the present moment and on into the future.[[178]](#footnote-178) As such they represent, as Anderson puts it, “intentional, stable, semantic structures that move through time.”[[179]](#footnote-179) The founding of national archival repositories and canonical series of published records reflected the reach and respect this material received from scholars. In the UK, the first Records Commission was established by the British Parliament in 1802, followed in 1838 by the founding of the Public Record Office in London. In 1857, the ‘Rolls Series’ was instituted to publish editions of foundational documents of English history.[[180]](#footnote-180) The foci of these efforts were overwhelmingly the products of governments and ruling elites, which produced highly structured, stable and consistent records over extended periods of time. Charters, court records, financial accounts and so on were centralised, privileged, and thus authorised as accounts of the past. This type of historical evidence readily aligned with the pre-existing ideas about the narrative of European culture stressed by Satia: progress, the rise of the nation state, and the ordained superiority of white elites. A key facet of their evidential value was (and is) their harmonisation with dominant legal and historical uses.

Consequently, certain types of archives were given the evidential weight necessary to establish authoritative versions of the past, in contrast with the intangibility of memory or the obliqueness of material culture. A dream, a story passed down through the generations or a pattern in the flight of migrating birds cannot be ascribed evidential value from this perspective and are thus harder (or impossible) to conceive as archives, even though they may have significant meaning under minoritized or Indigenous ways of knowing. Some types of archives are made thinkable, while others are entirely erased.

As Cubitt observes, in the document “notions of evidence, authority and truthfulness, and authenticity are refocused on the seemingly tangible stability and objectivity of the written text” which “tends to encourage a conceptual separation of historical knowledge from memory’s continuous workings.”[[181]](#footnote-181) A representational mode of history attempted to approach the past “as it actually happened” through evidence-based argument.[[182]](#footnote-182) Recently historians have acknowledged that the authority and evidential integrity of archives should be questioned in the light of changing cultural ideas. In line with the new archival values, Steedman has written about the ways in which the processes of selecting and collecting archives express power dynamics in the archiving society. She has noted that institutional Archives came into being “in order to solidify and memorialize first monarchical and then state power.”[[183]](#footnote-183) Instead she proposes reimagining these institutions in the twenty-first century as “an important location of memory”, where historians will approach the collections not as “stuff” but as a process of “ideation, imagining, remembering.”[[184]](#footnote-184) Methodologies designed to enable reading with and against the grain of archives have created new points of access to material which is the product of dominant power structures.[[185]](#footnote-185) Thus the thing used as evidence may be fixed but its evidential uses are subject to constant change. Increasingly, the uses and arguments about evidence are closely associated with the social and moral values of the interpreting community.

Nevertheless, in this new historical paradigm the evidential value of archival material is not depleted. The multi-evidential dimensions of any single archival object is recognised, whereby it can be harnessed to answer a range of arguments, some of which may be fundamentally opposite. The archive becomes a repository of latent evidentiary potential, waiting to be put to work on any particular question. From this perspective we could refer to archives as ‘evidences’, containers which are able to hold disparate beliefs. It is not possible to construct a definitive truth; instead, interpretation and argument interplay with evidence to construct a narrative. This arguably creates anxieties and uncertainties around the ways archives are conceived of and controlled but does not dismantle them. Thus evidential value, grounded in Western epistemology and codified as inherent in a Jenkinsonian worldview, shape what we can call an ‘authorised archival discourse’. This discourse is comprised of formations about what archives are and do, namely:

* That archives have a unique, fundamental evidential value, obscuring the subjectivity of evidentiality;
* That archives are autonomous actors, eliding human agency in their activation;
* That archives record all human activity, a totalising claim;
* That archival work is necessary to hold power to account, but is undervalued and misunderstood;
* That archival institutions reflect a legitimate, functioning system within which evidential value must be managed.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) of key texts of contemporary archival practice demonstrates how thoroughly, persistently, and deeply these five discursive formations are communicated to and by practitioners, politicians, and publics. This kind of systematic reading reveals the discursive systems that underpin written and spoken texts. Close reading of structure, language, modality, juxtaposition, grammar, and metaphor provides access underlying “accounts of the world” as well as “clues to the subjectivity of those who wrote them.”[[186]](#footnote-186) We can interpret texts as both content - for the explicit and implicit information they contain - and as things or objects that have agency and power in context. Developed by Norman Fairclough in the 1980s, CDA is founded in the proposition that social order and social processes are a result of shared constructions of reality rather than individual perceptions.[[187]](#footnote-187) Texts reflect and encode “sense-making stories” which then circulate and develop to “underpin visions of the world and the things and events within that world.”[[188]](#footnote-188) As such, CDA can be used to expose the ways in which archival discourse manifests and consolidates ways of thinking about archives. Its aim is not to reveal conscious manipulations or exertions of power but to review how subjectivities are naturalised and promulgated.

CDA is grounded in the ‘linguistic turn’ in the humanities and primarily in the idea that language does not just reflect reality but also constitutes and shapes it. In the first instance its purpose is to identify the discursive practices and structures constructed through our speech acts and textual productions. However, it is also enables us to identify the relationships between these discursive practices and structures and wider social and cultural processes. As such it responds to the poststructuralist challenge to recognise the importance of culture and context in producing speech and texts. CDA considers texts as both products in themselves, and as processes which are in dialogue with wider networks of meaning. In this case, it can be used to elucidate the link between the specifics of archival terminologies and talk and the wider cultural context of archival values.

A “unique quality”: Archives *as* evidence

The International Council on Archives describes itself as “a neutral, non-governmental organisation,” funded by its 1400 members (many of them institutions) in 199 countries.[[189]](#footnote-189) Founded in 1948, it is “dedicated to the effective management of records and the preservation, care and use of the world's archival heritage through its representation of records and archive professionals across the globe.”[[190]](#footnote-190) The organisation’s influence on archival practice has been significant, primarily through its work in advocacy and standard-setting, and is felt far beyond the immediate membership or those directly involved. For example, after launching in 1994 ISAD-G, the International Standard on Archival Description, was widely adopted as best practice for the intellectual control, cataloguing and description of archives. The sense-making logics of hierarchy, order and evidentiality which underpinned the standard structured the thinking and approach of several generations of practitioners.[[191]](#footnote-191) The ICA also funds and supports significant programmes of activity internationally, including work on disputed and displaced archives, human rights, and Indigenous rights in records, advocating for the relevance and importance of archival work. The apogee of its advocacy, the *Universal Declaration on Archives,* is now over a decade old, having been adopted at the Congress of the ICA in 2010 and endorsed by UNESCO in 2011.

The first version of the *Universal Declaration* was written in Quebec in 2007 during a meeting of the International Section of Professional Associations of ICA, in an attempt to communicate the value of archives to a “universal audience.”[[192]](#footnote-192) Participants in the process have since written that their aim was to generate “a statement of the relevance and importance of archives to the general public,” as “an articulation of the specific connections between records and archives and good governance, basic human rights and entitlements, cultural and community identity, history and heritage.”[[193]](#footnote-193) The text was subsequently redrafted before being unanimously agreed by voting members at the Oslo International Conference of the Round Table on Archives (CITRA) in 2010, and endorsed “as a key pillar of its outreach and advocacy strategy.”[[194]](#footnote-194) At this time voting members were almost all representatives of national archival institutions. It was adopted by the 36th Session of the General Conference of UNESCO on 10 November 2011. While a universal declaration is not legally binding for Member States, it is a means of establishing norms with the aim of setting “universal principles to which the community of States wish to attribute the greatest possible authority and to afford the broadest possible support.”[[195]](#footnote-195) The Declaration is therefore, by its nature, a document that authorises certain perspectives and behaviours over others.

The rhetoric around the development of the *Declaration* suggests that a key motive behind its promulgation was as an advocacy tool for archivists. A press release to ICA members claimed it as “a powerful succinct statement of the relevance of archives in modern society” and challenged practitioners to “use the *Declaration* to maximum effect, so that archives shake off outdated perceptions of their role and finally take their rightful place as a major player at the heart of public administration…”[[196]](#footnote-196) At the same time the creators of the document envisioned its audience as “the common citizen.”[[197]](#footnote-197) Its purpose was, ultimately, to “express the need for the public to recognise the vital role that archives play in every aspect of their lives.”[[198]](#footnote-198)

The ambition of the *Declaration* was significant: its endorsement by UNESCO positioned it as a statement with moral authority at the level of member States, while ICA’s rhetoric also conceived it as a tool to impact on the awareness of the nature and role of archives in the mind of the individual. Both the language of its creators and of the ICA’s press release implied that archives had not, up to that time, been sufficiently recognised at any level – they had yet to “take their rightful place.” This lack of recognition was contrasted with the critical function archives were understood to have in “every aspect” of individual lives. The language was both urgent and totalising: Archives are at once undervalued *and* fundamentally central to people’s lives. This paradox was a call to action which framed archivists as both incredibly powerful, in acting as custodians of materials with a universal impact, and unsung, in not having this power acknowledged. Paraphrasing a colleague explaining the role of the *Declaration* at the initial writing session in 2007, Kim Eberhard wrote: “This is what we, as archivists, hold to be true, and this is how that truth affects you.”[[199]](#footnote-199) The claim to truth – with its echo of Jenkinson’s claim about archivists as selfless devotees of truth - are reflected in the tone and content of document itself.

<Insert Fig. 1. Caption: The Universal Declaration on Archives, 2011. Credit: International Council on Archives.>

It is comprised of three parts and is brief and pithy enough to be presented as a poster (see Fig. 1). A short free-text preamble defining archives is followed by bullet point lists of six “recognitions” and six “undertakings”. The recognitions are constructed as authoritative factual statements that act as justifications for the desired outcomes described in the undertakings. Although the text is less than 1000 words long it encodes discursive statements about the value of archives, grounded in an evidential paradigm.

The first recognition of the *Declaration* is “**the unique quality** of archives as authentic evidence of administrative, cultural and intellectual activities…” [bold in the original].[[200]](#footnote-200) This statement is notable not only because it foregrounds evidence as the primary value of archival heritage, but also because it associates it with the key Jenkinsonian qualities of uniqueness and authenticity. “Authentic” is used as an adjective that modifies and enhances the type and status of the “evidence”. It positions archival evidence in contrast to a sub-textual spectre of evidence which is *not* authentic: the “uniqueness” of this quality of archives *as evidence* suggests that non-archival evidence is either inauthentic or inferior. Archives are positioned as *uniquely* evidential and therefore *uniquely* valuable; to identify something as archival is to make a value judgement about its evidentiality.

The second recognition is the “**vital necessity** of archives for supporting business efficiency, accountability and transparency, for protecting citizens’ rights, for establishing individual and collective memory, for understanding the past, and for documenting the present to guide future actions” [bold in the original]. [[201]](#footnote-201) The validity of this claim depends on acceptance of the proposition of the prior recognition, linking the work that archives do with their evidential qualities. It introduces the related paradigmatic concepts of efficiency, accountability and transparency, ideal measures of activity made possible by the evidentiality of archival materials. The phraseology elides human activity in the use of archives for these purposes. They are presented as autonomous actors, able to do the “supporting”, “protecting”, “establishing”, “understanding” and “documenting” of things independently of interpretation or application. This obscuration of human interlocution is notable throughout the *Declaration*. References to the processes and mechanisms whereby archives are generated, selected, interpreted, and applied are absent. In the preamble where reference is made to the management of archives this is in relation to the preservation function – “Archives are managed from creation to preserve their value and meaning” – implying that value and meaning are inherent rather than ascribed. The third recognition – “**the diversity** of archives in recording every area of human activity” [bold in the original] – makes an equally strong claim. [[202]](#footnote-202) This formulation does not acknowledge the notion of archival lacuna or silences, which are central to new historical and archival thinking, nor does it allow that some activities are purposely unrecorded. It builds upon the “unique” authenticity and “vital necessity” of archives by presenting them as a totalising authority. This recognition also reinforces their agency, semantically placing archives as surveillant over “every area of human activity.” This so-called record of ‘diversity’ further implies that archives are neutral, disinterested, and without prejudice, figuring those ‘areas of human activity’ which are not recorded, are unequally-recorded, or are oppressively recorded as outside the realm of authorised evidentiality and authenticity, and therefore as unarchival.

Throughout, the *Declaration* works to collapse the relationship between archives *and* evidentiality into archives *as* evidence. The latter indicates an inherent property and thus an identifiable “benefit value” which can be recognised and measured by expertise, namely the expertise of the archivist. The archivist is able to adjudicate on the “unique quality” of evidence and thereby validate the archive. In contrast, the phenomenological relationship between archives and people, which acknowledges the contingency of evidentiality as an ascribed value, is absent. To be clear, this discourse does not reflect the complexity of archival theory on the status of evidence. Four years before the *Declaration*, Geoffrey Yeo established that evidence is a relative descriptor in archival practice, a signifier of an apparent relationship between the proposition of a hypothesis and representations of reality.[[203]](#footnote-203) Subsequently, in her seminal article ‘The Footprint and the Stepping Foot,’ Kimberley Anderson argued that because a thing has no meaning independent of human action, the archive is not synonymous with evidence. Archives have no evidential status except when and where people engage them for evidential purposes. Further, the archive ceases to be evidence when it is no longer actively in use as such. Yet, the claims of evidential autonomy encoded into the *Declaration* do not encompass the possibility and complexity of this relativity – they reflect an underlying discursive system which co-exists in tension with this thinking.

“The power of archives”: Archives as evidentials

The discursive formation of archives *as* evidence, which reinforces their alignment with dominant systems of social power, justifies the way in which they are to be controlled. The *Universal Declaration’s* first undertaking is to ensure that the “appropriate national archival policies and laws are adopted and enforced” and the second is that the “management” of archives should be valued and carried out competently. The third and fourth undertakings reiterate the importance of this “management”; the former stating the need for the “employment of trained professionals” and the latter linking management activity to the preservation of the evidential qualities of “authenticity, reliability, integrity and usability.”[[204]](#footnote-204) The association between the evidential quality of archives and the processes of management, custody, control, and policy is clearly articulated. The latter are necessary for the persistence of the former. Archives must be controlled in expert ways because of their evidential powers, a role best fulfilled by “trained professionals” operating as extensions of states and nations.

In England, this association is embodied and expressed through four successive government documents on archives and their linked action plans. These texts have codified and authorised a national position on the values, use, and application of archival materials since the turn of the century. The first, straightforwardly titled *Government Policy on Archives* was published in December 1999; a second iteration – *Archives for the 21st Century* – followed in 2009.[[205]](#footnote-205) Both of these documents were presented as ministerial Command Papers with the status of government policy. In 2017, The National Archives published a third iteration of the document, *Archives Unlocked: Releasing the Potential*. This effectively replaced *Archives for the 21st Century* as a national archives strategy but did not have the status of a policy.[[206]](#footnote-206) Two years earlier The National Archives had released a similarly structured document called *Archives Inspire* which set out their own organisational strategy as a state and government archival institution.[[207]](#footnote-207) In 2019, *Archives Inspire* was succeeded by *Archives for Everyone*, a document which also replaced *Archives Unlocked* for all intents and purposes in the public eye.[[208]](#footnote-208) The latter is now categorised as a strategy for the “archives sector”, which “focuses on the needs and potential of archives around the country,” although the publication of *Archives for Everyone* blurs the distinction between The National Archives as an institution and the nation’s archival heritage.

These documents were intended to provide “for the first time a comprehensive statement on our [the government’s] policy for archives” and set out recommendations for the strategic development of Archives in the UK.[[209]](#footnote-209) Although they had no force in law, they were signed and endorsed by a government minister and formed the basis for the advocacy of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Archives and History. *Archives for the 21st Century* was developed jointly by The National Archives (in its role as the central government department accountable for archives functions) and Museums, Libraries and Archives (MLA), the arms-length governmental body then responsible for development and advocacy of the so-called ‘archives sector’. When the MLA was disbanded in 2012, The National Archives took over this leadership function and assumed full responsibility for the implementation and review of the policy. *Archives for the 21st Century* was accompanied by a plan that set out how the policy should be actioned by The National Archives, by other archival institutions and by archives practitioners in their individual contexts.[[210]](#footnote-210) *Archives Unlocked* was developed by The National Archives with the support of the Activist Group, a consultancy agency that works predominantly with the public sector. They held a series of roundtables in England, convened an “expert reference group” and undertook a public consultation between October 2016 and January 2017 with the intention of “listening to a broad range of voices from across the archives sector.”[[211]](#footnote-211) A close analysis of these documents demonstrates how the authorised discourse observed in the *Declaration*, underpinned by the typology of evidential values inherited from Jenkinson, is reflected at a national level and privileges the relationship between archives, institutions, and the state.

The National Archives of the UK Government, and for England and Wales, is itself is a relatively new construct, having been formed from the amalgamation of four governmental bodies between 2003 and 2006. However, three of its constituent parts have a long history. The Public Record Office was established by an Act of Parliament in 1838.[[212]](#footnote-212) Initially tasked with the management and preservation of legal and court records, its remit was later extended in 1852 to encompass the administrative records of government departments.[[213]](#footnote-213) In 1869, the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts (RCHM) was appointed under Royal Warrant to identify, locate and catalogue equivalent archives in private ownership, primarily those held by landed families, charitable organisations and businesses.[[214]](#footnote-214) The logics of these two sibling organisations established the separation of public and private records as a principle of English archival management.[[215]](#footnote-215) Her Majesty’s Stationary Office (HMSO) was originally founded in the early eighteenth century and has acted as printer of all Acts of Parliament since 1889. Finally, the Office of Public Sector Information was established by European Directive in 2005 to promote the re-use of information generated by the public sector.[[216]](#footnote-216) The repackaging of these four bodies as The National Archives (TNA) created a single authority for “managing and preserving government information” from both the past and the present, the objective of which was to “make the record accessible to all audiences, now and in the future.”[[217]](#footnote-217) TNA was officially made responsible for the leadership and development of the broader archives sector in England from 2011, coinciding with the adoption of the *Declaration*. This change formalised its status as a support agency with oversight of the activities and practices of other archival repositories in England, both public and private. In practice this authority had been enacted to some extent already, through its responsibilities to inspect local government record offices under the Public Records Act 1958 and its promulgation of national standards and strategic documentation. While TNA has no direct management responsibility for other archival institutions, its network of Archives Sector Development officers in each of the regions and, since 2014, the implementation of the Archives Accreditation Scheme, speaks to its authority in the national space. The former is a team centrally based at TNA but with responsibility for supporting and developing archival activity across England, predominantly in institutional contexts; the latter is a UK standard for archive services, designed to “help archives to manage and improve their efficiency and effectiveness through external validation, and by identifying good practice.”[[218]](#footnote-218) The documentation TNA produces communicates directly to institutions and practitioners how archives are to be understood and how archival institutions are to be properly managed.

The Executive Summary of the 2009 *Archives for the 21st Century* - in a boxed section titled “The power of archives” - stated that archives provide:

**evidence that demonstrates the integrity and judgement of public and private decisions and actions**, which lasts longer and is more reliable than individual memory. Archives thus…have an impact on the lives of individuals by providing authentic and reliable evidence of past actions.”[[219]](#footnote-219) [bold in the original]

The strategy goes on to quote from an influential 2004 report of the Archives Task Force, *Listening to the Past, Speaking to the Future*, which said: “The archival record is…the direct, un-interpreted and authentic voice of the past: the primary evidence of what people did and what they thought... The archival record is the foundation on which are built all our histories.”[[220]](#footnote-220) These documents spoke the language of authenticity, integrity, uniqueness and reliability which indicate the primacy of evidential values, foreshadowing the language of the *Declaration* (which they preceded). Archives were discursively positioned as having and exercising autonomous powers – “to impact on the lives of individuals”, as “the foundation of all our histories” – which are independent of human interpretation. Further, an important semantic link was made between the qualities of archival evidence and the production of “our” histories. Archives are particularly valuable because they are “the raw material of history, evidence of decisions made…”[[221]](#footnote-221) The use of the modifying “raw” in this context is another appeal to the objectivity of archival heritage – it is unprocessed and thus pure. The 2017 text *Archives Unlocked* continues to circulate these evidential and totalising qualities of archives. One of its central ambitions is that “people and institutions trust in the authenticity of archive records…” which can act as “reliable archival evidence.”[[222]](#footnote-222) Echoing the language of the *Declaration* these archives will “reflect all of society.”[[223]](#footnote-223)

An essential quality of the evidenced histories imagined by the texts is that they are primarily national, and associated with the mechanisms of governance (e.g. “the processes of decision-making”). This link is underlined later in *Archives for the 21st Century* which invites readers to envision what it would be like “if the true potential of publicly funded archives services were realised”, arguing that “we would live in a world where: Every citizen feels a connection to their nation state and their local community…”[[224]](#footnote-224) This is possible because “Archives have the power to narrate the essential record of our national and local story...” [[225]](#footnote-225) The invocation of “the true potential of archives” is a precursor of the *Declaration’*s “rightful place of archives”, implying that archives are currently undervalued and under-utilised. This is despite their significant power, which is presented as both all encompassing (reaching “every citizen”) and highly relevant (the “essential record”). In the same visionary mode the text imagines that “Every child experiences history brought to life…” and that “People of all ages and abilities can explore their personal identity…” through archival heritage.[[226]](#footnote-226) Thus archives systematize and narrativise government actions, making publically available histories relevant to the private lives of families and the identities of individuals. Their evidential value is seen to act as the essential link between the past, the state, and the people. *Archives Unlocked* asks us to “imagine a world without archives,” which would be, it claims, a world without evidence: “…we could not prove where and when we were born, or who owns the property we live in. We could not trace our ancestry, explore our collective and individual identities…”[[227]](#footnote-227) This reflects two related discursive contentions: first, that archives contain the total diversity of experience and identity, and two, that without archives experiences and identities cannot be validated.

Embedded in the rhetoric of the documents is the sense that archives serve and underpin common units of identity, from the national and regional, to the local and familial. The “shared” nature of these identities, and the stories or histories that create them, is repeatedly emphasised. Archives’ power, for example, is in “shaping the shared sense of national community and individual identity” and in providing “stories of common experiences, shared struggles and aspirations.”[[228]](#footnote-228) The shared is a key concept– shared identities, shared histories, and shared experiences – which archives are seen as contributing towards and reinforcing. The inference is that archives represent a special way of knowing that supports national and community cohesion because it reveals essential commonalities across time, culture, and experience.

This discursive formation is reinforced by the way in which archives are contrasted to change throughout the documents. In *Archives for the 21st Century Refreshed*, the 2012 iteration of the Action Plan, they “can provide context in a world that constantly changes, and ground us in the sometimes surprising continuity of our lives.”[[229]](#footnote-229)  The shared-ness of archival heritage becomes a fixed point in a flux, with a quality of steadiness and safety which is outside of change and transcends discord. Any reference to the ways in which archives can be marginal, divisive, or contentious is elusive. In common with the *Declaration*, the policy texts do not engage with the complexities of human-archive interaction or diversity of values. Instead, they privilege ‘sharedness’ based in evidential value: because archives are direct and raw their evidence can objectively and neutrally serve both the interests of government and people. An updated expression of the same principle can be found in *Archives Unlocked*, which claims “Archives sit at the heart of our collective understanding…” and “of our collective and individual identities”.[[230]](#footnote-230) The latter construct comes together to form “our collective memory.”[[231]](#footnote-231) The archive is figured as a neutral space in which difference can be neutralised; in which a collective, shared world view is stored, waiting to be operationalised for unity.

*Archives for the 21st Century* also stated that archives are evidence that “lasts longer and is more reliable than individual memory.” This strongly implies that the “collective memory” of the archive knows things that people and communities do not. In *Archives for the 21st Century Refreshed* the text invokes archives as “evidence” of “people’s own identities”, a phraseology which suggests that identities are actually contained in the archive.[[232]](#footnote-232) *Archives Unlocked* also suggests that “once revealed, they [the archives] can tell us our stories…who we are and how we got here.”[[233]](#footnote-233) Not only does the archive know things that people don’t; it knows more about the people than the people know about themselves. Not only is this a way of talking that puts archives before people rather than ‘people before archives’; it discursively puts archives *over* people. This has significant implications for the role of the archives practitioner, who is positioned as not only a custodian of evidence of a nation’s past but of a community’s identity and an individual’s sense of self. In “the world without archives” envisioned by *Archives Unlocked* “we could not trace our ancestry” or “explore our collective and individual identities” – the basis of our existence would be unsettled.[[234]](#footnote-234) This serves to devalue other ways of remembering or knowing about the past and the self, such as oral histories, community and family story-telling, folklore, and memory. It also obscures how documentation operates to privilege certain people, whereby being able to evidence your identity in the archive – because of the legacies of dominant evidential values - is an ongoing operation of power through validation.

We can consider the ascription of evidential values in both the *Declaration* and The National Archives texts in light of the linguistic category of ‘evidentials’. In linguistics an ‘evidential’ is the particular grammatical element of language that indicates ‘evidentiality’ which is, in turn, an indication of the nature of evidence for any given statement. Examples in English include verb instances like ‘I saw’, ‘I heard’, ‘and I read’ and adverbs like ‘allegedly’, ‘undoubtedly’ or ‘possibly’.[[235]](#footnote-235) In the texts examined here archives are subject to a definable body of adverbs that denote their evidentiality, such as authentic, reliable, and accountable. Evidence value is often explicitly invoked, but it is also recalled implicitly by this pervasive language of evidentials. This word use is not neutral but serves to bind archival evidence to the Western epistemological positions in which objectivity, neutrality and the truthful recovery of reality are possible. At the same time the archive itself can function as an evidential in its verb form: ‘to archive’ becomes an activity associated with the reproduction of certain social and political forms of power and control. The archives which are produced are understood to speak and act in the world according to dominant Western ideas about what evidence is and does. In this way archives enable some people to be seen, heard, and understood more clearly and more often than others. When this language is deployed in relation to archives it invokes these ideas, via the logic of evidential value, even in the context of work to dismantle or decolonise practices and processes. Evidentiality is haunted by a genealogy of hierarchy and inequity.

‘The Sector’: Archives as legitimate systems

The conceptualisation of archives as evidentials and the dominant evidential language of values in the texts also work to naturalise ways of structuring and governing archival institutions. In its updated strategy *Archives Inspire, 2015-2019*, The National Archives is described as “the official archive for the UK government, and for England and Wales.”[[236]](#footnote-236) This is also how it describes itself on its website.[[237]](#footnote-237) “Official” acts as a signifier of power, a grammatically unnecessary modifier to the definite article, which implies the *unofficialness* of any other institution or organisation which claims to collect the archival heritage of the nation. The authorising agent, which confers this officialness, is the UK Government. The National Archives’ dual role as the archival institution *of* the government and *for* the nation/s is made explicit but is unexamined so that it is unclear how one is differentiated from the other. Notably, government comes first. This claim to authority is further coupled with a statement of reach and influence – The National Archives is “one of the largest and most successful archives in the world” - and of expertise as “expert advisors in information and record management.”[[238]](#footnote-238) The text further establishes TNA as “leaders of the wider archives sector”, placing them at the apex of archival activity in England.[[239]](#footnote-239) Government authority and professional expertise are linked with the archival endeavour and with a system of national provision that can be identified under a “sector” umbrella.

The “archives sector” or simply “the sector” is referenced six times in the short foreword of the first *Government Policy on Archives*, and frequently throughout subsequent documentation.[[240]](#footnote-240) Notably “sector” was also the second most frequently used noun in the seventeen research interviews conducted with archives practitioners.[[241]](#footnote-241) One interviewee referred to “the sector” 63 times during the course of an hour long conversation.[[242]](#footnote-242) This “sector” is positioned as the primary agent in preserving and giving access to archival materials in the UK. References are almost always preceded by the definite article – *the* sector - implying an exclusive and complete body that encompasses the diversity of institutions and groups that hold archives.[[243]](#footnote-243) The concept is described in *Archives for the 21st Century* as the “nationwide network of archives services”, which are “treasure chests of information.”[[244]](#footnote-244) The phrase “national network” was also used to signify ‘the sector’ in several interviews. For example, in the context of encompassing archival activity with The National Archives’ oversight:

the ultimate result in many cases of us talking to community archives is trying to plug them into that national network and that, going back to sector clarity, its actually plugging them into the wider sector which they probably they may not, because they’re very narrowly focused, be aware of...[[245]](#footnote-245)

Speaking about their work liaising with community archives on behalf of TNA, the interviewee drew a distinction between the “national network”/”wider sector” of county record offices and university archives that they worked with, and other groups engaged in archives work such as community archives. “Sector clarity” required that these groups be “plugged” in.

In *Archives for the 21st Century* the “nationwide network” was defined as the three hundred local authority and university archives which “form the backbone of publicly funded archival provision in England and Wales.”[[246]](#footnote-246) “Backbone” is a biological referent that suggests an animal or organism, which has evolved organically to support itself in the fittest possible way. It compliments “network” which is a similarly organic term, indicative of an interconnected system that functions co-operatively. This language implies that this system of archival institutions is connected, knowable, and understandable, and distinct from other areas of heritage or information management. It discursively recalls Jenkinson’s suggestion that archives are formed by “natural processes… as much an organism as a tree or an animal.”[[247]](#footnote-247) Yet this discursive clarity is not reflected in reality. The Archon Directory of archive repositories maintained by The National Archives lists 2131 archive holding organisations in England. These include local authorities, museums, art galleries, schools, and businesses, universities, landed estates, community groups and individuals. Two hundred and thirteen of these organisations can be found in Yorkshire alone, from the North Yorkshire County Record Office and the West Yorkshire Archives Service, both funded by local authorities, to the community run Horsforth Village Museum and the archive of the Knitting Crochet Guild stored in an industrial unit in the small town of Holmfirth.[[248]](#footnote-248) While *Archives for the 21st Century* offered a list of generic repository types – e.g. business, local authority, university archives – it did not reflect the dispersed and varied nature of archival heritage. Nor did it address how diverse archive-holding bodies sit within the broader context of cultural and material heritage. Instead, the text assumes that the structure of archive provision is self-evident and does not require explanation, despite the stated ambitions of the document to reach a non-specialist audience.

There is a shift in the way this idea is expressed in *Archives Unlocked*. Here the “archives sector” is replaced with the “archival landscape” and the “archive ecology”, the latter suggesting an interdependent system of relationships between different archival groups and contexts.[[249]](#footnote-249) The rhetoric continues to tap into the organic and biological metaphors of Jenkinson but, rather than imagining a unified whole, reflects the kind of “arborescent thinking” identified by Deleuze and Guattari, describing something both wilder and more expansive, centring diversity and irregularity.[[250]](#footnote-250) It reflects the increasing profile of community archives, archival activism, and local heritage projects in the literature and in funders’ rhetoric. In this instance though the “ecology” is presented as under threat “in unpredictable ways by external factors” and requires “interventions…supported by long-term, comprehensive and detailed information.”[[251]](#footnote-251) Although the text recognises the “diverse and complex” possibilities of archives in a new environment, it reinforces the need for “oversight and foresight.” This is to be provided by The National Archives and other sanctioned experts. Although Jenkinson’s gatekeeper analogy is explicitly rejected – “Archivists…have become participants in the archive ecology rather than gatekeepers to it” – this is not a participation of equals. The figure of the zookeeper is invoked instead.[[252]](#footnote-252) The metaphor of the roles of zoos in wildlife conservation is used to argue for the value of providing “stewardship of archives.”[[253]](#footnote-253) Although this new language aspires to reflect a shift towards a more co-productive environment in which power is shared, it does so by invoking symbols and relationships that reinforce established dynamics of expertise and dependence.

In England the ideal of the “national network”, and thus of “the sector” and “archive ecology”, has its origins in the development of record-keeping legislation during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This legislation established that certain types of archives were only to be kept by legitimated forms of archival institution. Foremost amongst this legislation was the Public Records Act 1958, the Local Government (Records) Act 1962, and the Local Government Act 1972.[[254]](#footnote-254) Elements of these Acts still remain in force, although all were partly superseded by the Freedom of Information Act 2000.[[255]](#footnote-255) The institutions subject to this legislation, namely The National Archives, local government record offices and university archives, consequently operate within a framework which provides them with legitimacy, authority and ‘sector’ privilege.

The aforementioned Acts shaped the formation and development of the concept of a unified system of Archives in the latter half of the twentieth century in two key ways. Firstly, they established the rightness of a hierarchical network of County, City and Borough Archives with The National Archives as overseer. Secondly, they introduced official criteria and measures of evidential value. The records of national and local government, and of arms-length bureaucratic agencies, were established as the most valuable aspects of the national archival heritage, worthy of legal protection. In the Public Records Act 1958 the former were designated ‘Public Records’ and identified as the only types of document that must be preserved.[[256]](#footnote-256) Under the Act any Public Record over 30 years old (now 20 years old) must be transferred to an archival institution and be made accessible unless it qualifies for an exemption. The Public Record Office (now TNA) was granted statutory rights and duties to monitor the retention and preservation of such records, establishing and enforcing best practice standards. Under s.4(1) of the Act archival institutions within the hierarchical network were licensed as ‘Places of Deposit’ and received routine inspections to ensure national standards were being met.[[257]](#footnote-257) The same Act also established the role of Keeper of Public Records, a title which is now synonymous with the role of Chief Executive of The National Archives.

The emergence of the Public Record as a category of archive gave regional and local Archives a responsibility mandated by central government. These institutions were accorded status and positioned as the legitimate location of archival material of the highest value. Value in this case was ascribed according to the extent to which records were considered to evidence the activities of national and local government activities. Legitimacy flowed ultimately from The National Archives as representatives of that government. Although local record offices were permitted to collect other forms of archival material by the Local Government (Records) Act 1962, and almost all did so, this material was not given protected status. Whether or not archival material is designated as Public Records can have serious implications for the way in which it is treated. This is amply demonstrated by the case of the so-called ‘Migrated Archive’, a large collection of records of colonial administration still in the custody of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. In 1995, during discussions about the transfer of the material to The National Archives, the materials’ questionable Public Records status was used as a justification for leaving them in administrative limbo.[[258]](#footnote-258)

Other mechanisms have been used to establish measures of value for materials that do not qualify for Public Records status. In addition to government record offices and universities this includes material held in business, organisational or family archives, or archives collected by voluntary organisations such as antiquarian and local history societies. As already noted, the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts (RCHM) was established to co-ordinate the oversight of archives held in private hands. The Commission’s original purpose was to identify archival heritage and publish information about its location and contents, with a remit of “records or archives of all kinds, of value for the study of history.”[[259]](#footnote-259) The Commission’s focus on historical value aligned it with prevailing historiographical priorities for evidential quality, which has had the effect of making certain types of records – those of landed estates, charities and established businesses for example – more visible than others over time. The revised 2003 RCHM warrant empowers The National Archives to “promote the co-ordinated action of all professional and other bodies concerned with the preservation and use of such manuscripts and records.”[[260]](#footnote-260) The Commission’s merger with The National Archives effectively brought archival records of “historical value” under the authority of a government department.

Like the Public Records Act, the RCHM sought to identify a canon of archives to form a national archival collection.[[261]](#footnote-261) It further embedded a top-down system whereby archival value was determined by the extent to which records embodied the values of the agency. Jamila Ghaddar has observed a similar relationship between the values of the Canadian ‘total archives’ approach and the development of the Library and Archives of Canada in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[[262]](#footnote-262) The authority to care for these systems and police their values is thus encoded into the work of both UK and Canadian National Archives, which then monitor and maintain standards throughout their respective ‘sectors’. Nicholas Kingsley, formerly Head of Sector Development at The National Archives stated in 2012 that TNA’s vision for sector leadership was “based upon the belief that the myriad of individuals and organizations, which collectively preserve our national archival heritage can usefully be considered as a functional system.”[[263]](#footnote-263)

This status quo is reflected throughout the strategic documentation. It addresses an ordered world in which archives and archival institutions can be systemised, categorised, and controlled. The distinction between archives as things of value and archival institutions as places that preserve and give access to records is collapsed, so that one is presented as synonymous with the other. This has two effects. It marginalises alternative and broader definitions of archival heritage and archival agents, including community archives. And it puts new critical approaches to archives by other communities or individuals into a peripheral or secondary position.[[264]](#footnote-264)

Subsequently The National Archives has developed a complex of activities focused on recording, monitoring, and approving the holdings and activities of the “national network”. These include the National Register of Archives (a legacy of the RCHM function, which invites selected repositories to return lists of new deposits to be added to a national database annually and after which the aforementioned listserv mailing list is named) and the management and support of Places of Deposit. It finds its most complete expression in the Archives Accreditation programme, launched in 2013, which seeks to establish a consistent standard of archival practice and provision in England and Wales. Accreditation is now the mechanism through which The National Archives fulfils its statutory duties under the Public Records Act. However, the scheme is not limited to Places of Deposit, extending authority over a much broader range of archival institutions. Managed and fronted by TNA, accreditation is also supported by a UK-wide partnership of authorised archival organisations, including the Archives and Records Association, National Records Scotland, the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland and the Museums, Libraries and Archives Division of the Welsh government.[[265]](#footnote-265) The programme acts to classify what is and is not archival, and to manage the identification of archival institutions as authorised places. The benefits, as advertised by TNA, include raising the profile of archival services, maintaining standards of professionalism, and providing validation for external partners and funders.[[266]](#footnote-266) As of August 2021, 167 Archives have been accredited.[[267]](#footnote-267) To date, all successfully accredited archives are situated in a local government, university, ecclesiastical, charity, museum, or business context; there are no accredited community archive organisations.

The Archives Accreditation standard exemplifies the link between the evidential values paradigm and the archive sector as a legitimate functioning system. At the outset the scheme sought to define what archives are, using the definition from the Society of American Archivists as a baseline. Closely paraphrasing Jenkinson and citing core archival principles, this definition states that archives are:

Materials created or received by a person, family or organisation, public or private, in the conduct of their affairs and preserved because of the enduring value contained in them or as evidence of the functions and responsibilities of their creator, especially those materials maintained using the principles of provenance, original order and collective control; permanent records.[[268]](#footnote-268)

Accreditation is only open to institutions which meet this definition.[[269]](#footnote-269) An initial 2013 document entitled “Scope of Archive Service Accreditation scheme” parsed its meaning for organisations, foregrounding the importance of archives as evidence. The prospective applicant was presented with seven questions with yes or no answers; if the answer to any but one question was no then the material is “probably not archival”.[[270]](#footnote-270) [underlining in the original] The first question asks:

Was it [the prospective archive material] primarily created to record information or evidence, or is it linked (physically, or in terms of prior use) to something else which conveys information when the two are taken together?[[271]](#footnote-271)

Questions 2, 3 and 5 then recall the language of evidentials to identify archives, namely of authority (‘Does the information or evidence it (they, if linked) contains relate to something specific…’) and integrity (‘Does it still convey the information/evidence originally intended?’).[[272]](#footnote-272) In the examples of archival material that follow, archives are referred to “as evidence” three times. The phraseology of the document works to suggest that archives can both be created as evidence and be used as evidence. Their nature and retention are perceived to be bound up with the complex of qualities associated with the work of evidencing. It is notable that there is no reference in the Accreditation scoping document to other forms of value recognised by critical archival approaches, such as affective or social values. Community archives, whose motivations for collecting and preserving historic material may fall outside the evidentiary paradigm, were used to provide examples of non-archival material. For example, the “old postcards of Puddleby” and “beermats from the Puddleby Brewing Company” are not considered archival, except insofar as they are “evidence of the activities of the Puddleby Community History Group.”[[273]](#footnote-273) The evidential lack of Puddleby’s community archives is used as a criteria for establishing whether or not a holding organisation can be accredited as an archives service. The most recent guidance does specify that community archives can be eligible but only if their collections meet the Society of American Archivists criterion.[[274]](#footnote-274) If the evidence value of their holdings is insufficient, then the organisation is excluded from the legitimised system of “the sector.”

The national Accreditation scheme is mirrored at a local level in the UK by several schemes aimed at providing the same kind of structure and validation to community archive activity. One interviewee cited two examples, the West Yorkshire Archives Services’ accreditation scheme for community archives *NowThen* and the Cornish Archive Network, as a sign of an emerging integration between “record offices” and community groups.[[275]](#footnote-275) The former example was also cited by another interviewee.[[276]](#footnote-276) These schemes work to reinforce the existing archives sector as a legitimate governing system, with the:

…record office at the very centre, the centre of the wheel, the spokes going out to these hundreds and hundreds of community groups, and Archives really being integrated into more of a framework and infrastructure there that provides more collective and sustainable advice and guidance…[[277]](#footnote-277)

In this way community archives, which cannot be accredited unless they can conform to evidential standards, are nevertheless brought under an expert sphere of influence.

The Evidential Orthodoxy

Evidence is the principal value ascribed to archives by archival authorities internationally and in the UK. An evidential orthodoxy is constituted of a typology of mutually reinforcing concepts, namely authenticity, integrity, uniqueness, and truth, grounded in a dominant Western epistemology of evidentiality that underpins systems of law and property under a juridical system. This epistemology is embodied in the development of nineteenth and twentieth century institutional structures, including the development of national and local archival repositories, which in turn informed early professional instructional manuals, specifically Jenkinson.

The typology is thus expressed and reinforced through an evidential loop: the ascription of evidential value confers archival status; archives are thus valuable because they are evidence; therefore archival institutions exist primarily to ‘steward’ this evidential value. Certain types of archives, such as those produced by bureaucratic systems, are privileged – not only discursively but legally - over others because their evidential superiority appears self-evident from dominant perspectives. This superiority stems from their creation by and ongoing relationship with government and state apparatus and is encoded into archival practices. Archival institutions which hold these types of records are also privileged, discursively positioned, for example, as the “backbone” of the UK’s archival services. They are centralised in relation to other types of archive-holding bodies, which are connected to them in an “ecology” of dependency that is conceived to be organic and naturally occurring. The ‘sector’ is figured as a legitimate functioning system, a hegemonic way of structuring the world which, by necessity, prioritises some subjectivities over others. Established patterns of archival holding and an alignment with dominant evidentiary perspectives secure membership of the system. Consequently, community archives and archivally-engaged communities are positioned as peripheral or non-expert. Although they are acknowledged in the “archival landscape” they do not have sufficient authority or expertise to act as custodians to the highest valued archival evidence. Some categories of archive, those of the highest evidential value, can only be maintained within the legitimated and authorised system.

This system may be read as the embodiment of an authorised archival discourse, in which archives are identified and understood according to a range of historically-situated assumptions. These assumptions are not just representations of a form of knowledge, but construct, constitute, and reinforce reality. Central amongst them is the truth-claim that archives are inherently evidential, eliding the relative nature of evidence and the role of human actors in activating evidential uses. A feature of the discourse is archives *as* evidence, a notion that underlines the innateness rather than the ascription of evidential values. This establishes the necessity of experts schooled in Western paradigms of evidential legitimacy in identifying and managing value. The discourse defines archives by characteristics that must be actively managed to protect this legitimacy, promoting the experiences and beliefs of some individuals while limiting the authority of others.

Just as the AHD is rooted in the nineteenth century development of nationalism and conservationism, so its archival equivalent is grounded in the emergence of historical empiricism and modern statehood during the same period. As in Bennett’s theorisation of the birth of the museum, archival institutions can be understood as a manifestation of Foucault’s governmentality, acting as apparatus of the state. The paraphernalia of guidance, regulation and rhetoric that surrounds archives’ preservation and use is reflected in the functioning of government bureaucracy itself. The close links between the legitimated archives system and the government lead to a conflation of the short term goals of an institution or ‘the sector’ with the fundamental purpose of archives. However, whereas Smith sees cultural heritage discourse as driven by broad ideals of “liberal duty for social improvement, with messages about patriotism, nationalism and certain aesthetic tastes as ‘good’ or ‘edifying’”, my analysis suggests that the authorised archival discourse is distinct in its focus.[[278]](#footnote-278) Evidentiality is fundamental to the ascription of an associated complex of characteristics, values, and truth claims. Rather than focusing on “pleasing” objects for educating future generations about the past, the authorised archival discourse is preoccupied with reinforcing standards of evidentiality that support juridical, governmental and empiricist historical uses of archives in society.[[279]](#footnote-279)

As in the AHD, the discourse of evidential value is adaptive to allow practitioners to reconcile loyalties to institutions and nations with higher ethical principles of truth and justice. Preserving and providing access to archives of the former is understood to ensure the latter. It becomes possible for the *Universal Declaration* to pair archives’ “role in protecting citizens’ rights” with the need to adopt and enforce national policies and laws.[[280]](#footnote-280) Evidential value thus underpins the necessity for expertise, for management and for government control of archives, and reinforces the rightness of authorised social and cultural subjectivities.

**Chapter Three:**

**The Affective Alternative**

**Who Do You Think *You* Are?**

In 2012, I appeared on an episode of the popular family history television programme *Who Do You Think You Are?,* in which celebrity guests trace their ancestry. Episodes follow an established pattern that has since been exported to 18 countries around the world. The celebrity begins by learning what they can from surviving relatives and family documents, before going to visit archives and places that contribute to the construction of a narrative that combines their personal history with broader context. I was filmed in my then-role as City Archivist in York, using late nineteenth century census and Poor Law records to help the late British actress Una Stubbs (1937-2021) trace her grandmother Annie. During the clip I revealed that Annie not only gave birth to Una’s uncle in the workhouse as an unmarried teenager but that Annie herself was born outside of marriage and had been adopted as a very young child.[[281]](#footnote-281) When I rewatch the episode (in addition to the deep-seated embarrassment of seeing my awkward past-self) I am struck by the performance of authorised archival discourse in which I was – at that time, unconsciously - participating. This relatively mundane encounter between archives, archivist, person and past became an oft-returned-to site for self-reflection and – to some extent – self-recrimination. It encapsulated a confrontation between the values of evidentiality, authority and expertise explored in the previous chapter and the critical archival values of affect, sociality and justice which preoccupy this one.

In the weeks prior to the arrival of the cameras and crew, extensive research was done into Una Stubbs’ family, but not by me. Members of the local Family History Society voluntarily searched the records and constructed the story that would ultimately make it to the screen. However, the volunteers were deemed unsuitable to present the findings with authority, which is how I came to restage the research for the camera. I occupied the role of expert, explaining the possible meanings of birth certificates and census returns that I had never seen before. Because I understood the revelations about Una’s grandmother – who she had never met – to be sensitive, my on-screen tone was sympathetic, and more than a little sorry. I sounded as though I was breaking difficult news gently; perhaps a little patronisingly. On the other side of the interaction, Una’s demeanour was emotional and at the end of our encounter, as presented in the final edit, she appeared to be overcome, pressing her hand to her mouth and suppressing tears. Imagining the fear and despair of a young woman giving birth in a workhouse, she repeatedly said ‘oh bless her, bless her’ and made small, soft sounds of distress.

Throughout our conversation, both on and off camera, Una asked me for information the records could not provide. When was Annie adopted? Who was the father of her child? Why was she forced to turn to the workhouse? What happened to her when she was discharged three weeks after giving birth? I couldn’t answer, but she could. It doesn’t appear in the episode itself, but I remember her repeated efforts to bypass the shortcomings of the records and fill in the silences and affective gaps left by archival evidence. Una used the records as only one kind of link in a chain of stories she spun for herself, about Annie’s circumstances, feelings, and likely behaviour:

*Annie’s mother gave her up so that Annie could have a better life, in a family with a father.*

*Annie became pregnant by someone in the house where she worked as a domestic servant.*

*Annie must have been frightened to go to the workhouse alone but was incredibly strong and resourceful to keep her baby as a young single mother.*

In response, I asserted what I considered to be more reasonable, justifiable interpretations of the documents: limited, logical, and authoritative. In the show I can be heard saying: ‘It doesn’t tell us why…”, and “we don’t know why,” and “we don’t know what happened to her after.” In this way I moderated Una’s attempts to weave her own stories around the documents, to integrate them into sense-making, emotionally resonant narratives that she found meaningful; I insistently prioritised my own logics as both a historian and an archives practitioner. You can see my discomfort at this interpolation of feelings. When Una once again repeated ‘Bless her, bless her, bless her wrinkled stockings’ at the end of my segment (referring to a photograph she had of her grandmother in old age), I responded with what can only be described as a nervous laugh.

When I embarked upon the early stages of the research that would later become this book, my encounter with Una was a stubborn splinter that I could not dislodge, a sharp needling provocation. I came to understand that the framework of values and assumptions that shaped my interaction with the archive, with the past, were in sharp contrast to those that shaped Una’s. This contrast could not be explained entirely by our different personalities but was shaped by our discursive understanding of what archives are and do. I began to hear an interrogatory tone in the show’s title: Who do you think *you* are? An expert, an authority, an arbiter of pasts? Who did my archival institution think *it* was? A custodian of evidence that knew more about a person’s history than it was possible for them to know about themselves? What was the root of the dissonance between my performance to camera, which acknowledged emotion in expression and tone, and the words coming out of my mouth, my attempts to cleave to the limits of the record? How to account for my anxiety and discomfort? For that horrible nervous laugh? Since then, Anne Gilliland, Michelle Caswell, Marika Cifor and Jamie A. Lee have explored the affective and embodied nature of archival work and outlined an ethics of care in archival practice that seeks to highlight and navigate such dissonance.[[282]](#footnote-282) But, at that time, I didn’t yet have models or tools through which to frame and understand my own behaviour: I ‘qualified’ as an archivist in 2010 (by which I mean, I graduated from an accredited UK archives programme, although not the one founded by Jenkinson) on the cusp of the remaking of archival values.

**The Reflexive Turn**

A reflexive turn in archival studies in the latter half of the twentieth century, amidst a broader archival turn in the humanities, presented an early challenge to the authorised archival discourse. Initially, it manifested in a recognition that the archives of dominant actors in society were being privileged by appraisal and collecting practices, to the exclusion of other groups. In 1970 the historian Howard Zinn, speaking to the Society of American Archivists, told assembled practitioners that recordkeeping was “biased towards the rich and powerful elements in our society – government, business and the military – while the poor and impotent remain in archival obscurity.”[[283]](#footnote-283) This had led to an unbalanced record of the past, a deficit brought into sharp relief by the contemporary efforts of New Left historians such as E.P. Thompson and feminist historians like Sheila Rowbotham to recover the histories of women and the working class.[[284]](#footnote-284) Subsequently, F. Gerald Ham, President of the Society of American Archivists from 1973-1974, advocated for the “active archivist” – a new figure who intervened to document society more broadly, to become involved in “helping people to understand the world they live in.”[[285]](#footnote-285)

Canadian practitioner Helen Samuels proposed the introduction of “documentation strategies” that not only sought to appraise the materials that were offered to an archival institution by creators but to proactively identify archives of value.[[286]](#footnote-286) As early as 1987 Hans Booms had asserted that in developing such strategies it was society itself that should determine what constituted valuable archives. Public opinion should “provide the fundamental orientation for archival appraisal.”[[287]](#footnote-287) Nevertheless, any such strategy should still be grounded in the principles of provenance and undertaken by expert practitioners who would interpret that value on behalf of society.[[288]](#footnote-288) Subsequently Cook developed “macroappraisal,” a methodology which aimed to equip archives practitioners to reflect society by taking a broad view of the context in which records were created, “on the assumption that those creators, and those citizens and organizations with whom they interact, indirectly represent the collective functioning of society.”[[289]](#footnote-289) More broadly a “total archives” approach sought to extend macroappraisal to non-governmental and private archives, working towards an archival representation of society itself.[[290]](#footnote-290) From this perspective, archives produced about or by counter-cultures or minority populations could be recognised, and dispersed, ephemeral, and oral traditions of recordkeeping could be validated. Nevertheless, although these developments characterised the archivist as a societal rather than solely bureaucratic agent, expectations as to the “organic context of recordkeeping,” the significance of organisational and institutional records and the centrality of evidential and informational value were largely reproduced.[[291]](#footnote-291) There were early exceptions: In 1991 Brien Brothman questioned the normalisation of archival principles, using Foucault’s genealogical method to historicise them in eighteenth and nineteenth century conceptions of scientific order.[[292]](#footnote-292) Foreshadowing an understanding of evidence as an ascribed value, he argued that the relationship between archives and evidentiality was not inevitable, but was “manifested in choices made by record-keepers in how they situate themselves in relation to other professions and institutions within the public sphere.”[[293]](#footnote-293)

Work by Foucault and Derrida that engaged with the archive as “a central metaphorical construct upon which to fashion their perspectives on human knowledge, memory, and power” fuelled a different kind of disciplinary reflection.[[294]](#footnote-294) Confronted by postmodern critiques of truth, notions of objectivity, authenticity, and evidentiality were questioned, both as qualities of archives themselves and as aspirations of archival practices. In a seminal special issue of *Archival Science* in 2001, Joan M. Schwartz and Terry Cook outlined the relationship between archives, memory, and power. They began by acknowledging the predominant persistent self-perception of archivists as “neutral, objective, impartial” - the Jenkinsonian gatekeepers of truth – and noted a significant gap between the state of philosophical theory of the archive and archival practice.[[295]](#footnote-295) Their aim was to show how “archives – as institutions – wield power” over governments, communities, and individuals, including over records that are central to identity and memory.[[296]](#footnote-296)

In the context of Post-Apartheid South Africa, Verne Harris demonstrated the dynamics of power that underlie all archival activities, and the extent to which they determine not only what is remembered but what is silenced or wilfully forgotten. In a rebuff to the notion of “total archives,” he argued that a combination of political, social and cultural forces, as well as physical degradation, meant that archives could only ever represent a “sliver of a sliver of a sliver” of society.[[297]](#footnote-297) In *Archive Fever* Derrida had explicitly drawn connections between the archive and the exercise of power, authority and control, stating that “There is no political power without control of the archive…”[[298]](#footnote-298) Harris’s experience in South Africa affirmed that “the archive is politics” and that archives practitioners are always engaged in political activity.[[299]](#footnote-299) This was both a rejection of the archivist as passive, objective gatekeeper and, to some extent, of active theories of appraisal. It recognised that archives reflected and reproduced inequalities in society, because appraisal was not a mechanism whereby values were identified, but one through which they were created, ascribed, and authorised; or, in other cases, disputed and destroyed.[[300]](#footnote-300) Archives practitioners were implicated in not only the selection and interpretation of archives or the preservation of the past but in the selective construction of memory. The archive was acknowledged as an ambiguous and limited societal resource, on the one hand having the positive function of supporting collective memory or social justice action, on the other hand available for use by oppressors in restricting access to knowledge, controlling the past and surveilling the present.[[301]](#footnote-301) Archives – and archivists - could no longer be understood as disinterested, and archives’ content and make-up was seen to be dependent on the infrastructures within which they were managed and controlled.

From this staging point the remaking of archival values began to develop along two related but distinct pathways, one of which sought to accommodate and negotiate new understandings of subjectivity and power alongside the existing authorised discourse; and one which instead focused on disrupting and dismantling the evidential paradigm.

**The Archival Multiverse**

Arising out of the first Archival Education Research Institute (AERI) in 2009, the concept of the “archival multiverse” seeks to open up a generous theoretical space which can encompass the “pluralism of evidentiary texts (records in multiple forms and cultural contexts), memory-keeping practices and institutions, bureaucratic and personal motivations, community perspectives and needs, and cultural and legal constructs.”[[302]](#footnote-302) It is a response to the increasing liminalisation of the boundaries of the ‘archival paradigm,’ where it is being stretched and unsettled by new ways of thinking, and a recognition of the existence of “multiple traditions and possibly multiple paradigms, and the need for tolerance of multiplicity.”[[303]](#footnote-303) It embraces a heterogenous landscape of diverse approaches and objectives, which is able to accommodate traditional, legal, and evidential ways of knowing about archives alongside frameworks that challenge and unsettle them, emerging, for example, from Indigenous, Queer and postcolonial perspectives. While the ‘multiverse’ centralises mutual understanding and respect of those with differing epistemologies, it also prioritises looking at old principles in new ways.[[304]](#footnote-304) Evans, McKemmish and Rolan have described the process of mapping the distance between existing standards, systems and practices and the multiverse as a “societal grand challenge” with implications in every aspect of life.[[305]](#footnote-305) The multiverse is thus understood as conducive to “unsettling the power imbalances embedded in the current archives and records landscape” and more broadly in society.[[306]](#footnote-306)

The concept of the multiverse has intellectual roots in the “records continuum” model, an Australian approach to thinking which questions linear, literal, and teleological perspectives on archives. Formerly, “lifecycle” models of records had envisioned a staged process, following Jenkinson, in which records were created, served their original purposes and then were either destroyed or became archives. The roles of records’ creators, archives practitioners and users were seen to be distinct and sequential; the archives’ provenance, original order, and chain of custody could be traced from beginning to end. The “continuum” model, first proposed by Jay Atherton in the 1980s and subsequently developed by Frank Upward in the mid-1990s, offered an alternative, which stressed the plural and reiterative movements of records through dimensions of use.[[307]](#footnote-307) The theory aligned with the Derridean opening out of potential and the fluidity of the archive emerging at the same time in the work of Brothman, Cook, and Harris. As a theoretical model, the continuum is hospitable to ideas of plurality and multiplicity because it envisions archives in constant motion rather than as “static end products.”[[308]](#footnote-308) Subsequently, archives scholars have used the continuum as a basis for rethinking core principles. These includes the introduction of concepts of co-creation and “multiple” or “parallel” provenance, to reflect that archives may be generated or created by many actors; [[309]](#footnote-309) the recognition of archival autonomy,[[310]](#footnote-310) and the social justice implications of archival practice for human rights.[[311]](#footnote-311) Work with Indigenous communities, with refugees and with survivors of child sexual abuse generated the concept of “archival autonomy” to describe the transfer of power from archives practitioners to the subjects of archives, enabling them “to participate in societal memory, with their own voice, becoming social agents in recordkeeping for identity, memory and accountability...”[[312]](#footnote-312) These ideas are influential to recent scholarship on archives and social justice, which recognises that individuals may have archival needs which are fundamental to their experience of family, sense of belonging, wellbeing, and personal safety.[[313]](#footnote-313) It has led Gilliland and McKemmish to propose the “participatory archive,” a concept that goes beyond involving users in archival practice to acknowledge the multiple values, beliefs and emotions invested in archives by different communities.[[314]](#footnote-314)

**Critical Archival Studies**

In parallel, although emerging slightly later and primarily in North America, is the development of “critical archival studies”, a field which seeks to “explain what is wrong with the current state of archival research and practice” and “posit practical goals for how such research and practice can and should change.”[[315]](#footnote-315) This focus on critique and subsequent action for change to some extent differentiates it both ideologically and philosophically from the accommodation of the multiverse. It has strong intellectual roots outside of the discipline, particularly in feminist and critical race theory. However, in reality, leading scholars in both areas have worked closely together and ideas have emerged in parallel as a result of international collaborations and conversations, especially (since 2008) through AERI, the Archival Education and Research Initiative. Although only named as such by Caswell, Punzalan and Sangwand in 2017, it was first articulated in the mid-2000s as the ethical obligation of archives practitioners to commit to social justice work.[[316]](#footnote-316) Work in the critical archival space requires “promoting the inclusion of underrepresented and marginalized individuals and sectors of society…and reinterpreting and expanding archival concepts to disrupt dominant power structures and promote justices.”[[317]](#footnote-317) Importantly, in working towards justice archival institutions must “collect and appraise in more socially conscious ways, that extend concepts of who and what is of value…”[[318]](#footnote-318) The role of archives in “constructing a community, consolidating its identity and shaping its memories”, at national and local levels, is foregrounded.[[319]](#footnote-319)

Critical archival studies has been galvanised since 2010 by community archives movements on one hand and by civil rights activism arising out of the oppression of marginalised and minoritized people on the other. In pioneering work in the UK Andrew Flinn and Mary Stevens identified community archives as “social movements” and “political and subversive endeavours.”[[320]](#footnote-320) Key to such endeavours, they argued, is the creation of literal and figurative spaces for “communities to make collective decisions about what is of enduring value to them…”[[321]](#footnote-321) This represents a radical redistribution of archival power and a challenge to the logics of expertise that constitute archival training, including the ability to confer and identify evidential value In her extensive work with community archives, Caswell has highlighted the ways in which “traditional dominant archival definitions of the record” have reinforced the marginalisation, oppression and “symbolic annihilation” of lived experiences.[[322]](#footnote-322) She theorised the establishment of independent community archives, separate from existing archival infrastructures, as a form of activism, as a way of both reclaiming power over marginalized histories and as a foundation for “building more just and equitable futures.”[[323]](#footnote-323)

Central to this challenge is the claim that archives should be people-centred, acknowledging the competing needs, experiences, and priorities of those whose lives are most effected by archival work. Critical research has questioned the constructions of the archive as stable, static, and fixed – as evidence – from the perspectives of Black and Indigenous communities and people of colour, particularly in settler colonial contexts in North America and Australasia; from LGBTQ+ communities; and from feminist and disabled perspectives. As these ideas have been widely acknowledged, mainstream institutions have increasingly sought to collect and represent minoritized and marginalised voices. However, the integration of Black and Indigenous knowledge and memory into national settler/colonial archival repositories, as part of such diversification and inclusion agendas, can itself be an act of colonisation and violence.[[324]](#footnote-324) The discourse of diversity and inclusion, as Ahmed explains, is a way of managing rather than eradicating inequalities of power – a ‘containment strategy’ which co-opts those who have been oppressed into the systems which have oppressed them.[[325]](#footnote-325) Instead critical archival scholars argue for a praxis which centres those who have been marginalised and focuses on the transformation of archival work rather than integration or accommodation into pre-existing orders.[[326]](#footnote-326)

**The New Archival Values**

Implicit in both the conceptualisation of the “archival multiverse” and critical archival studies is the ascription of diverse archival values and an inclusive definition of archival actors. Cvetkovich’s feminist argument that, as “cultural texts,” archives are “repositories of feelings and emotions” is common to both, as is Derrida’s conception of the archive that is always becoming.[[327]](#footnote-327) These commonalities underpin their challenge to the evidential values paradigm at the heart of the authorised archival discourse. However, their respective conclusions as to the implications of this challenge differs, in their answer to the questions of where change comes from within the archival space. The generosity of the multiverse permits the reproduction of pre-existing value systems inherited through the authorised archival discourse; it can absorb and integrate ideas about evidentiality, authenticity, and expertise into its pluralism. Thus change, like the record itself, exists on a continuum, building on and reshaping past ideas for new purposes.

In critical archival studies this is not possible – instead paradigms and practices which are seen to be founded in oppression and injustice must be dismantled. The dominant archival paradigm is figured as inherently reactionary and can’t be negotiated. Justifying his decision to leave the archival profession, Jarrett M. Drake questioned the possibility of delivering justice from within a system that “mandates a replication of the patriarchy, oppression and violence that many in our work experience.”[[328]](#footnote-328) Elsewhere he has argued: “We are entrenched within power. We are trained and prepared within our graduate programmes to see no other options.”[[329]](#footnote-329) Although Drake has subsequently returned to archival practice – and refers to his 2016 exit letter as “somewhat regrettable” – he continues to grapple with the affordances of archival practices and institutions in liberatory memory work.[[330]](#footnote-330) Lately Harris has agreed that the structures of archival institutions and archival practice are “…profoundly resistant to transformation of a society still structured by centuries of colonialism and apartheid. They collaborate both passively and actively in the replication of oppressive relations of power.”[[331]](#footnote-331) The alternative is a liberatory model of archives, which requires both the systematic dismantling of existing structures and practices and creation of new approaches to archival labour. It may, as Findlay has argued, include the distribution of the custody of archives and the costs of archival work across communities, according to the diverse needs of people and places.[[332]](#footnote-332) This liberatory movement is not only a new way of ‘doing archives’; it is an act of resistance against old ways, against an archival discourse which requires participants to understand and subscribe to authorised notions. Archives in this paradigm have a potential to “catalyse histories for liberation”, but that can only be realised if they are “activated for resistance rather than assimilation or integration into the mainstream.”[[333]](#footnote-333) Echoing Audre Lorde, Caswell suggests that change cannot come from inside the master’s house; the master’s house must be dismantled and a new house built simultaneously. The master’s house, in this case, is built brick by brick from the systems of power and structures of dominant Western practices developed and predicated on the evidential values typology, Jenkinsonian praxis and authorised archival discourse.

**Critical Archives in the Heritage City**

In the previous chapter we saw how the typology of evidential values is expressed through instructional manuals, international standards, and strategic institutional documentation, and how these values are naturalised, reinforced, and circulated through the language and practices of evidentiality. Between 2016 and 2018 I worked on two participatory archive projects in the city of York which indicated an alternative typology of affective values, aligned closely to critical archival theory. Both projects were designed and developed according to participatory principles, and were shaped by the interests, needs and motivations of all those involved, including myself as the researcher. Inspired by the notion of “archival autonomy” (then very recently published), they focused on the intersubjective actions of talking, listening, building relationships, and reaching shared understanding, creating space for different archival values to emerge and be acknowledged.[[334]](#footnote-334)

The first was ‘Hungate Histories’, a time limited project co-produced by members of the York Past and Present Facebook group (YPP), three university researchers (including myself) and an archivist at the City Archive (where I also worked at the time). YPP was founded by lifelong York residents Richard Brigham and Lianne Brigham in October 2013 and describes itself as a “Historical Community sharing York’s historical past” [capitalisation in the original].[[335]](#footnote-335) It was created in response to what was perceived as a lack of safe and informal space to discuss York’s history and share memories, in spite of (or because of) the city’s dense concentration of heritage institutions and organisations.[[336]](#footnote-336) By August 2018 the group had over 23,000 members worldwide, with posts rapidly generating a hundred or more comments; the number is now (as of November 2021) 34,800.[[337]](#footnote-337) Members share their memories and histories of the city, or the stories of family members, sometimes also including photographs or documents as illustration. As a result, the page has become a space for people to reconnect not only with places – many of them now lost, changed, or forgotten – but also with former work colleagues, neighbours, school friends, or distant relatives.[[338]](#footnote-338)

Soon after starting YPP Richard and Lianne, with several other locally-based members, became involved in heritage action projects around the city, combining online discussion with local activism. This often involved reclaiming places that had been discarded by dominant regimes of value, documenting the remains of sites about to be demolished, sold out of public hands, or converted into new uses. In doing so the group often came up against the resistance of expertise and the limitations of bureaucracy, being denied permission to take photographs or to retrieve objects which would otherwise be destroyed. They found it frustratingly difficult to access decision-makers and to navigate the legal and administrative constraints that seemed designed to thwart their interest in these sites. During their first action in 2013 they undertook guerrilla documentation of Second World War hutments being demolished behind the City Art Gallery because there seemed to be no other choice.[[339]](#footnote-339)

Almost from the outset YPP collected both digital and physical archives, in the form of contributions, books and materials donated by members or recovered during their documentation projects. Local people began to bring them items which they found in their homes or bought at car boot sales and which they wanted to see more freely available.[[340]](#footnote-340) The group began to digitise books as well as archives to host on a library and archive platform on their website as well as in Facebook albums; with photographs, both gifted and harvested from local archives websites and newspapers, they created short, interpreted video histories of the city.[[341]](#footnote-341) This brought them into contact with the City Archives and with me, first in the guise of City Archivist, then as a researcher, and subsequently as a friend. Reflecting back several years later, Lianne recalls that I was initially very formal with them, seeming “protective” of the archives and apt – like the other heritage officials they had met – to say no to proposed interventions.[[342]](#footnote-342) This changed slowly as I changed; as the remaking of archival values, which I encountered through critical readings as a researcher, remade me as a practitioner.

In November 2015 we collaborated on a short two-week project that used archives to think through contemporary debates around housing and green space,[[343]](#footnote-343) which led to “Hungate Histories” a six month open collaborative enquiry to activate archives as a basis for thinking through current problems of sustainable development, housing inequality and poverty. YPP wanted to recover the marginalised voices of local people living in social housing, in low-wage employment, and with disabilities. In a city which marketed itself as a tourist destination and a heritage site, they wanted to use the archives to amplify their own voices as contemporary residents with similar lived experiences. At the same time the encounter between YPP, an archival institution and the city council’s archive represented an opportunity to explore the values ascribed to the same documents by both archivists and community members. Unlike other engagement activity then ongoing at the City Archive (which I discuss in depth in Chapter Five), the project de-centred the role of the archivist and involved no preparatory training or induction in archives work for the YPP members, respecting their own ways of knowing about both archives and the city’s past.

I acted as a participant-action researcher with the group, collaborating with my research colleague Helen Graham, Richard, Lianne and other YPP members who took part in weekly sessions. Together we designed a programme of work on uncatalogued records related to the early twentieth century demolition of a part of the city known as Hungate. This aligned with YPP members’ established interest in liminalised, lost and forgotten sites, in contrast to the grand narratives of iconic places like York Minster or the famous medieval Shambles. Although situated within the city’s medieval walls, Hungate was formerly part of the floodplain for the River Foss which runs along its edge, and during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was an area notorious for overcrowding, poor housing stock, dirty industry, and poverty. In 1907 the York Corporation ordered the sanitary inspection of the area and condemned the majority of homes as unfit for human habitation.[[344]](#footnote-344) After the First World War a programme of compulsory purchase and ‘slum clearance’ moved many inhabitants to newly built social housing on the outskirts of the city.[[345]](#footnote-345) The Hungate area was used for light industry and commerce until 2008 when it was purchased for executive housing by Lendlease, the development company responsible for the 2012 London Olympic village.[[346]](#footnote-346) When the ‘Hungate Histories’ project started in summer 2016 the redevelopment was ongoing and the irony of building expensive apartments on a former ‘slum’ piqued the group’s interest. In the future-orientation of the project we were concerned about the increasing unaffordability of the city’s housing stock, the difficulty of securing stable housing for families, and rising homelessness. The clearance archive was chosen to both explore the history of the Hungate area specifically and as a starting point for discussing these issues more generally.

To maintain my role as a participant and a researcher, distinct from my employment at that time at the City Archive, the project was hosted by another member of staff (who also took part in the research in that role but elected to remain anonymous). This archivist identified the relevant boxes of material in storage and was present with us in the reading room. Their role was not to oversee the project but they did, at their request, contribute their knowledge and opinions as they saw fit. Otherwise, the research, activity, and engagement with the collections was guided by the preferences and interests of individuals, in conversation with each other. Research data was collected through reflective notes made after each session, recorded group discussion, blog posts written by the participants and interviews with the archivist, academics, Richard and Lianne.

Of the core group of YPP members who came every week, all were white and identified as working class. They all knew one another before the project began as they had socialised either via the Facebook group or at YPP events in the city. As well as Richard and Lianne two other members of the group had previously taken part in projects and were acclimated to the idea of participation action research. However, none of the group had previously visited the City Archive or used archives in an institutional setting. A distinctive set of values emerged and were ascribed during the project which reflected the ways in which they approached, interpreted, and wanted to use the Hungate material. These were framed and, in some cases, opposed by the values and expectations of the Archive as an institution, the archivist, myself as a researcher, and by the archives themselves.

Approaches to order

The archives that were selected for the project were records created and received by the York Corporation (city council) during the inspection and clearance of the Hungate area. They included printed materials, such as legislation and byelaws; reports and correspondence by Corporation officers; letters from Hungate residents or property owners about the clearance; newspaper clippings, photographs and plans. The archive included a long series of records of inspectors’ returns on the living conditions of residents which were formulaic but provided detailed information on individuals and families. None of the archives had been processed or catalogued since their transfer to the archival institution from council offices in the 1980s. Although they had been re-boxed into archival containers the files were still wrapped in their original housings of brown paper tied with string. Their order had been partially disrupted since their creation, possibly during the transfer and boxing process, and it was difficult to discern the original filing system.[[347]](#footnote-347)

Making these files available to the group was in direct contravention of the institutional policy that uncatalogued archives are closed to the public because of the lack of intellectual control over their content.[[348]](#footnote-348) This lack of control is seen to increase the risks of theft or other damage to the collection, threatening their qualities of authenticity and integrity. Anxiety around the heightened dangers caused by disorder in the archives reflects the prioritisation of evidential values in the decision-making processes of the organisation. The policy is related to a discursive tendency to perceive archives as unready for use and lacking in value prior to the intervention of an archives practitioner.[[349]](#footnote-349) Some parts of the archive had been previously opened to an academic historian during “Dig Hungate,” the pre-development archaeological excavation of the site that took place between 2008 and 2014. However, by summer 2016 the resulting project website was unmaintained and the history sections unavailable for reference.[[350]](#footnote-350) Articles relating to the excavation which referred to the archival material had been published but in academic journals that were unavailable to public audiences.[[351]](#footnote-351) The lack of an accessible book or website that explored the material reinforced the visual impression that the archives were being discovered for the first time.

The absence of practitioner interventions (such as cataloguing and repackaging) and of authoritative narratives around the material turned out to be productive. It highlighted a clash of expectations between ‘expert’ approaches to archival practice and historical research, which anticipated certain ways of approaching the material, and YPP’s community interest, motivated by curiosity, personal connection, and engagement in contemporary issues. At the outset the archivist in attendance encouraged the group to approach the archive via the context in which it was created, foregrounding the importance of provenance and original order. They suggested making a survey of all the boxes of records to create a “robust starting point” or using the Council meeting minutes to establish a timeline of events by which to structure and approach the uncatalogued material.[[352]](#footnote-352) This reflected the evidential values typology whereby records are ascribed significance as authoritative products of organisational bureaucracies. I attempted to impose related values, rooted in the teleology of history as a discipline, by suggesting that we begin by establishing a chronology of national housing legislation and local regulations prior to using the uncatalogued files.[[353]](#footnote-353) However, as the archivist later observed in an interview at the mid-point of the project: “People aren’t very interested in the lists [of archives] and sources of organised information…”[[354]](#footnote-354) They continued:

…you were talking about legislation…I don't think people are interested in that at all. I think that was you putting your perspective on it… that was how I started off doing it, that's where I came from, so there's obviously quite a consistent archivist-historian way of approaching things.[[355]](#footnote-355)

This “archivist-historian” methodology was challenged by the way YPP members approached the archives using different organising principles. Instead of seeking and imposing ‘original’ or chronological orders formed by legal or historical structures, the participants situated, rearranged, and explained the archives based primarily on geographies of family and place. Their orientation was away from legislation, bureaucratic process, and the Corporation and towards the locations and people involved. The administrative history of the records’ creator, which is a primary sense-making element of archival processing, was perceived to be far less important than the subject/s of the record. Instead, spatial and experiential features – the places records referred to; and the feelings of the people in them – were the primary categories for organising and engaging with the material. These required no specialist or prior knowledge but enabled the group to meet the records on their own terms, without having to adopt or be co-opted into the orientation of the institution or of archival practice. This embodied the critical archival principle of ‘people before archives’ in two ways, prioritising the people *in* the records as well as the people *looking at* the records.

During the first session the group decided to focus their attention on two streets in Hungate: the eponymous Hungate itself and Garden Place, a street running parallel to it. The latter ultimately became the focus of the project. The group mobilised around this decision and began to sort and move through the archive to find references to Garden Place dispersed throughout the files.[[356]](#footnote-356) In the second session participants began to digitise material they felt was relevant with their phones and other devices, and in week three a Google Drive was set up to house these images centrally, to digitally re-order the material by place.[[357]](#footnote-357) Two members of the group, Richard and Dave, chose to compile a collection of maps and plans that showed the two streets through time. A table in the reading room was set aside to display a number of these plans for constant reference, in particular a 1907 coloured sanitary inspection map (see Figure ?) and an updated copy of this plan from the 1930s when the clearance was at its height.[[358]](#footnote-358) Along with Ordnance Survey maps of the area, these were used to connect written records and photographs the group found with locations in space and time, often literally when documents were moved around and laid over each other to construct narratives. As files were opened and spread out, bureaucratic aggregations of records were unpicked to generate new relationships and groups, the physical manifestations of reorganisation that is usually only countenanced in digital contexts. The process strained the professionalised instincts of the archivists present, including myself.

The group also used the maps as a creative bridge between the archives and the present, discussing how closely the new Garden Place (the name having been reused by the executive housing development) overlay the old one and speculating as to the different lives and expectations of people living there. Lianne suggested that “Maybe those that are just moving in to Hungate [in 2016]… I think it would be nice for them to see where their house is situated maybe. I mean it would be kind of brilliant if your house was situated on Garden Place that we've been researching…”[[359]](#footnote-359) This translated into a strong desire amongst the group to be *in* Hungate at the same time as experiencing the archives, with the maps acting as a not-always-satisfactory surrogate for being onsite. Dave decided to go and walk around the area between sessions, returning the following week with questions about an archaeological dig taking place in the vicinity.[[360]](#footnote-360) Having spoken to the archaeologists he and Richard subsequently became involved in that project as well, making an immediate link between the place in the archives and the place in the world.

This spatial connecting and restructuring of the archive was fully expressed in an event held near Hungate in November 2016. As part of a collaboration between the project and a local arts collective YPP worked with artists to design an exhibition that presented their archival research. They recreated housing spaces, smells and scenes that the early twentieth century residents of Hungate might have experienced, taking information and inspiration from the archives (see Fig. 2 and Fig.3).[[361]](#footnote-361)

<Insert Fig 2. Caption: A plan of a house in Hungate, drawn up from the description in the archive. 2017. Credit: Reet So.>

<Insert Fig 3. Caption: ‘Census’ of a family from Garden Place designed from inspectors’ survey sheets. 2017. Credit: Reet So.>

The way the group organised and explored the archives by place fed directly into their constructions of the past. Catherine, for example, used this approach to build detailed narratives of individual properties and their inhabitants.[[362]](#footnote-362) However, it also led to frustration and unmet expectations. Just as for Una Stubbs, the archive was frequently unable to answer the questions participants wanted to put to it. Relevant records were distributed over dozens of files, some of which were unpromising, formulaic, or boring to look through. When references to Garden Place were found they sometimes contained partial or confusing information. Ironically, the original creators did not appear to have the detailed grasp on the geography of area that the group had cultivated. Several “mistakes” were found, such as properties in Garden Court being confused with properties on Garden Place or a corner pub being given the incorrect street address. [[363]](#footnote-363) This led some group members to distrust the archive, or rather to distrust the knowledge of the people making it. This questioning of the trustworthiness and expertise of the Corporation in the 1910s and 1920s was connected to their scepticism about the ability of the present-day Council to manage and understand the city. The archives replicated the communication barrier not only between a practitioner language of evidential values and the group’s affective research approach but between the bureaucracy of the Council and YPP’s crowd-sourced knowledge base.

As a result, the group did not accept the authority of the archive or the discursive assumption, which we saw expressed in the professional strategic documentation, that it knew more about the past of Hungate than they did. Throughout the project they used alternative strategies to supplement and ‘correct’ the information they found. In addition to the visits to Hungate, members also consulted local oral history testimonies, posted questions to the YPP Facebook page, and ran Google searches on their phones.[[364]](#footnote-364) The archive was not prioritised over other sources of information or referred to as the fundamental basis for evidencing claims about Hungate in the past. The evidential and informational values ascribed by the group were limited, moderated by their lack of trust in the records creator and diluted further by the archives’ inability to respond to their needs. Instead, the archives were one of a range of sources about Hungate that allowed the group to explore, speculate, and construct meaningful knowledge about the past.

The desire to be *in* the place that they were researching was related to the group’s sense that the records were also significant and relevant to debates in the present. Knowing about the past was not an end in and of itself but a precursor to connecting with personal experiences, reflecting on change, and discussing current affairs and local political decisions. This aligns with Caswell’s proposition that community archives (or, in this case, institutional archives in the power of the community) reach their potential when they are activated for change. Almost a third of the talk during the research focus group sessions was reminiscence of personal stories or opinions prompted by the archives. Topics covered included high rents, the poor quality of social housing, the lack of inclusivity in the new Hungate development, community spirit, students, and the postal service. During a conversation about if and how 1930s Hungate residents might have tried to influence what happened during the clearance, Lianne recalled her experience of living in council-owned housing as a young mum:

It was awful. Hated it. But then when I first moved in I didn't know that I could do anything about it, you know, I thought it was just a case of this is my house I have to live with it… until you know that there are places that you can go to get help you don't know because nobody advertises it. Nobody tells you.[[365]](#footnote-365)

The group’s use of the archive generated a space for remembering, expressing, and imagining social situations and emotional states, leading people to consider their own experiences as valid, important, and historical. Researching the experiences of people in the past evoked powerful responses and gave members permission to explore their own feelings. Sue H, for example, wrote about a “letter that really touched my heart” about an elderly woman who had been removed from Hungate in 1936 and admitted to an institution. Sue used this single letter to express her empathy for this person, imagining how it must have been to have “her pension book taken off her…her furniture deemed unfit to be sold at public auction and sent to the ‘Destructor’.”[[366]](#footnote-366) It led Sue to make a connection to her own childhood in York in the 1940s: “We lived in Micklegate and that was classed as quite a posh area wasn't it but where we lived it was overrun with mice… We had to go to bed at night and there were all the mice. Disgusting.”[[367]](#footnote-367) Sue appreciated the affective potential of personal stories in the archive, explaining that “it made me so grateful for what we have today…it gave me a glimpse into the past, without the archive this wouldn’t be possible.”[[368]](#footnote-368)

The emotion latent in the archive wasn’t always pleasant or easy to deal with. Reflecting back on the experience Lianne admitted “I found myself getting quite upset with the archives. The slides [photographs of ill residents’ bodies, made by the Medical Officer of Health] were just horrific and I found myself going home after seeing the slides and it's like I'm thankful that I don't live like that but I'm very sorry that they did.”[[369]](#footnote-369) Other members of the group expressed feelings of anger at the social injustice experienced by the Hungate residents. This was often directed towards the Corporation who were seen as uncaring and more interested in appearances than peoples’ wellbeing:

S: It always looks nice by the Minster though.

AP: That’s because it’s not owned by the Council. [all laugh]

D: They couldn't be bothered...How many times did Hungate flood? Almost once a year.[[370]](#footnote-370)

These feelings were not only related to the group’s sense that the records were significant and relevant to debates in the present, but an indicator of broader concerns for disrupting and challenging the status quo or authority they signified. Working with the archives presented an opportunity to figuratively and literally enter the new Hungate development, which was otherwise exclusionary, and to critique housing policy in the city. This critique could then be used in other areas of the project, in thinking about how to build better homes and better relationships between residents and the Council. In this way the archive was co-opted as a “memoryscape”, as described by Caswell, becoming an active space that allowed the YPP researchers to construct aspirations for the future through thinking about the past.[[371]](#footnote-371)

The term “houses of memory” was first used to describe Archives in 1991 by Jean-Pierre Wallot, invoking both their physical and metaphorical role as “memory spaces.”[[372]](#footnote-372) This terminology has since been widely adopted and the relationship between memory and archives extensively explored, often in the context of engaging the public with archival heritage. Terry Cook, for example, has offered a poetic reading of the link between archives, memory, and community: “Archives are about memory, continuity, linkages, community, heritage, humanity – about allowing the solace of remembering and the balm of forgetting to move the spirit, to open us evermore sensitively to the possibilities of justice.”[[373]](#footnote-373) However, as Blouin has noted, the relationship between archives and memory is not straightforward. For him “the archive is relational and suspect… as one contested element in a variety of tangible and intangible elements that help construct a sense, an image, a theory or a representation of a particular past.”[[374]](#footnote-374) Verne Harris has reinforced the limits of the archive to represent the fullness of community and societal remembering:

Truth be told, archives narrowly defined, these “memory institutions” holding the treasure of records with archival value, contribute relatively little to social memory.[[375]](#footnote-375)

This ambivalence was also evident in the memory role the archives assumed during the “Hungate Histories” project. While the archive could be used to stimulate debate and generate powerful emotional responses, its ability to speak authoritatively about the past was subordinated to grassroots history-making that drew on YPP’s collective memories and online resources, as well as individual’s opinions and experiences of living in York. This challenges practitioners’ assumptions (expressed in the interviews explored in the next chapter) that archives have an evidential value in learning and remembering the lessons of the past. Although this dynamic was at work during “Hungate Histories” it was not straightforward. Arguably, although the relationship between the evidentiality of the archive and YPP’s communal remembering was productive, this productivity was generated through a form of resistance to archival authority rather than a process of learning through and from it. In a debate with Richard, Lianne and Helen Graham a year on from the project, this resistance was characterised as a form of counter-authority grassroots insurgency.[[376]](#footnote-376) The value of the archive was as a body of information around and against which the group was able to generate ideas, creating a space to discuss urgent issues and form plans of action.

The team’s collective response to the archive foregrounded the personal, affective, and place-based connections they shared with it, suggesting that the dominant values ascribed were emotional and social. Emotional values were generated when the archive led people to express and share their feelings, and subsequently to use those feelings to reflect on personal and communal experiences. Not all the feelings were positive; on the contrary the experience was challenging and painful as well as thought-provoking. Social values emerged thereafter in the unauthorised and activist use of the archive to reflect on the housing crisis of the 2010s in the context of the housing policy of the 1930s. The policies and approaches of modern-day national and local government could be questioned and disrupted by learning about the Corporation’s actions in the past. This impulse ran counter to the discourse of archives as tools in the production of “shared stories” that work to unite diverse perspectives in the interests of “community cohesion.” Instead, the response of the YPP members would suggest that the breakdown of relationships between government and community evident in the Hungate archives was the basis for exploring the conflict and tensions inherent in the imbalance of power between local people and local government today.

Developing the history of Garden Place turned all group members into ‘experts’ and created a basis for sharing their minds more broadly, contributing to a redistribution of this power. As a result, during workshops held after the project was complete, participants were able to debate with planning and local heritage officers on a new basis. The archive channelled the emotional immediacy of their responses, and mediated their personal experiences, acting as a basis from which to make political statements. This basis did not need to be factually correct or assiduously evidenced, but could be patchworked from archives, family histories, hearsay, opinion, and online articles. In contrast to an archival institution, YPP was under no obligation to maintain a discursive stance of legitimacy or a neutral subject position based on evidential values. They were free to mobilise the archives, even in ahistorical or ‘wrong’ ways, to “imagine and reimagine different trajectories into the future.”[[377]](#footnote-377)

This orientation strained against systems of control, order and research approaches that emphasised linearity, order, and progress. The groups preferred an approach to sense and meaning-making that was often at odds with the limited possibilities offered by the records themselves. Not all these limitations are inherent (although some, such as the archival silencing of marginalised people, are). Others arise out of an orientation towards authorised archival discourse, from the logics of the creation, selection and management of the records through to the environments and technologies that are interposed between the archives and the individual or community. When archival heritage is presented, described, and assessed within the evidentiary paradigm then assimilationist, instructive and expert led approaches to ‘public engagement’ (which I explore in Chapter Five) become necessary, because participants cannot make sense of the records without them. The Hungate Histories project at least partially disrupted this authorising environment, making it possible to redeploy bureaucratic archives as a tool for community activism aligned with new archival values.

An LGBTQ+ Archive for York and North Yorkshire

The second illustrative participatory project was exploratory and is still ongoing. In 2013 a group of LGBTQ+ residents, including myself, began to plan an LGBTQ+ archive for the city of York and county of North Yorkshire. Members were variously involved with other LGBTQ+ activities in the city, including the York LGBT Forum (‘the Forum’) - the city’s leading LGBTQ+ advocacy organisation - York Pride, and York LGBT History Month. The project was originally mooted in 2013 but developed slowly, shifting through changes in the research group and personnel, until a more structured working group of seven members (including myself) formed in 2017. At this stage members of the group consented to take part in research, and we held five workshops between February 2017 and January 2018 where the design, ambition, and purpose of the LGBTQ+ archive was discussed. All have chosen to remain anonymous here.

Prior to taking part in the project only one of the group members had any experience of working with archives in institutional or organised settings: GM4 had previously volunteered at a feminist community archive in England, now held by a university library, and had been involved in an LGBTQ+ oral history project elsewhere in the region. However, GM1 had their own extensive personal archive, including a series of diaries dating back to the 1960s which they had considered depositing with an Archive. Their motivation for becoming involved with the project partly arose from their dissatisfaction about leaving their personal papers to an institution.[[378]](#footnote-378) GM2 and GM6 had attended some of the LGBT History Month events which had taken place since 2014 and so were aware of the ongoing conversation about preserving queer archives and objects in the city. Both were also active in LGBTQ+ advocacy. GM3 and GM5 were students who were involved in LGBTQ+ communities at their universities. The group identified with a diversity of sexualities and gender identities but nobody was asked to label themselves. Inclusivity and equity were values that emerged most strongly in discussion about the proposed archive, and this was reflected in the approach to the research project. The other principal themes that emerged were visibility, autonomy, intergenerational solidarity, and the role of archives in consolidating and furthering LGBTQ+ civil rights. Although these reflected different experiences and priorities to the Hungate Histories project, they arose from a similar typology of affective values.

Valuing LGBTQ+ stories

From the outset there was consensus that “the community should decide” what York’s LGBTQ+ archive looked like, ensuring that its contents, management, and values were produced by the needs and experiences of LGBTQ+ people.[[379]](#footnote-379) GM2 envisioned the content would be collected primarily by project volunteers, who identified as LGBTQ+ themselves and would exercise control over the decisions that were made. The archives would be an ‘own voices’ collection that would value LGBTQ+ perspectives and make them visible. The proposed archive thus fit within the definition of a community archive first established by Flinn, Stevens and Shepherd, the defining characteristic being “active participation of a community, on their own terms.”[[380]](#footnote-380)

Being seen or making visible was expressed as a core motive. This was not just a matter of historical recognition in response to being ‘hidden from history’ (as it is expressed, for example, in The National Archive’s strategic documentation on engagement) but part of a broader societal experience of not being seen or acknowledged. As GM1 put it: “We’re invisible normally. We’re not counted. There isn’t anything on the census…they took it off the last census and I was very cross about that…so I want to be counted…that’s why I need an archive, to be made visible.”[[381]](#footnote-381) The group recognised that this invisibility was not an accidental or unconscious omission but a result of a programme of erasure under dominant archival values. GM2 felt strongly that the city’s LGBTQ+ history “has been deleted, it has been destroyed…there is a lot of LGBT history in York that people don’t know about… it’s been eroded.”[[382]](#footnote-382) Bringing the archive into existence was understood to be what Rebecka Sheffield has termed an “archival intervention”, in which the process of researching and documenting a community or subculture calls attention to what is absent or distorted in institutional archives.[[383]](#footnote-383) The group’s feelings were akin to the “symbolic annihilation” experienced by marginalised groups in mainstream archival repositories.[[384]](#footnote-384) An LGBTQ+ archive would not only have the effect of re-establishing the historical presence of LGBTQ+ people in the city, but would begin to address this deeper social and cultural erasure.

Since the 1970s LGBTQ+ rights movements have recognised the social values of archives in raising awareness, building solidarity, and making communities visible. In 1973 the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives (CLGA) was founded because “a conspiracy of silence has robbed gay men and lesbians of their history...,” further arguing that “a sense of continuity which derives from the knowledge of a heritage is essential for the building of self confidence in a community.”[[385]](#footnote-385) The motivation for collecting archives was not just about the past, but “a necessary tool in the struggle for social change.”[[386]](#footnote-386) More recently LGBTQ+ archive projects in other parts of the UK have foregrounded the change and recognition potential of such “archival interventions.” In Plymouth the *Pride in the Past* project specifically envisioned its archive as a way for LGBTQ+ people to “share their memories and take pride in their own past and contribution to the city.”[[387]](#footnote-387) The York group also imagined the archive in this way, as a tool for social and cultural recognition that extended out from the past and into the present. This understanding of the potential of archives echoed the contemporary uses of Hungate by YPP, in mobilising archival heritage to make visible otherwise marginalised perspectives and minoritized viewpoints that counter authorised narratives.

This had been briefly achieved through a community-curated exhibition on LGBTQ+ life since 1967 hosted by York Castle Museum as part of the 50th anniversary commemoration of the decriminalisation of sex in private between consenting men over the age of 21.[[388]](#footnote-388) The Forum, Pride and History Month had collaborated to collect a small number of oral history testimonies and objects, and curated a display in the 1960s pub gallery which opened in June 2017. However, this was not permanent, and the material was returned to the contributors in December of that year.[[389]](#footnote-389) The lack of permanence afforded the exhibition and the collections it generated was understood to be emblematic of institutional attitudes to LGBTQ+ heritage. Efforts were made for specific purposes, which were often linked to anniversaries, but the outputs were not part of the authorised or popular history of the city. The community archive was perceived as an antidote to this problem, because “that’s it, it’s there then for the longer term.”[[390]](#footnote-390) However, the objective was not to influence the collecting behaviour of mainstream repositories. The prior experience with the museum, and the absence of engagement from the City Archive, suggested a lack of genuine and consistent commitment. As a result of their involvement with these projects GM1, GM2 and GM6 all expected that archival institutions would want to interact with the LGBTQ+ community according to their own fixed parameters. GM2 dryly commented that “it [LGBTQ+ history] does seem to be flavour of the month at the moment”, later suggesting that part of what archival institutions wanted was the appearance of LGBTQ+ collaborations to leverage diversity-linked funding.[[391]](#footnote-391)

Instead, the group asserted the right of LGBTQ+ people to collect and determine what constituted their archival heritage, applying their own regimes of values. GM2 highlighted the importance of posters, flyers and personal photographs as heritage which might not be prioritised within institutional schemas. Almost anything, through its association with a LGBTQ+ person, was seen as valuable and useful to the community archive. [[392]](#footnote-392) This aligns with Barriaut’s characterisation of LGBTQ+ archives as true “total archives”, in which collections function as the collective memory box of communities.[[393]](#footnote-393) It echoes the collections policy of the Lesbian Herstory Archive, which will accept any “materials that are relevant to the lives and experiences of Lesbians.”[[394]](#footnote-394) As a result the Herstory Archives collects and preserves material that might be discarded by mainstream archival repositories, in the same way that YPP seeks to document and discuss buildings, sites and memories that have been deemed dispensable by local authorities. Caswell suggests that this diversity of ephemera, artefacts and formats is reflective of the multiplicity of voices that community archives contain.[[395]](#footnote-395)

There was implicit recognition of the lack of interest in such material from institutional repositories in York. GM1, for example, mused on what the City Archive “would want” from the work of the Forum. Having done some research they suggested that minutes and accounts were most likely to conform to the requirements of the collecting policy, whereas they felt less confident that non-bureaucratic records such as feedback forms from training programmes, event photographs, and promotional material would be selected.[[396]](#footnote-396) This may be indicative of messaging received during initial contact with archivists during the *Gateway to History* project, and reading the community archives training materials they produced as part of that programme (which I analyse in Chapter Five). Concern for autonomy in collecting has been a central theme of the LGBTQ+ archives movement. In 1975 CLGA refused an offer to acquire their collections by the Archives of Ontario, electing to remain an independent organisation.[[397]](#footnote-397) The Lesbian Herstory Archive similarly rejects amalgamation or absorption by an institution. Their principles state that the archive must be “housed within the community,” so that the community can collect, manage and provide free and open access to the collections.[[398]](#footnote-398) They further radically reject the “elitism of traditional archives” by advocating for the transfer of archival skills through teaching “one generation of lesbians to another.”[[399]](#footnote-399) This is an assertion of their power to “document their own commonalities and differences outside of the boundaries of formal mainstream institutions” that speaks to the new values of critical archive studies.[[400]](#footnote-400) The project team’s strong feelings about the independence of their archive also reflects the debates about archival autonomy, power, and independence.

However, they did recognise that there were practical limits to this position that might necessitate some form of relationship with a mainstream Archive. For instance, they accepted that the community did not have facilities for keeping archival materials in one place, which was important because of the value of being able to touch and interact with the collection. Hiring and paying for storage space of any kind was identified as a problem. This was notably the unmet concern shared by other York community archives during the consultation phase of the *Gateway to History* project. The group didn’t want to collect an archive without a long-term plan for looking after it. GM2 recalled visiting an independent LGBT history centre where the archives were kept “in some kind of attic dive with boxes with paper poking out…and I thought no.”[[401]](#footnote-401) This, combined with an emphasis on “wanting stuff to last,” meant that there was a desire for the archive to be “in a place where it’s well looked after.”[[402]](#footnote-402) The group also felt that working together with an institution like the City Archive would give the materials a public profile and visibility over and above what could be achieved in the community itself.[[403]](#footnote-403) This reasoning was contextualised by the experiences of a number of prominent LGBTQ+ community archives in the UK, which had started from a position of radical independence and latter been forced to negotiate deposits with mainstream institutions.

The solutions had not always been ideal. When the Hall-Carpenter archive ran out of funds in 1989 its collection could not find a home with a single repository. Instead, they were divided according to the collecting policies of three institutions: the oral history recordings to the British Library; archives and grey literature to the London School of Economics and the press cuttings to the Bishopsgate Institute to form the Lesbian and Gay Newspaper Archive, LAGNA. The low status of the cuttings in the hierarchy of evidential value had meant that LSE felt unable to accept them with the rest of the archival material.[[404]](#footnote-404) The Brighton OurStory Archive, founded in the 1970s, was forced to close in 2013 and only small parts of it were subsequently deposited at The Keep, the Sussex County Record Office.[[405]](#footnote-405) In comparison, although the London Lesbian Archive had similar beginnings it was able to retain its coherent identity under the umbrella of a larger independent organisation, the Glasgow Women’s Library. Founded in 1984 as the London Lesbian Information Centre, its funding was withdrawn in 1995 and, threatened with dispersal akin to the Hall-Carpenter archives, it moved to Scotland.[[406]](#footnote-406)

The lessons from these experiences highlighted a tension around the group’s desire for control and the apparent constraints imposed by an archival authority. GM3 expressed concerns about “easy access and ownership and all that sort of stuff.”[[407]](#footnote-407) This was envisioned as a long-term issue which stretched beyond the involvement of the current project team or Forum stakeholders. There was a need for something “which is there, which is held, in trust for *us* and *our* generations that come in the future.” [emphasis in the spoken word][[408]](#footnote-408) This “holding in trust” implied a relationship between an archival institution and the community that was ideologically and practically different from the ownership-transfer model described, for example, in the City Archives’ Collections Management Policy.[[409]](#footnote-409) Trust (as opposed to truth) emerged as a key word that embodied a mutual understanding that went beyond the language of custody, ownership, and copyright expressed by archives practitioners. GM3 wanted to know “Who will be the gatekeeper of it?” suggesting that “you would want it to be at least one person who had a vested interest in LGBT people being able to have access to their stuff.”[[410]](#footnote-410) GM4 shared a negative experience where permission was refused to display archival material held by a university at an LGBT film festival. The archivists who were responsible for the collection told them that “we only lend things out to other museums.”[[411]](#footnote-411) This led to concerns that the LGBTQ+ community would have to accept a contractual inequality of power in return for the benefits of longevity and security for the archive.

The vulnerability of being ‘in the power’ of a mainstream institution was compounded by the emotional, personal, and intimate nature of the archives’ content. GM1 highlighted the position of people who were not out to family and friends or trans people who were passing and might not want to “give their stories to the world.”[[412]](#footnote-412) GM2 was concerned about the implications for members of the Forum who were visiting York from countries where making their sexuality public could cause serious harm and danger to them or their families.[[413]](#footnote-413) There was also recognition that donated archives would contain information about people other than the donors, who may not want or be able to give consent to their actions, opinions, and feelings being preserved. These issues were relevant not only to people who were still living but also those who had passed away, who may not have wanted their private lives to be shared.[[414]](#footnote-414) The project group emphasised the absolute necessity of protecting peoples’ right to self-determination as a key characteristic of the community’s archival autonomy. A debate about how to manage the multiple rights in the archives led GM1 to express a concern that content could be “screwed up and misused” in the public domain, particularly via social media.[[415]](#footnote-415) On the one hand the sensitivity of the material meant that the access restrictions and controlled use imposed by an institution might help to assuage the fears of wary donors.[[416]](#footnote-416) On the other it might mean relinquishing LGBTQ+ control over the transmission and circulation of material as part of the archiving process. Cataloguing and indexing, for example, would have to conform to international standards and work within existing documentation systems, limiting the extent to which community members could describe and organise the collections on their own terms.

Given the strong emphasis the group placed on self-determination this was seen to be a particularly troubling challenge. The protections afforded by Data Protection legislation and the Archive’s existing policies were not seen as sufficient to cover these eventualities and the group subsequently discussed alternative regimes of differentiated control and access. GM4 gave an example of an LGBTQ+ archive elsewhere in the north of England that marked certain files as “For use by lesbians only,” a level of protection that would work against the desire to use the archive to raise awareness of LGBTQ+ histories with the wider public.[[417]](#footnote-417) GM1 suggested redaction of names prior to deposit as an alternative solution that would allow people to see what happened and when without revealing the identity of the individual involved.[[418]](#footnote-418) There was a consensus that any collecting and donations process would need to be carefully planned, so that the ramifications were understood by everyone. GM4 suggested a donations form that included a range of privacy options for different levels of sharing, including anonymity and pseudonymity, so that each donor could personalise their relationship with the Archive.[[419]](#footnote-419) A nexus of complex issues emerged around privacy, public identities, and Data Protection, which in turn generated tension between the desire to be seen and recognised and an underlying uncertainty about full disclosure.

One solution to this problem was for the community to omit certain types of information from the archives, actively deciding to allow parts of recent LGBTQ+ history to be forgotten or lost.[[420]](#footnote-420) Discussion centred around a defining period in the evolution of the York LGBT Forum, a time of intense internal conflict which involved some individuals who were no longer members of the organisation. Authorised archival logic places the responsibility for determining if and how these individuals’ actions should be remembered on the Forum with the archive-creating body. However, this became a meaningless concept in the context of York’s LGBTQ+ community, in which organisational identities and individual identities were blurred. Any decision the Forum made would be personal and require some individuals to make decisions concerning other individuals.

Passing on the past, knowledge and memories to future generations of LGBTQ+ people was a key motive for the working group. There was a strong feeling that the loss of older people, particularly those with personal experience of criminalisation and gay rights activism in the 1960s and 1970s, meant that the community archive should be established as a matter of urgency. The recent death of an older gay man in the city, for example, had led to the loss of both his historical research and of his memories and expertise. The necessity of “passing on” the history was aptly demonstrated within the group when GM1, GM4 and I reminisced about the York Lesbian Arts Festival (2000-2008).[[421]](#footnote-421) As younger and newer arrivals in the city neither GM3 or GM5 had been aware of this event, which for a time attracted over 2000 lesbian, bi and trans women from across the world.[[422]](#footnote-422) This genealogical dimension to preserving archives emerged from a recognition that members of the community do not usually inherit their sexual identity from their parents and need to build a sense of self from resources outside of the family unit:

A lot of communities, you’ll grow up in a family most of the time… and you can sort of hand down oral histories of family, whereas most of the time LGBT people don’t grow up with LGBT families….you feel isolated growing up. So having that kind of archive that, like you said, says people have always been here, getting that sort of continuity is, I think, really important.[[423]](#footnote-423)

Archival work was constructed as a form of community kinship and as a way of exploring queer family, establishing affective connections between people who might otherwise feel isolated. This was most completely expressed in the values ascribed to intergenerational communication, particularly in the form of oral history work. This was seen as an opportunity not only to collect archival heritage but to acknowledge and celebrate the lives of older people: “it’s just amazing the stories that people have...it’s amazing what people will share with you.”[[424]](#footnote-424) Such testimonies might create a continuum of experiences as in, for example, the ubiquity of coming out stories. This continuum was also the basis for a network of personal connections that was implicitly understood to be the way in which the archive would collect and grow. Throughout the workshops individuals from the York and North Yorkshire communities were named as vital people to speak to, often to a chorus of agreement followed by the suggestion of further names.[[425]](#footnote-425) Pre-existing social and support groups were suggested as an obvious way to collect oral histories: “people talk about history anyway, just in conversation you know.”[[426]](#footnote-426) However, it was made clear that membership of the LGBTQ+ community was necessary in order to develop and activate these relationships. These were not “shared stories” in the cultural and political sense implied by, for example, *Archives for the 21st Century*. In fact, they were categorically unshared, in that they were what differentiated and demarcated LGBTQ+ experience from heteronormative society. As with the ‘Hungate Histories’ project, the act of ‘sharing’ such stories was about foregrounding struggle and injustice rather than cohesion, and for the purposes of community rather than societal solidarity.

Further, it was not just the LGBTQ+ past that needed preserving. The LGBTQ+ present was also being rapidly lost. GM5 pointed out that the ephemerality of the community’s archival heritage was only increasing as “night club flyers are now all Facebook events and that’s very transient.”[[427]](#footnote-427) The issue of digital preservation was seen as very pressing but was understood to be on a continuum of disappearing heritage that went back to the underground word-of-mouth networks of the mid-twentieth century. As I observed: “It’s almost like LGBT archives have been having the social media experience since forever.”[[428]](#footnote-428) This underlined the importance of the collection of oral testimony, both from the past but also from LGBTQ+ people in the present. Whereas this would ordinarily represent a relatively small part of an archive, in the case of the LGBTQ+ archive it may be the largest and most significant component. GM1 observed that “traditional archiving” would only be possible for York’s LGBT charities “with sets of minutes going back to 2006 and the constitution and all that…kind of what traditional archivists look for, but that’s not really the history of LGBT people.”[[429]](#footnote-429)

The affective alternative

The values ascribed to archives by YPP members reflect a typology of values which, like the affective turn in history, make room for “acknowledging the importance of emotions and the central role they play in social communication and moral judgement.”[[430]](#footnote-430) The LGBTQ+ archives project also centralised this idea, by associating the act of archiving with the visibility and acceptance of the community in the city. It was predicated on an understanding that extending ideas about what constituted valuable archival heritage would reinforce socially-just conceptions of what constitutes a valuable and respected member of society. Participants in both projects understood the value of archives in ways that recall Agnew’s definition of the affective as: “less concerned with events, processes or structures than with the individual’s physical and psychological experience.”[[431]](#footnote-431) This echoes Cvetovich’s argument that as “cultural texts” archives are “repositories of feelings and emotions” with affects coded into their content.[[432]](#footnote-432) As Marika Cifor has suggested, from the perspective of affective values, archives are about creating, documenting, and maintaining the relation established by affect between the body and the world across time and space.[[433]](#footnote-433) The archive becomes a “way of encountering and indeed handling ‘pastness’…’ in the present.”[[434]](#footnote-434)

However, the authorised archival discourse resists such encounters where they engage with institutions, as with YPP and the Forum’s attempts to create permanent records that reflected their values. As Archibald observes: “perhaps because the personal is emotional and the emotional is suspect as a source of knowledge in our culture, it smacks of non-professionalism.”[[435]](#footnote-435) The discursive alignment of the management of archives with evidential values produces knowledge and activities that prioritise authenticity and integrity over emotion and affective practices: By keeping the archives together in their original bundles rather than activating them for community empowerment; by providing temporary display space for LGBTQ ephemera but not deeming it worthy of long-term storage. Consequently, while archivists may be increasingly aware of the “need to understand the affective contours of users’ relationships to records,” they lack a framework for emotional and experiential responses.[[436]](#footnote-436) This is evident in the next chapter, where archivists were able to describe numerous emotional encounters with archives but could not articulate their emotional values when asked directly. In contrast, they were almost universally able to describe evidential and informational values, using a common language that was related to their professional identities and training. This suggests that archivists instinctively recognise affective values as individuals, with their own feelings and responses – and are increasingly aware of the critical archival literature - but become uncomfortable describing or activating them in practice. When confronted with them, as I was on *Who Do You Think You Are?*, they retreat into safe, normative behaviours.

Although the remaking of values over the last 20 years has challenged sexism, racism, and heteronormative assumptions in archives, Cifor has noted how many inequalities continue to be underexplored and unrecognised.[[437]](#footnote-437) The rhetoric of community cohesion, shared narratives, and collective memory evidenced in the strategic documentation of institutions and in engagement projects has served to obscure the ways in which archival institutions continue to act, and to be instrumentalised, as sites of authority. As Harris has observed, one of the impacts of current activity is the tendency to over-package information about what archives are and do. This contributes to “the commodification of knowledge” so that no space is available for counter or sub-narratives even when they are supposed to be the subject of the activity.[[438]](#footnote-438) The disjunction of values between groups like York Past and Present, the Forum and the City Archive are therefore discursive as well as practical and personal. Harris argues that instead:

We need to embrace process rather than product. And we need to foster the contestation of social memory, seeing ourselves, conducting ourselves, not as referees but as contestants.[[439]](#footnote-439)

This is what the YPP Facebook page allows. Posts by members of the community are subject to the memory work and responses of other members of the community. Each poster approaches from their own authority, while the group self-manages its archival ethos.

The new archival values recognise this autonomous rather than authoritative archive as central to equity and liberation. Authenticity, order, long-term preservation, and physical safety is not necessarily paramount for archives generated and managed in this way. The significance of the Interference Archive in New York is not its permanence but its “function as a social space for learning” and “for organising in the present.”[[440]](#footnote-440)An equivalent archive in the UK is the MayDay Rooms, “a safe haven for historical material linked to social movements, experimental culture and the radical expression of marginalised figures and groups.”[[441]](#footnote-441) Its founders consider it to be less a repository and more of “an active social resource” where “the future can be produced more than the past contemplated.” [[442]](#footnote-442) The communality of the space, the recognition of varied forms of expertise and the circulation of knowledge are key. Recalling Soja’s “third space” these archives offer a venue for archival work which is neither the realm of the private individual nor of the institution, where people can gather independently. In this context, archival heritage doesn’t generate universally “shared stories” or contribute to simple communal identities but acts as a basis to connect different points of view, even where those points of view are painful or divisive. The orientation of both YPP and the LGBTQ+ archives project team represented a desire to create and activate archives that do more than evidence or represent the past. Although imagining the past is an important activity, and a key to initial curiosity, the primary motivating value of their engagement is “changing what we envision is possible for the future.”[[443]](#footnote-443)

Engagement and Affect

A critical archival reading of the Hungate Histories and LGBTQ+ archives projects suggests an orientation towards affect and social action as the dominant values of archives. People engaged these values and generated meanings from the collections in spite of the difficulties in navigating the limits that bureaucratic production and archival processes placed upon them. YPP members turned the archives reading room into an oppositional space in which a community could “construct collective identities and discourses apart from dominating groups.”[[444]](#footnote-444) They produced counter-memories, finding “legitimacy in local and vernacular forms of heritage” through telling stories about their own lives, walking the streets, and imagining the past.[[445]](#footnote-445) By selecting and reordering the archive, both physically and digitally, they used the material to create their own archive, with Google Drive acting as a space to “forge new relationships between parallel histories, reshape and reinterpret dominant narratives and challenge conceptions of the archive itself.”[[446]](#footnote-446) In so doing they fulfilled Sellie et al’s definition of an autonomous archive, enacting and modelling the politics of their community.[[447]](#footnote-447)

The York LGBTQ+ archive team expressed a similar determination, in their desire to make visible the memories and experiences of their community in the form of archival heritage. As a marginalised group, erased by York’s mainstream repositories, they were especially concerned to be as inclusive and open as possible. In common with other LGBTQ+ archives they acknowledged the value of a multiplicity of archival heritage, which could reflect the differences of sexual and gender identity within the community. As representatives of the originating community they felt confident in making independent decisions about what should and shouldn’t be collected because their decision-making criteria was based on personal and social recognition rather than evidential or historical criterion. Their appreciation of value was not hierarchical or informational but dynamic and fluid. Akin to the Lesbian Herstory Archive, appraisal in the new archive will be based on affective values.[[448]](#footnote-448)

However, autonomy in these cases did not require absolute separation from the activity of institutional archives like Explore and the North Yorkshire County Record Office. Although the relationship between institution and community was uneasy and subject to discursive tension, this did not preclude the negotiation of partnerships or collaborative spaces. In the case of Hungate Histories, power over the acceptable uses of the archives reading room was ceded to YPP and the research group. A notionally sacrosanct space, embodying the rules of archival discourse, was partly recalibrated. Similarly, the LGBTQ+ archives project team recognised the practical necessity of accessing the resources and specialist equipment that an archival repository could provide. They were prepared to trust their archival heritage to the city Archive if their autonomous and independent right to interact with it on their own terms could be recognised. This required breaching practitioner control of the archives strong-room, sharing responsibility for the selection, care and provision of access to the community’s collections.

Such negotiations require archives practitioners not only to accommodate community needs but to cede power as a preliminary act of engagement. This is necessary if work is to move beyond recovering marginalised histories to activating archives as tools for building more equitable futures. Similarly, the representativeness of the archive on its own is insufficient to manifest its emotional and social potential. Because archival practices are discursively constructed around authorised values, of evidentiality, legality and historicity, which counter-act, co-opt or dismiss these activities. They take place within spaces that embody such values. Engagement which is apparently designed to move archival institutions towards more just and inclusive practises consequently occur within a discursive and spatial frame that depreciates rather than centralises affect.

**Chapter Four**

**Authorised Archival Discourse in Action**

I first met Richard and Lianne Brigham from York Past and Present in 2014 in my role as an archivist, in the café of York Explore, the early twentieth century neoclassical Carnegie library where the city’s archive collections are stored and accessed. They came to talk to me about digitising documents, maps, and photographs, predominantly from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, to create a free online resource for people interested in York’s history via their website. They envisioned a do-it-yourself project, where volunteers from YPP would bring their own equipment – phones, digital cameras, and hand scanners – and crowdsource knowledge about the images through YPP members on Facebook. It would be an ongoing effort, guided by the curiosity and affective values later demonstrated in the Hungate Histories project. Rather than planning or predicting the outcomes, they would get started and take it from there, going where the work took them. Although I was, at that time and to my own mind, committed to public engagement with the archives and apparently working towards the inclusive vision described in the *Gateway to History* programme, I experienced deep unease at their suggestion. I recall a myriad of anxieties: about preservation of the archives being digitised and the resulting digitised images; about digitisation standards, formats, and protocols; about platforms and descriptions; about intellectual control and copyright. My first, strongest, and most persistent instinct was to say ‘no’ or, at least, ‘wait’. Wait until we could get funding; wait until we could establish a sustainable, standardised infrastructure; wait until we could discuss it all much, much further and with many more people. Richard and Lianne’s suggestion that they could be ready to start the following week made me reprise my *Who Do You Think You Are?* performance of the nervous laugh. Not only did this seem impossible to me, it was also *unthinkable*. Everything about what was being suggested seemed inadvisable, unprofessional, and, most importantly, *unarchival*. It was another point of disjuncture and dissonance that splintered under my skin and opened up critical questions for me: What archival values were at work on both sides of that conversation? How was my professional logic constructed? What sense-making stories about archives motivated my resistance as opposed to Lianne and Richard’s sense of limitless and immediate possibility? I ultimately did say no, or as good as by delaying a decision; in the meantime, YPP started their website anyway, digitising the archives brought to them by community members. Much later, after I’d worked with YPP on Hungate Histories and other projects, Richard said to me: “We’ve tried to do things that previously people have said that you can’t, ‘no’. And there is no more powerful words in the English language than ‘no, you can’t’. It tends to get people interested.”[[449]](#footnote-449)

This chapter is about the ways in which archivists consciously and subconsciously reproduce, reinforce, circulate, and integrate the authorised archival discourse into their work. Grounded in critical analysis of semi-structured interviews with archives practitioners from England and Wales, it considers if and how the discursively constructed values of authorising institutions such as the ICA and The National Archives are interpreted and activated through practice. Specifically, it discusses the discursive assumptions about, and orientations towards, archival work that construct practitioner identities, shape actions, and demarcate archival boundaries. These assumptions in turn shape the relationships between practitioners, institutions, and communities. I also consider the articulation of the new critical values in archival practice and how these alternative perspectives are negotiated alongside the traditionalist typology of evidential values. Because although the authorised discourse is hegemonic, it is not monolithic – while I argue that an authorised range of values is replicated and ascribed to archival heritage, competing affective values also surface, sometimes even at the fore, generating dissonance. My deconstructive reading of the interviews is an attempt to unpack “how the conspicuously foregrounded statements in a text are systematically related to discordant signifying elements that the text has thrown into the shadows or margins…”[[450]](#footnote-450) This means paying close attention not only to what archivists say and how they say it, but also to the juxtaposition of ideas, logics, and stories that underpins their words.

The seventeen interview participants were initially recruited by self-selection following an email communication to the Archives-NRA listserv mailing list. The email asked for volunteers to take part in research on “archives, communities, and social values.” The only criteria for participation was that interviewees should have experience of archival work in an institutional setting in England and Wales. Only one participant - Interviewee 12 - was directly invited to contribute at the outset; this was because of their role in the delivery of the *York: Gateway to History* case study project (which is the focus of Chapter Five). Of the seventeen respondents three identified as men and fourteen as women; five were aged under thirty-five and three were over fifty-six years old with the remaining nine aged in between. While all seventeen worked in archival contexts, six respondents did not identify specifically as ‘archivists.’ Interviewees 04 and 06 described themselves as cultural heritage professionals; interviewees 09, 14 and 17 as librarians or local history officers and interviewee 19 identified as an academic researcher. All of the interviewees were white. While the sample was small, the interviewees broadly reflected the gender, age, and racial distribution of archives practitioners in the UK found in the 2015 Workforce Mapping exercise undertaken by the Chartered Institute for Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) and the Archives and Records Association (ARA) and released in 2018. According to that survey women account for around 78% of all UK archive workers and 96.7% are white.[[451]](#footnote-451)

The interviews were semi-structured into four sections. Initial questions focused on the biography of the participant, including the remit of their current work, their career trajectory, and the extent to which they had been involved in public engagement activity. This section was designed to contextualise the abstract questions about definition, values, and strategy that followed. The second section focused on definitions of archives and the boundaries of archival practice. Interviewees were asked to consider ways of understanding archives from several points of view, starting with themselves (‘How do you define archives?’) before being asked to reflect on that definition in relation to the uses of the word and concept by academic researchers and communities. The third section considered the ascription of values. Again, interviewees were initially asked why they thought archives were valuable, before being asked to consider if and how values might be changed by circumstances. They were also asked specifically about the emotional and social values of archives and prompted to give an example of when the affective value of archives had been demonstrated to them. Finally, the fourth section asked for their perspective on the efficacy and relevance of sector strategy in England and Wales. They were asked to comment specifically on the content (where they were aware of it) and usefulness of the then government policy on archives, *Archives for the 21st Century*.[[452]](#footnote-452) Finally, they were encouraged to share their own thoughts on the future of archival practice.

As the interviews were semi-structured the order and wording of each question changed in response to the flow of the conversation and the reaction of the participant. Some lines of enquiry prompted follow-up questions; similarly, some respondents felt unable to answer certain questions. Interviewees were confident in different areas, depending on their level of experience and self-perceived expertise. For example, early career practitioners were less likely to speak at length during the strategy section but felt more able to expand when asked about definitions and values, perhaps given the recency of study and qualification. Conversely experienced practitioners, some of whom were in senior or consultant roles, had extensive thoughts about the role of national strategy in their work but were more distant from recent debates in the field.

Certain lines of questioning proved more challenging than others. The section about values caused confusion, with questions about the contingency of values – whether they changed over time or according to circumstances, for example - requiring extended conversation in some instances. This both reflects the relative absence of values-based thinking and approaches in archival practice, and the extent to which values were invisible to the practitioners more generally.

Interviews were recorded and a denaturalised transcription approach was used, in which oral discourse was given primacy over written language.[[453]](#footnote-453) Written language is an idealised system, whereas spoken language is messy, broken and syntactically confused. The translation of the latter to the former is necessarily interpretative. It may be considered a subjective act that “reflects transcribers’ analytic or political bias and shapes the interpretation and evaluation of speakers, relationships and contexts depicted in the transcript.”[[454]](#footnote-454) In this case features of written language, such as punctuation and paragraphing, were largely omitted, except where they could be clearly identified in the speech. A full stop, for example, was inserted only when the end of a sentence was followed by a pause and then speech was resumed on a new topic. Otherwise word strings were run on without imposing structure. Features of oral expression such as ‘erm’ and ‘ah’ were retained, as were false starts and word repetitions. Pauses of longer than three seconds and other non-verbal signals such as sighs or laughter were noted in square brackets. This approach to transcription, although time consuming and less fluent to read, was selected as most suited to the needs of a discourse analysis, which considers paralinguistic features, like pauses and restarts, as well as the prosody and rhythm of speech. After thematic content analysis, four discursive formations were identified as key to the ascription of values by the interviewees, each one related to the authorised archival discourse. These were: their practitioner identity; an understanding of archives as organic objects; persistent notions of inherent or objective values; and the sense-making structuration of archival practice.

Course, cult, sector: Becoming an archives practitioner

Participants chose to provide different levels of biographical detail during the first section of the interview. Some gave highly specific and lengthy autobiographies, which had to be redacted where they compromised the anonymity of the respondents, while others chose to provide only basic information. Either way responses indicated an expectation that I would share and understand archival career trajectories and work experiences, given my own background as an archivist. This was indicative of ways of thinking about archival practice that emerged throughout the responses, perceiving it not only as a form of work and labour but as a signifier of identity and of belonging to a community of shared expertise.

Being “qualified” for archival practice and pathways to “qualification” were frequently alluded to, suggesting their importance to both the credibility and status of the participants. All eleven of the interviewees who self-identified as archivists on the pre-interview questionnaire held a postgraduate archive studies qualification recognised by the Archives and Records Association (ARA). The postgraduate diploma or Masters in Archives and Records Management (which is currently offered by seven UK universities, three of which are in England) was perceived as a key factor in belonging to the ‘profession’. Ten of the archivists in the sample shared their qualification stories. Interviewee 01, who qualified as an archivist after having already secured employment in an Archive, explained why they had taken the course:

…it was quite important to go out to archives services with the confidence that I knew what they [other practitioners] had been trained in and that I understood things from their point of view and I wasn’t just coming in with…assumptions about what an archives service should be and what archives are.[[455]](#footnote-455)

Qualified practitioners were seen to have a particular “point of view” – an orientation from which they looked at things – which was different to the ‘unqualified’ perspective. In this response a distinction between insider/qualified and outsider/unqualified perspectives or “assumptions” was established. Interviewee 02 reaffirmed this, saying: “most archivists in this country who call themselves professional archivists have been through this kind of common experience of work experience the course etc. etc…so in the narrowest sense it can be about the fact that you’ve been through the course…”[[456]](#footnote-456) This was not the only time that an archives qualification was referred to as “the course,” a definite noun signifying a uniform learning experience that, no matter where or when it happened, was fundamentally the same. Subsequently the same interviewee expressed discomfort about belonging to the insider perspective and an awareness that it was limiting: “I’m having trouble with this label I don’t [pause] I no longer choose to call myself an archivist…”[[457]](#footnote-457) Almost immediately, however, they clarified that “I do sometimes but not all the time” and then, further, “particularly when I’m talking to other archivists.”[[458]](#footnote-458) They recognised the necessity of invoking this shared experience of qualification in establishing credibility and authority amongst their peers, even though it increasingly gave them a sense of unease.

Those without the qualification were aware of the lack. Interviewee 06, in response to a question about how they came to work in archives responded: “So I… I’m not an archivist so I’m not a qualified archivist I trained as a historian and did a PhD in history…”[[459]](#footnote-459) In the recording the interviewee begins positively “So I” before breaking their flow to insert “I’m not an archivist…”, deciding to provide this information about what they were *not* prior to the positive statement about what they *were*. Their second repetition of the phrase and addition of the clarifying “qualified” connected the status of “archivist” and the right to work in archives with the qualification. Later, when asked about the future of archives, they returned to the issue by suggesting the “profession” needed to open up because “it’s quite an intimidating place to work when you’re not an archivist cos it is almost cult-like at times in terms of the importance of the qualification and that the qualification is sacrosanct.”[[460]](#footnote-460) Another respondent suggested that “…one of the most destructive questions that you can ask some of my colleagues who aren’t qualified is where did they qualify because it goes nowhere and the conversation ends.”[[461]](#footnote-461) This last comment suggests a divisive gulf between the qualified and the unqualified that, once revealed, effectively shuts down communication between archivists and non-archivists.

The close association between practitioner identity and “the courses” is policed by the Archives and Records Association, the leading professional body for archives practitioners in the UK and Ireland. The organisation maintains an assessment and accreditation regime, monitored by a members’ Qualifications Accreditation Panel, which determines whether a university programme meets a set of universal criteria, not unlike the model of the Archives Service Accreditation programme. This partially explains the assumption of interviewees that an archives qualification is effectively the same across the awarding institutions. Since 1984 each of the postgraduate courses has been assessed on a five-yearly cycle, with new courses thereby aligning to pre-existing offers. Those that conform to the standard are accredited and endorsed by the Association, while unaccredited courses are specifically noted on their website.[[462]](#footnote-462) While there are a small number of alternative routes into practice, such as The National Archives’ Bridging the Gap and Skills for the Future programmes, research has shown how difficult it is for practitioners who come via this route to find long-term stable employment.[[463]](#footnote-463) The dominance of the postgraduate qualification system effectively channels prospective applicants down narrow qualification pathways. Kirsty Fife and Hannah Henthorn have recently suggested that this is one of the key structural barriers (paired with an expectation to undertake unpaid or low paid work during, prior to and immediately after qualification) which perpetuates inequalities of opportunity in the UK profession.[[464]](#footnote-464) Although a Master’s level qualification is not necessarily and by definition exclusionary, under current neoliberal conditions it amplifies the inequities of resources (money, time, security), experience, and support which keeps the archival field predominantly white and middle classed.[[465]](#footnote-465)

The criteria for course accreditation are set out in the Panel’s operating procedure and terms of reference, the most recent iteration of which emphasises the “strong links” between the universities and “the archives and records management professions.”[[466]](#footnote-466) ARA’s role in maintaining these links is in ensuring that the “programmes provide professional education of appropriate content,” determining what does and does not count as archival expertise.[[467]](#footnote-467) This “appropriate content” includes “specific knowledge of the historical, administrative and legal context of archival materials and records,” as well as national and international standards of practice. This requirement not only situates archives and archival practice within the Western epistemologies of historiography, bureaucracy, and the law. It also serves to locate the source of legitimate expertise in the discourse of agencies such as the ICA, TNA, and ARA. Thereby authorised assumptions about where, how, and why archives are managed in society are reinforced during a central rite of passage.

The accreditation criteria further specifies that students should learn “the value of archives” as “information resources, the means by which citizens hold governments and others to account, evidence for legal and moral accountability and for cultural and historical purposes.”[[468]](#footnote-468) Informational and evidential values are privileged, aligning archival education with the claims of the authorised discourse, and emphasising the necessity of ‘qualified’ experts in maintaining and managing these values. As the qualifications standard is set by a panel of ARA members, who “shall be or shall have been practising archivists” the affirmation and circulation of authorised conceptions of archival value has become integral to a sense of professional belonging.[[469]](#footnote-469)

While being part of the expert insider group of qualified archivists could be a positive experience – the supportive and cooperative nature of the professionalised archives community was cited several times – it could also lead to experiences of loneliness and isolation. Some respondents, for example, associated their qualified status with being different from colleagues and peers. Interviewee 05 pointed out: “I'm the only one in the whole of the borough who is qualified as an archivist…”[[470]](#footnote-470) Although they went on to share experiences of working with community archives and colleagues within local government who were also engaged in archival work this participant felt notably separate from them. Later in the same interview, while talking about introducing new audiences to archives, they suggested “we speak a different language [chuckles] we call them records and things like that they call them pieces of paper and documents you know [chuckles] we've got a set of rules that people have to stick by…”[[471]](#footnote-471) The “we” encompasses archives practitioners, as a class of experts with their own terminologies and ways of seeing the world that are distinctive; “they” are community organisations and audiences for archives. The difference conferred by archivist status is enjoyed on the one hand, as indicated by the chuckles, but understood as a barrier on the other. Again, the participant indicated difficulty in communicating with outsiders: the distinctiveness of language and adherence to particular “rules” distinguished the qualified practitioner from others. These responses suggest interconnected and reinforcing discourses about the identity of archives practitioners and the expertise required of archival work. Taking “the course” and becoming “qualified” is a process of transformation that inducts individuals into shared ways of thinking about archives. These ways of thinking are distinctive from those of non-qualified people, even where they may be working in the same archival contexts. An insider/outsider dialectic is established, which can appear hostile, even cultish, as described by Interviewee 06, and which acts as a barrier to mutual understanding.[[472]](#footnote-472)

This dynamic is not unique to archivists – professional identity formation in general is characterised, as Evetts has said, by “shared educational backgrounds, professional training and vocational experiences.”[[473]](#footnote-473) Indeed, the context of the evolution of archival training and practice over the last 120 years, characterised by an emphasis on increasingly specialised bodies of knowledge that distinguished the “qualified”, is aligned with that of other professions in the twentieth century. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century staff were recruited to the Public Record Office (and the small number of other archival institutions in England) from an undifferentiated field of classically educated candidates. Very few had any prior knowledge or experience of working with documents and records. A skills gap was recognised as early as 1902, leading to the foundation of the School of Local History and Palaeography at Liverpool, but the focus was on interpreting and understanding documents rather than on principles and process.[[474]](#footnote-474) Jenkinson catered to this lack with his Manual in 1922. However, it was the creation of the National Register of Archives (NRA) and the County Committees for the survey of historic records in England in 1945 which produced a market for archival specialism. Haunton has shown how the NRA’s first director, G.E.G. Malet, actively campaigned for the establishment of local county record offices to hold and provide access to archives recognized by the register.[[475]](#footnote-475) By 1959 almost every county in England had a record office.[[476]](#footnote-476) Shepherd has identified this as a significant factor in the establishment of the first postgraduate courses in archives management in the late 1940s. Five universities introduced professional qualifications for archivists in the early NRA period between 1947 and 1955.[[477]](#footnote-477) The courses were established to provide suitably qualified staff to record offices outside of the management of the PRO, providing a means to conform local practices to established principles. The courses were led almost exclusively by senior professionals, mostly from the PRO, teaching central government practices for listing, indexing, and administering archives that could be reproduced across the UK. The qualification became a distinctive commodity, conferring the authority of the National Register of Archives, the PRO and central government on local activity.

Notably the PRO itself did not employ a ‘qualified’ archivist until 1979, preferring instead to recruit civil service candidates and train them in house. [[478]](#footnote-478) Indeed, this remains the case at The National Archives where only one of the current Directors has a background in archival practice.[[479]](#footnote-479) This may seem inconsistent for an organisation at the ‘super-mainstream’ end of archival practice (as one interviewee put it), if “the course” is understood as the primary means of conferring authority through expertise. However, this ambivalence towards qualification may arise from the belief that “the course” is a way of aligning archival practices with values that are established and embodied by TNA as an authorising agency. Qualification becomes a mechanism, not unlike Archive Service Accreditation, that embeds, reproduces, and circulates authorised values throughout ‘the sector’.

This may be understood as an extension of TNA’s role and function as a non-ministerial government department. Johnson has argued that modern professions are an integral apparatus of Foucault’s theory of governmentality, providing the “institutions, procedures, tactics, calculations, knowledges and technologies’” that reinforce the activity of government in society.[[480]](#footnote-480) In the case of archival practice this is particularly apparent, given the state-sponsored origins of qualification pathways. Johnson has further located the apogee of professionalism in Britain in the late 1940s, just as archival practice was becoming associated with particular ways of conceptualising and working with archives. New professionals at this time were “increasingly located in new, corporatist structures as ‘neutral experts’, with the task of implementing the social and political goals adopted by the National Wartime Government and its Labour successor.”[[481]](#footnote-481) This appeal to neutrality and social good resonates with the archival rhetoric of truth, accountability, and integrity established by Jenkinson in the 1920s and integral to the authorised discourse. It establishes a paradox: that, as a correctly trained professional, the archivist can be both integral to government functions while at the same time being independent of it.

From the interviewees’ perspective, their expert world and sphere of influence was defined by “the sector”, a terminology familiar from Chapter 2, used here as a catch-all for all archive institutions and archival activities. The term was endemic throughout the interview responses. When asked directly about “the sector” all interviewees questioned its extent and nature, seeking to problematize it. Interviewee 10, for example, asserted: “There isn’t a homogenous sector, I think we have some homogenous concerns…”[[482]](#footnote-482) However, uncertainty about its validity did not appear to inhibit the use of the term. On the contrary, most participants went on to apply it in significant and indicative ways, as a shorthand for their understanding of a coherent and meaningful network of archival organisations and people.

Interviewee 08 offered an extended and nuanced description, using the metaphor of a rainbow:

the sector is a whole spectrum and it’s easier to define and identify at one end of the spectrum and then it gets very granular and fuzzy at the other end… I think it was [named colleague] who a few years ago came up with this lovely rainbow [laughs] of the sector, so at the one end you’ve got county record offices that are also Places of Deposit, maybe university archives… So big formal professional set ups that call themselves an archival record office, that have got archivists working there, using international standards blah de blah de blah. And then as you move across the spectrum and ultimately end up with archives that are still in private hands, or community hands, you may also have archives that don’t even identify themselves as archives or see themselves as part of that sector…[[483]](#footnote-483)

Although the metaphor of the rainbow invites us to imagine the equality or “ecosystem” of different types of archival custodian, inclusive of county record offices and community archives, the subsequent elaboration reflects the same understanding of the legitimate functioning system of archival institutions identified in The National Archives’ strategic documentation. It calls upon an ordering metaphor, the spectrum, positioning instances and locations of archival work between two distinct points. The interviewee gives primacy in their description to county record offices and Places of Deposit, the legislatively authorised locations of archives of national importance. The centrality of these archival institutions is implicit in the verbal organisation of the metaphor. The interviewee goes on to categorise such places as “big, formal, professional”, using language that signifies status and recognition. They identify two further characteristics of these “set-ups” – “archivists” and “international standards” - to further underline their position. By employing qualified professionals and conforming to national and international standards they reflect and fulfil the requirements of the *Universal Declaration on Archives*. This recognition of authority is apparently dismissed by the “blah de blah de blah” that follows, a rhetorical device that implies familiarity, boredom and, perhaps, impatience with the institutions described. However, at the same time it signifies the obviousness and inevitability of their position and reputation, so that the interviewee simultaneously asserts and mocks the status quo, reinforcing it while appearing to dismiss it.

At the other end of the spectrum are archives that are not recognised as archival, even by the custodians themselves. Nevertheless, ‘the sector’ contains them and asserts metaphorical control over them, by recognising them for what they are even though their owners or communities may not. So that, while community archives may not perceive themselves to be part of ‘the sector’, they still fall within its remit. The interviewee was subsequently asked where The National Archives sat on this “spectrum.” They responded that it was “at the end of the super mainstream,” occupying an originating position from which all archival activity across ‘the sector’ may be defined and controlled. [[484]](#footnote-484) This ideation of the spectrum works, firstly, to define the broadest possible array of archival activity as ‘the sector’, and secondly, to order it from closest to furthest away from The National Archives. Qualifiedness and “professional set-ups” are proximal to The National Archives while community archives and archives in private hands are furthest away.

The same interviewee used the word ‘sector’ 77 times during their interview, the most of any respondent (although Interviewee 06 was a close second at 66 times). They continued to express complex mixed views about what ‘the sector’ is and how it should be approached. Later they stated: “the big county record offices that were the backbone of the sector and the main points of collecting that’s all shifting, now you’re getting much more integrated ecosystems but… it’s like any ecosystem it’s complicated.” [[485]](#footnote-485) This recognition of the “shifting” diversity of archival activity is apparently dissonant with the earlier metaphor of the rainbow or spectrum. The hierarchical, structured nature of the former is unlike the rich, interconnectedness evoked by the “ecosystem”. The “super mainstream” of The National Archives and of the “big formal professional set ups” of the spectrum is here imagined as the outdated “backbone”. The language of archive-as-organism found from Jenkinson to *Archives for the 21st Century* is seen to shift in line with the integration of new thinking about diversity and inclusivity. However, there is anxiety about the resulting “complications.” When the interviewee cycled back to the question a third time they continued to be haunted by the same imagery:

it’s not as simple as the backbone of the county record offices / PODs [Places of Deposit], and then the universities and the branches, and then the charities businesses and private owners, and little museums, it’s not [hesitates]… [[486]](#footnote-486)

Claims that they no longer saw ‘the sector’ in these linear, hierarchical terms were undermined by this repeated recourse to it in ordering their ideas and worldview. While they rejected the simplicity of this perspective, no alternative was presented except the unspecified “ecosystem.” It echoes the way the language of the “ecosystem” replaced the “backbone” in The National Archives most recent strategic documentation but in such a way as to perpetuate ‘the sector’ as a natural creature or organism. This organism remains a whole system, with an explicable biology which can be mapped and used, and which can be subject to management through, for example, the development of national collections strategies. Considering the standardisation of collecting practices, another interviewee explained how:

a lot of our [The National Archives’] work’s been looking at how we work through existing networks in the archive world or how we foster those where it makes sense. So then we’ve got a very strong sense of networks, and networks of networks, and how we need to work through that…[[487]](#footnote-487)

The National Archives is perceived to have centralised oversight and authority over these networks, which comprise ‘the sector’. Although this is not a legal position, TNA is authorised by a web of legal and advocacy functions, including the work of the RCHM, the provisions of the Public Records Act 1958 and the transfer of advocacy and support functions from MLA. A liaison officer was first appointed by the PRO to oversee the activity of local record offices as early as 1964, the forerunner of The National Archives department which is now known as Archives Sector Development.[[488]](#footnote-488) Although the ‘sector’ has never constituted a single, distributed archives service, the activity of the PRO and subsequently The National Archives has strongly signalled that this is the de facto case.[[489]](#footnote-489)

Since the 1990s, in line with the new archival values, the UK ‘sector’ has expanded to include a much broader range of archival actors, including community archives and archives in private hands. Metaphors like “the backbone” of county record offices have consequently been recognised as inconsistent with twenty-first century reality. However, while new ways of describing ‘the sector’ as a rainbow, ecosystem or network appear to be a shift in perspective, the new language is adaptive rather than disruptive. It is used in ways that reiterate and reinforce old patterns of thinking. Rather than dispersing authority and experience such metaphors reinforce the hierarchy of value that assigns archival activity a status, depending on its proximity and likeness to The National Archives and authorised repositories. The presence of qualified practitioners, established from the mid-twentieth century onwards as the officers of sanctioned archival work, are used as a criterion for distinguishing between kinds of institution. This structuration has implications for the relative worth ascribed to archival activity. We might infer that the further away from The National Archives an institution is on the spectrum, and the further a person is from ‘qualified’ status, the less validity and authority they have. This has far-reaching implications in practice – for the distributions of funds, for the accessibility of archives, for the recognition and reward of archival labour, and for values ascribed to and conferred upon archival materials.

Shedding the snakeskin: Defining archives

To access their values, interviewees were asked a series of questions about their understanding of archives. Open questions like “How do you define archives?” and “Would this definition change depending on who you were speaking to?” provided access to a range of perspectives and assumptions about archives. The aim was to understand not only what practitioners thought archives were, but what language they had available to speak about them, what knowledge was required to construct them and what values were associated with them. As Brothman has observed, definitions of the record don’t stand alone but are wrapped up in “detailed supplementary statements” that help us to understand the conditions and processes of archival work.[[490]](#footnote-490)

When asked to provide their definition of archives the initial reaction of over half of the interviewees was to laugh, groan or make other non-verbal noises before offering an answer. We can account for this relatively consistent response in a number of ways. While some participants may have been expressing frustration at having to rehearse a tired debate, others appeared to think that the interview was entering disputed territory and were experiencing nervousness or discomfort. Interviewee 18, for example, began: “Oooh god argh that's an interesting one erm…”[[491]](#footnote-491) A smaller third group saw the question as a knowledge test and assumed that I was looking for the right or correct answer. Responses subsequently broadly fell into two categories: those who attempted to offer a ‘textbook’ definition of archives and those who improvised their own. In the former category definitions were sometimes offered ironically: “The official definition is records that are deemed to be worthy of preservation [laughs] see I read the text book [laughs].’[[492]](#footnote-492) Or were followed up with what they perceived to be a more realistic meaning:

…strictly speaking if you're going down the archive profession perspective it's something like: the records of people, organisations, that they create in the course of their business or their creative lives. That kind of thing… I think in practice archives is one of those terms that is used by the public and by people generally to mean old things, that might be dusty and live in a basement and that are old I bet…[[493]](#footnote-493)

Here the interviewee also used the definition to further reinforce the distinction between insider ‘professional’ perspectives and the outsider perspectives of ‘the public’. They demonstrated an awareness of the correct formulation of the insider point of view – and if they were being “strict” that is the orientation they would adopt, distinct from the popular inexpert conception of dusty old things familiar to “the public” and “people generally.” In making this distinction the interviewee appears to conceive of the differences in definitions of archives as an extension of the differences in ‘archivist’/qualified and non-professional/non-qualified identities. The response further demonstrates how practitioners use their shared learning experience and core texts from “the course” to inform their perception of archives.

However, definitions became messy when responses were improvised beyond bold statements. Where interviewees provided longer answers they were more likely to introduce ideas that were dissonant or in conflict with their initial statements, finishing with expressions of uncertainty or asking me for reassurance that their response was correct. This type of answer was made up of two parts, beginning with a statement about archives as things followed by a statement about archives as actors. In this way archives were defined both by what they are and what they do in the world:

it’s a collection of items that may be paper, electronic [things], that come together to form a story about something [actors].[[494]](#footnote-494)

So, archives are the records of organisations or individuals [things] which have been kept safe because they’ve got value for history or evidence or research in simple terms [laughs] [actors].[[495]](#footnote-495)

Answers like these frequently referenced the potential formats or types of archival heritage, which were then listed. Interviewee 14, for example, provided a definition entirely based on the form and content of their own repository: “the official borough records so minute books, rate books, planning records all sorts of different things like that and a whole series of deposited records from the community…”[[496]](#footnote-496) Statements about archives as actors focused on telling stories, supporting research, and their role as evidence, qualities that find precedent in the language of the authorised discourse.

Several responses drew a metaphorical parallel between archives and ‘the sector,’ by describing the former as similarly organic, natural, and biological and by stressing their cumulative nature. This might occur in passing, such as in Interviewee 07’s definition, strongly reminiscent of Jenkinson: “organic accumulations of material that accrue either from the creative or collecting activities of individuals or organisations.”[[497]](#footnote-497) Or briefly as in Interviewee 20’s answer: “I think an archive is just the natural accumulation of material by a person or an institution really…”[[498]](#footnote-498) One interviewee, however, gave an evolved simile of archives as biological remains, explaining:

[laughs] Ok. This is the most horrible image but it works for me. It’s, for me, archives are like the… they’re like the shed snakeskin. They’re what people left behind when they moved away [interviewer laughs] from whatever it was they were doing, so that they are naturally formed and they’re not needed anymore and some of them like many many snakeskins you don’t really want to have hanging around forever and that’s not an archive but the ones that you say ‘this is fascinating, this is interesting this is something we want to preserve’… if I’m stretching this metaphor as far as it can conceivably can go it’s the ones you put into a museum and say ‘hey these are fascinating snakeskins please use them for reference’.[[499]](#footnote-499)

This description foregrounds the naturalness of archives, which are imagined as shed organic tissue that was once part of its creator’s body. This is an intimate conceptualisation that foregrounds the idea that archives are part of a biological system. The metaphor implicitly encourages us to think about how archives are selected for preservation, differentiating between the ones you “don’t really want to have hanging around forever” and the ones you want to “put in a museum.” The image of the chosen skins in a museum is invocative of natural history taxonomies and order. Although the metaphor positions archives as part of a natural process, it also hints at the intervention and decision-making of experts. Putting this in the broader context of the authorised discourse, ‘the sector’ is the ‘ecosystem’ in which such naturally occurring archival materials encounter the expertise necessary to identify and preserve them.

Only two interviewees eschewed the tangibility of archives as things and defined them entirely by what they do in the world. One suggested they were defined by evidential qualities: “it [the archive] is an ability. It’s the ability to find out what happened when, who was involved, what it meant at the time and to be able to rely on that information to sort of build further, to move forward, to make a new decision.”[[500]](#footnote-500) The same interviewee stressed authenticity as a defining characteristic of archival material because “it has to be reliable you have to be able to trust it because if you can’t trust it then you can’t move forward.”[[501]](#footnote-501) Interviewee 10 went further, offering a rights based definition: “archives are one of the tools to enable humans to have the right and freedom of memory.”[[502]](#footnote-502) Both responses called upon the ‘evidentials’ of truth, authenticity and rightness to determine what is and is not archival. Unlike other interviewees, whose definitions constructed archives as independent actors that did things without the intervention of human agents (also a discursive formulation of the authorised archival discourse) they recognised archives as “tools” or “abilities,” stressing that archives must be activated in order to become what they are. This is a distinctive conceptual definition that may be partly explained by the work experience of the interviewees involved. Both were engaged with archival theory and literature as an integral part of their practice and therefore more likely to be familiar with the emergence of social justice and critical conceptions of archives since the early 2000s.

All but one interviewee said they would adapt their definition of archives when speaking to different types of audiences, although some clarified that this didn’t mean they changed their view of what archives were but only the words they chose to describe them. One interviewee stressed that they would “always try and make the definition a transactional one, a descriptive one of how an archive is produced rather than saying it could be digital records, it could be film, it could be paper, it could be files, because as soon as you start to say files minutes boxes it gets quite difficult.”[[503]](#footnote-503) However, generally, a consensus emerged that transactional or conceptual definitions of the archive, which were useful when talking to peers and in certain research contexts, were not fit for purpose for everyday encounters. Interviewees recalled having to explain their work to a lay person, like their hairdresser or taxi driver, and reverting to format-based definitions that had been previously rejected as unsophisticated or incorrect. Alternatively, they would offer a use definition of archives: “sometimes I just say that it's dealing with records and what's left of people's lives. We're remembering people's lives. We're remembering what they did. We're remembering events. We're passing things on for the future.”[[504]](#footnote-504)

One interviewee described approaching audiences that use archives for structured purposes, such as academic historians, with a “kind of diplomatics approach, the kind of National Archivesy kind of approach,” whereas:

…other audiences, they don't need to know all that it doesn't matter. What they need is to be wowed. They want to see JB Priestley's shirt. They want to see some First World War letters you know? It’s a sensual experience it's a wow factor. Oh it's like Hogwarts you know? It's that kind of thing and it's… if you start going on and on about all that kind of recordykeepingy kind of stuff that might… [pause] that just isn't as exciting to people…[[505]](#footnote-505)

A definition of archives associated with ‘recordykeepingy’ ideas and The National Archives was sharply contrasted with intuitive, “sensual” responses of emotion and wonder that connect archives to significant historical figures and events in imaginative ways. In this way Interviewee 17 suggested a distinction between the values ascribed to archives by practitioners and other specialists (such as historians) who understand the “recordykeepingy kind of stuff” and the values held by others. This difference in values orientation recalled the dialectic in their previous definition of archives, between “strict” traditional notions and more permissive and expansive perspectives, intimating an awareness of two distinct ways of seeing and understanding archival material.

It is notable that in each of the cases above respondents segued unconsciously from thinking about how they would define archives to different audiences, to thinking about how they would describe their work, its purpose, and effects. This reflected a tendency to elide ideas about what archives are with ideas about what archives practitioners do. This implies how strongly practitioners identified with the materials that they work with, and the extent to which they associate the definition of archives with a justification of that work. In their responses many interviewees were offering strategies about how to excite and interest people. Often this involved distancing themselves from the professional definitions – as Interviewee 17 put it, the “recordkeepingy kind of stuff” – which they had offered in response to the first question. A conflict was implied between what archives are to the initiated and how they must be presented in order to engage people. These represented attempts to talk across the qualified/non-qualified, practitioner/non-practitioner divide. On the one hand the interviewees were keen to extend the reach of archives, but on the other implied a belief in the fundamental inability of non-experts to understand or value them for what they truly are.

“Technically not correct”: Perspectives on community archives

A related tension emerged when participants were asked how they felt about community archives and community archivists. On the surface the response was overwhelmingly positive and supportive. Interviewees concurred with recent thinking on the value and positive impact of community archive activity. The passion of community archivists was highlighted: “I think the palpable enthusiasm is fantastic and the democratisation of the processes is great…professionalism is a spectrum…”[[506]](#footnote-506) However, at the same time, concern over the “ungoverned unregulated unmapped”[[507]](#footnote-507) nature of community archives was evident:

…many of these groups are going hell for leather scanning photographs and things without really any infrastructure in place for digital preservation or what’s going to happen if Maureen’s shed goes up in flames and all the photos are lost or whatever else.[[508]](#footnote-508)

This response resonated with my own instinctive fears when approached by YPP to collaborate on their digitisation project. In both instances, the question of sustainability and the safety of archival materials in community custody was a touchstone for anxiety. Enthusiasm for and concerns about community archives were often expressed in the same sentence:

I’ve spent an awful lot of time with community groups and volunteers and stuff and actually their knowledge and enthusiasm of what they care for is so powerful that I think that is good news for the term archives. Yes ok some of the things they do are highly questionable, and I have been on projects where I’ve turned round and I’ve said ‘you can’t do this’ and once or twice it’s had to be quite brutal when it’s not acceptable…[[509]](#footnote-509)

Here community knowledge and enthusiasm are placed in the balance with the proper care and management of collections. The archives practitioner acknowledges the former (although their use of the modifier ‘actually’ suggests they anticipate this might be unexpected or surprising to the listener) but still has to intervene and “be quite brutal” when actions are “not acceptable.” The assumption being that they, the expert, remain the arbiter of what is acceptable, with the “Yes, ok” that separates the first half of the statement from the second positioned in such a way as to undermine the initial positive assertion. It enables a pivot, the cautionary tale disrupting the supportive sentiment like a plosive ‘but.’

Other interviewees responded by describing how they had changed their minds about the value and role of community archives over time, from seeing them as suspect to being won over.

I think ten years ago, partly because I was still studying and I had less experience of the real passion that these groups can feel for the records that they hold, I would probably have been much sniffier about it…[[510]](#footnote-510)

Shifts in perspective were not consciously prompted by changes in archival theory and best practice. Neoliberal models for the resourcing of archival work were more significant factors. As institutional budgets were squeezed, and funding from both parent organisations and heritage funders was seen to be increasingly linked to social impacts, community archives – along with public engagement and volunteering – were perceived as a necessary compromise. Interviewee 07 suggested that their “purist” perspective had been eroded by the lack of investment in active collecting by recognised repositories:

…that’s an area where my views have certainly modified over time. I used to be very much a purist, and I’ve come to the conclusion that if people aren’t doing this, then things aren’t going to be saved…[[511]](#footnote-511)

Interviewee 11 shared a similar perspective:

I think what changed my mind really was the contact with these different community archives where people were saying, well, there are alternatives to a proper record office. And at first I was no no no but after a while you think perhaps they can be…[[512]](#footnote-512)

In both cases the dichotomy between archives practice taking place in the context of a “proper record office” and the activity of community archives was asserted before the possibility of shared archival labour was considered. Community archives were positioned as ‘alternatives’ to recognised repositories which, while not ‘pure’, ‘proper’ or expert, were better than nothing. Another interviewee identified conflict between community and “proper” archives as one of custodianship and management:

I know that my previous boss who has just retired really didn’t agree with that. She wanted to try and collect all of the archives i.e. bring them under our management.[[513]](#footnote-513)

Although this conflict was displaced into the past by projecting it on to a retired colleague, which indicated they knew the opinion was outdated, it continued to haunt the practitioner’s thinking. Later in the interview they personally accepted the expediency of partnerships with community archives: “I’m [pause] we are very limited in terms of resource and space and time and so I personally feel that community archiving is actually the way that we’re going to have to manage in the future.”[[514]](#footnote-514) They gave the example of a local funeral director whom they had worked with to provide support for an in-house business archive. However, this relationship was less than straightforward and they went on to express uncertainty about the rightness of the situation:

…it’s a corporate archive, it’s a business archive, but on the other hand what they need to understand is that those burial records are an extremely important family history resource and… they had a fire and it nearly destroyed all of those records, so there’s a level of responsibility, and I do feel that we are still in a kind of… not a superior position but in a more favourable position, in that we still have enough funding and have our resources in a beautiful storage environment, basically.[[515]](#footnote-515)

The construction of the opening phrase suggests that the business’s right of ownership over the records does not necessarily equate to a right of custody because, as they “need to understand,” their records may be ascribed value beyond their corporate or community use. The evidential potential of the record for family history should be considered over and above any value for the business. The interviewee justifies this statement by suggesting that the records are in danger of physical damage and should be transferred into the borough’s “beautiful storage environment.” They introduce and then dismiss the idea that the Archive is in a “superior position”, replacing it with the weaker adjective “favourable”. However, the intimation of superiority has been introduced and can’t be unheard. The use of “basically” suggests that their reasoning is straightforward and obvious, operating as a terminus to shut down debate about what they have said.

When asked to offer an opinion as to why the business chose to keep its own records, they made their position more explicit, speculating: “I think both of those people actually have a sense of ownership over those records that is technically not correct.”[[516]](#footnote-516) The interviewee reduces the business’s actual ownership to “a sense of ownership,” which they then dismiss as incorrect with the invocation of the modifier “technically”. Clearly the “technically” in this statement does not relate to a technicality of the law, under which the archives are indeed the property of the business, but to an alternate set of beliefs about the status of archives. In this way the interviewee reclaims the originally dismissed position of their former colleague. Although the idea that community archives are valid custodians was foregrounded in their initial statements, the opposite perspective is signified by these later responses which suggest that archives of sufficient value – as ascribed by professional metrics and rubrics – should be under their management and control.

Other interviewees offered similarly in-depth and dissonant descriptions of relationships between their institutions and community archives. Narratives about interactions and partnerships emphasised a teacher/student, mentor/mentee dynamic, stressing the knowledge of archivists as opposed to the passionate but unschooled enthusiasm of the community. Interviewee 05 described the apparent disarray of a community archive prior to their intervention with the support of National Lottery funding:

they'd been collecting objects and paintings and all sorts of things from the community including records, and they'd got to the point whereby it was just in plastic bags in the attic and on top of people's wardrobes and under beds and things like that. And they were getting terribly confused and stuff was getting damaged, and they couldn't control it, basically. So with this project what we did from the archives point of view is we actually taught them how-to…[[517]](#footnote-517)

In this instance the community is perceived as disorganised and lacking in direction. As in the example of the business archive, the risk to the intellectual and physical safety of the archival material is stressed. The intervention of the archives practitioner is to teach the correct ways of thinking about and approaching the material in order to make it safe, recalling the Jenkinsonian imperative to provide a physical and intellectual defence. Ultimately the archive generated by this community was transferred into the custody of the local borough Archive. The interviewee was asked who made the decisions about what was ultimately deposited:

[plosive chuckle] Yeeeees [laughs] a moot question. We don't as such but we've told them categorically we're not [pause] they've got a lot of rubbish in there it's got to be said, we wouldn't have necessarily collected this stuff but it was part of the project and we were stuck with it...[[518]](#footnote-518)

Thus the community’s collection has been saved by entering a legitimate, authorised institution only for the effort to be revealed as misplaced; no longer at risk, the archive is now a burden. The difference between how the community archive and the archives practitioner define archival value is underlined by the designation of parts of the collection as refuse.

What emerges in these responses is a dissonance between practitioner’s actions and underlying thinking. The actions, centralised in their responses, focus on supporting community archives to preserve and safeguard their collections. However, support was mostly in the form of didactic teaching about the “proper” and correct way to do things. Doing things correctly was privileged over enthusiasm or local knowledge. This recalls Laurajane Smith’s critique of heritage engagement practice as a mechanism for perpetuating authorised discourse by absorbing troubling alternatives. Concerns with the physical safety, context and intellectual management of the archives emphasised their value as evidential and informational resources, the authenticity and integrity of which were under threat. In order to capitalise on this value they must be brought within the system designed to map, govern and validate this value. The emotional or social values of the community, which were implied by their “passion”, “enthusiasm” and determination to collate materials, were acknowledged but minimised. Ultimately the community archive formed around such values might prove to be “a lot of rubbish”, confirming the inability of the community to make sound archival judgements. The relationship with archives practitioners is characterised by an anxiety about the fitness and qualification of the community archives on the one hand, and a desire to integrate and absorb them or their collections on the other. Engagement activity appears partly motivated by a desire to neutralise anxiety and take control of the boundaries of archival practice, demarcating the values, role, and rules of the archives practitioner in relation to those of the community.

This is not just true of individual community encounters but is also evident at the level of the legitimate functioning system of the archival sector. Interviewee 06, for example, described their work to co-opt and absorb community archives nationally:

that’s the ultimate result in many cases of us talking to community archives, is trying to plug them into that national network, and that’s going back to sector clarity. It’s actually plugging them into the wider sector… they may not, because they’re very narrowly focused, be aware of how they actually fit in to the wider landscape.[[519]](#footnote-519)

Yet, as we see in the standards of the Archive Service Accreditation scheme, the standard to which community archives must aspire and work to join the national network is one set by the parameters of the authorised discourse.

Storytelling “at the core of democracy”

Interviewees were also asked to consider different facets of archival value as well as how contingency factors such as time, ownership and location affected them. The first question – ‘Why are archives valuable?’ – was not considered as disconcerting or challenging as the initial ‘How do you define archives?’ Interviewees appeared to feel more at ease with the idea of describing values than demarcating the thing valued. This may be because, as Interviewee 12 suggested, respondents did not so much identify archives as recognise them: “I don’t really think about how I define archives. I just do.”[[520]](#footnote-520) This moment of recognition was connected to ideas about why archives were valuable, and the interviews suggested that archival status was conferred by certain types of value ascription.

Responses fell into two core strands, with related sub-strands. Firstly, those which explicitly centralised the evidential values of archives, as tools for democracy, transparency, accountability, and the defence of rights; and secondly, those which could be coded as social, identity or affective values statements. Although these categories were not mutually exclusive, almost all respondents favoured one or the other. Interviewees articulated their perspectives with widely varying degrees of confidence and distinction. One respondent, for example, an academic in Archival Studies offered an immediate and rehearsed evidential response: “records are primarily important because they uphold and produce [and] provide evidence of rights however those rights are perceived in any given particular judicial or social context.”[[521]](#footnote-521) Interviewee 20 a recently qualified archivist, expressed similar perspectives but with less clarity: “I mean for me my biggest thing with archives really is that archives are about democracy, it's about transparency…”[[522]](#footnote-522) Another respondent made significant rhetorical claims in the same vein:

[they] strike at the very core of sort of democracy. Actually they’re the most democratic vehicle that you can… think of in many ways, in having the ability to define and help define a person’s space not only in time, not only in the world, not only in terms of their family but also in terms of society and their relationships with other parts of that society…[[523]](#footnote-523)

These statements connect the notion that archives are valuable evidentiary tools with the operation of transparent, democratic systems. As Interviewee 20 put it: “not to be dramatic about it but the foundations of society quite frankly rely on archives…”[[524]](#footnote-524) This interviewee went on to suggest a gamut of uses for archives, from “learning about your past” to having the evidence of residency or citizenship required to apply for a job or housing.[[525]](#footnote-525) This reflects the totalising claims of the authorised archival discourse, recalling The National Archives’ claim that a world without archives is impossible.[[526]](#footnote-526)

Other responses outlined further didactic or instrumental uses of archives associated with their evidentiality:

…they provide some evidence of the past, particularly past mistakes, past decisions, that would hopefully teach us how not to make the same mistakes in the future.[[527]](#footnote-527)

Evidential value is related to the capacity to provide salutary learning experiences and, more broadly, to the potential to construct narratives about the past for the edification of the present and future. As Interviewee 14 put it:

…it’s the storytelling, it’s the bit about how we’ve lived in the past and why decisions have been made that actually effect the present day, and why the present day is the way it is and also learning from the past to ensure that the future is brighter.[[528]](#footnote-528)

Ideas about the democratic and progressive function of archives were apparently an inspiration for a significant number of these respondents. Seen in the context of prior statements it is possible to discern a relationship between ‘the sector’ and the value of archives as the product of an authorised political environment. The democratic function of archives is linked to the idea that they are created and managed by centralised systems of governance. These systems, including ‘the sector’, works to reinforce certain ideas about what archives are and why they are valuable based on their evidential uses.

Where cultural and social values were invoked they were somewhat enabled or activated as part of this evidential regime. Those respondents who had worked closely with communities appeared to express a more nuanced view of values. Interviewee 12, an “outreach archivist”, described how they had started to think differently because of working with diverse communities:

So when I was on the archives course I used to think of it in terms of the very traditional ways they teach you, so they’re important for evidence and authenticity and all that. Very business things. And they are important for that. But in the role that I do now I would say archives are important for actual sort of cultural and local identity. There’s a lot that’s tied up in it in terms of emotional identity as well. It’s not just about how a Council evidences their activities and legal and financial stuff. There is a lot about what it means to individual people and people’s identity is part of the group that they’re in, and it’s a little snapshot in time.[[529]](#footnote-529)

This recognition that ‘traditional’ ways of thinking – associated, again, with ‘the course’ - may not be fit for purpose was shared by Interviewee 01:

I think if you need something to be evidential and trusted in court then, yes, if there’s no unbroken chain of custody then you are in trouble, but I think that’s a relatively limited part of what I’d see as the general social value of archives.[[530]](#footnote-530)

However, critical concern emerged around cultural and social values, which were seen as much harder to identify and manage than evidential value. The latter was talked about as though it were both inherent and self-evident, while the former was messy and hard to grasp. Again, it put the archives practitioner in a position of conflict with their audience:

…obviously that is in the eye of the beholder what one person would deem to be of cultural and historical value… but that's one of the problems that we have in archives. We try to make decisions, as much as we possibly can, which means that we keep records for the future and what records we keep… we've got guidelines, we've got things that we all know we should be doing and all the rest of it and sometimes that can be quite confusing for the general public. What they think is valuable may not be of the same prominence that we feel the value is in that area, and particularly when it comes to family records [plosive chuckle]…[[531]](#footnote-531)

While this archivist accepted that cultural and historical value were subjective – in “the eye of the beholder” - they used that acknowledgement to reinforce the status of the archivist as a more objective decision-maker. This objectivity was conferred by “guidelines” and knowing “what we should be doing,” allusions to the standards, strategies and training which circulate and are reinforced as an authorised discourse. They acknowledge that values can be multiple and disputed, and that the general public and archivists work to different value systems, but privilege what archivists think and feel. That archivists share a typology of values is suggested from the repetition of the communal ‘we’ (“*we’ve* got guidelines, *we’ve* got you know things that *we* all know *we* should be doing”); people outside of this circle of expertise are liable to become “confused.” Family records, for example, which may be meaningful to an individual and their loved ones would not necessarily be sufficiently valuable to warrant institutional preservation. Under this logic the confusion arises because the archivist is making decisions on behalf of a broader constituency, based on criteria which are not shared.

There was near-universal agreement that archival value was changed by circumstances and context. One interviewee, for example, admitted that the archive of the filmmaker Stanley Kubrick, which currently sees heavy research use at their institution, may no longer be as popular in fifty years:

…if he wasn't as famous as he was now - which, let’s face it, people always change in popularity - then I guess the value of it technically, if you're looking at value in terms of usefulness and relevance, then that would drop…[[532]](#footnote-532)

Use was the most cited contingency factor in changes to the values the interviewees ascribed to archives. If an archive was unusable – through being uncatalogued, held privately or through deterioration – or if levels of interest in it fell, then its values were less clear. Conversely, activity that brought archives into use, and specifically deposit, cataloguing, and preservation within a recognised archival institution, were seen to increase their value. One respondent saw this process as fundamental to the creation of value:

…value is not inherent in the things because if they do not have people like us cataloguing them, caring for them, making sense of them, and making them available then they don’t have any value, because they are just lumber, they're just sat there, they have no value at all and one of the things that archivists and librarians do is that we add value…[[533]](#footnote-533)

While this insight acknowledges that archival value isn’t inherent, it is not in the context of critical ideas about the fluid, dynamic and subjective nature of the record. Rather the correlation between “people like us” and the value of archives stakes out the territory, and asserts the power, of the expert: archives outside of the institutional context, which have not been subjective to qualified interventions, are “just lumber.” Interviewee 06 made a similar connection between value and the location of a collection in an “approved” repository, suggesting that:

the important stuff is in the record office, if it was that important surely it should be behind a fire proof door… Speaking as a historian you usually think that or say that the material held in the repository, in the approved repository, is of greater historical importance in terms of the national historical narrative…[[534]](#footnote-534)

Here the professional practices aimed at making archives accessible act as a method not just of intellectual and physical control but of authorising values.

Recognitions of the subjectivity of the value of archival material could be further undermined by later statements that reasserted inherent or intrinsic value. For example, in the case of the Kubrick archive, despite the imagined future in which his films are no longer popular or relevant, the interviewee considered that “in terms of its value to film students and learning from the person, I don't think that ever changes.”[[535]](#footnote-535) When prompted to take this thought experiment further and consider whether changes in value might lead to reappraisal of collections, the interviewee reiterated:

…I think it [pause] the value can change in terms of how useful it is at a certain time but I don't think if somethings just not being looked at the moment, I don't think that personally a good reason to get rid of an archive cos otherwise we could probably get rid of an awful lot of stuff.[[536]](#footnote-536)

This direct contradiction of the use-value nexus was replicated by several respondents, strengthening the hypothesis that use was not truly a measure of value of the archives but a logic that established the value of the archivist rather than the archive. This interviewee further justified their position by referring to the example of records of Indigenous residential schools in Canada, which were central to inquiries into genocide and abuse during the Truth and Reconciliation commission (2007-2015). They noted that records of the schools had been considered unimportant in the past and some had been destroyed, whereas now they were vital to the wellbeing of survivors. [[537]](#footnote-537) In this way they diverted attention from the uncomfortable notion of the subjectivity of values ascribed to the Kubrick archive on to a body of material recently ascribed with rights values. This recourse to evidentiality in a very different case helped to clarify and justify the position of long-term preservation in general, in the face of changing values in the specific instance.

In this way justice processes were seen to be predicated on enduring evidential values, which could be used in turn to reinforce ideas grounded in inherent, objective, neutral positions, even while social, emotional, and cultural values were accepted as contingent. This meant that, while the values of archival material could change, the core evidential values that justified certain ways of thinking and acting could be retained. As one interviewee put it: “The intrinsic nature of the record, it's evidential value and it's information value, will be constant but the worth assigned to the evidence and information will vary over time…”[[538]](#footnote-538) One respondent argued that the treatment of archives as cultural materials, and their association with cultural values, was an aberration of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and that the changeability of these values threatened the future of the archival profession. The same respondent went on to express an unusually strong Jenkinsonian perspective, suggesting that archival institutions should not collect diverse materials but should only preserve the records of their own organisations as evidence and decision-making tools.[[539]](#footnote-539)

Yet when interviewees were asked to recall an occasion when “the value of archives was clear to them,” overwhelmingly the responses concerned their emotional and social values to an individual or type of individuals, most often family historians. The very people, in fact, whose perspectives on archives had been considered “confused.” These examples were in sharp contrast to the evidential value systems privileged when asked more abstract questions. There was a discernible gap between theoretical positions and lived experience that was not consciously recognised by the interviewees. Some sought to bridge this gap by disconnecting personal experiences from their social and emotional contexts and reorienting them to an evidential framework. One respondent, for example, explicitly made the link between value for individual identities and membership of the wider democratic community:

…it was amazing seeing how emotionally invested people were with people that they'd never met, who had died long before they lived and you could see that specifically changing them, to learn about that. Just seeing some people actually crying reading records of families from hundreds of years ago, I have absolutely no doubt from witnessing them doing that, that it did change them. Having access to these kinds of records kind of makes people trust government a little bit more and civilisation in that sense because by having this information about yourself made available to you, you have a little bit more faith in the system…[[540]](#footnote-540)

In this answer the emotional response to archives is not an end in and of itself. It is figured as transforming individuals into better citizens, because the provision of access to archives that help people to know more about themselves establishes trust in government. This directly echoes the discursive formation that archives know more about people than people know about themselves. Although access to archival heritage was positioned generically as a ‘right’ by other interviewees, this respondent implied that having “information about yourself made available to you” is a technology for social change and thus social control. The archive can be instrumentalised to produce trust “in the system” by leveraging emotional responses, which in turn generate positive feelings about the state.

The respondents who didn’t use personal or individual examples chose instead to connect the emotional value of archives back to a rights framework, citing the recent work of the Hillsborough Disaster Archive (Interviewees 06, 15, 17, 19) and the work of the International Criminal Courts (Interviewee 19). Cases that focused on the pursuit of truth on behalf of justice tied the emotional value of archival heritage back to its use and status as authentic evidence: “Hillsborough’s a traditional example which has great resonance with councillors and people recognise the importance of good information management…”[[541]](#footnote-541) Evidentiality in this context did not displace emotion as an archival value; rather it was figured as a universal form of rationality from which all other values emanate.

From emotion to political imperative

The final section of each interview was concerned with the organisational context in which archives practitioners and institutions were operating, and particularly the strategic objectives expressed inThe National Archives strategic documentation. Questions were designed to consider the extent to which the values or definitions provided during the preceding sections aligned with or contested the publicly stated priorities for archives in England. *Archives for the 21st Century* was specifically mentioned as the most accessible and most immediately relevant of the documents available at that time. Three respondents were very familiar with the policy and its principles because of their work context (one was able to recite the objectives to me in full) and three had not heard of it previously. Of these three two were recently qualified archivists and one was a senior librarian. Most respondents’ awareness fell in the middle, with them having heard of the document and read it at some point in the past. It was cited as one of the tools that practitioners in local government contexts might use to leverage funds and influence: “…we all bandy it around, we all quote it when we have to, we all try to baffle people in the council with it and make it sound really important…”[[542]](#footnote-542)

Talking about organisations and strategy prompted respondents to underline the political and instrumental uses of archives, and the importance of conforming to national and local policy in order to secure funding within a neoliberal framework. The connection between archival heritage and government activity that had been drawn ideologically during the interviews was reaffirmed as a political and strategic imperative. Interviewee 06 explained:

the drivers of archives are going to change very significantly in the local authority sector, the increasing importance of aligning oneself to key corporate aims and wellbeing and localism. The sector, that part of the sector, will have increasingly specific audiences that it will be targeting and working in relation to specific collections due to those drivers.[[543]](#footnote-543)

Another interviewee described the importance of aligning archives work with political strategy: “what you have to do is to align yourself with the published priorities and strategies of your employing organisation and you have to twist [pause] no twist is the wrong word you have to align yourself and demonstrate as far as you possibly can how your activities match the often grossly torturous and irrelevant local government priorities…”[[544]](#footnote-544) In this case the interviewee recognised the importance of playing the strategic game while questioning the wider relevance and value of doing so. This position combined cynicism at local and national government agendas with pragmatism, suggesting that archives practitioners should follow a course of action that ensures their survival. The interviewee originally described this as “twisting” before acquiescing to the prudent “aligning.” Twisting is a powerful word that suggests that government priorities deform or derail archival work. Underlying this dynamic is an unarticulated set of alternate priorities that politically motivated alignments stray from. The implication was that short-term government priorities were detracting from the core functions of archival labour, even while (earlier in the interviews) that labour was tied to a more constant and stable notion of the State.

Interviewee 08 saw this dynamic at work in *Archives for the 21st Century* itself, which was developed by a partnership of The National Archives and the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council. They noted: “MLA was much more banging the drum about inclusion and the political delivering to key agendas stuff, and driven by culture sector things rather than information, whereas TNA was more about information, evidence, intrinsic value, beauty of collections, all that stuff…”[[545]](#footnote-545) This apparent tension between inclusivity and evidentiality reflects the interviews more generally, where inclusivity has a range of negative associations centred on devolving power to (or at least sharing it with) unqualified and “confused” publics and acknowledging their perspectives. Thus the shift towards community-oriented practice is associated with short-term priorities for social impacts, which detract away from the fundamental and long-term work of archives in protecting rights through transparent evidence. The latter is associated with the perpetuation of the higher principles of the State – democracy, transparency, and order. Interviewee 08 stressed the fact that The National Archives was a non-ministerial department reporting to the Ministry of Justice:

we can also look at the advantages of us being over here, not part of culture which may well get a bit of a funding battering you know? And we need to be really thinking about what advantages or strength it gives us by being over here with MoJ and being about evidence and transparency...[[546]](#footnote-546)

Shortly after this interview took place, in 2016, policy responsibility and sponsorship of The National Archives was in fact moved from the Ministry of Justice to the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), more firmly associating archives with the culture sector and aligning it with different policy agendas.[[547]](#footnote-547) Two months after this move the DCMS budget was cut by almost 20% or £1bn.[[548]](#footnote-548) Although neither TNA nor the ‘national network’ of Archives are funded by DCMS and so were not directly affected by such cuts, the priorities and perspectives of parent organisations and funding bodies have changed as a result. The fear that budgetary restrictions could filter down as archives are positioned as cultural and social assets rather than as legal and evidentiary necessities was made more real. The tension between archives as collections of legal evidence and archives as assemblages that reflect the values of diverse people was understood as not just theoretical or ideological but closely connected to the ongoing financial viability of ‘the sector’. The authorised discourse that stresses archives’ intrinsic value as sources of evidence and rights becomes a key factor in the justification of the infrastructure of buildings, staff and standards that preserve the status quo. Ideas that weaken that position, like the possibility of contingent, ascribed, or relative values and the subjectivities of critical archival theory, can be seen as a fundamental challenge. This accounts somewhat for the fact that although critical archival positions were explicitly claimed by interviewees, they were also marginalised, contradicted, and repressed within the same texts. Although social, cultural and emotional values were expressed, they were routinely linked back to or undermined by evidential value systems. The authorising discourse acts as both a rhetorical and literal safety net, stressing the relationship between the organisational structures of ‘the sector’, the status of Archive repositories and the values of archives. Statements that reinforce the evidentiality and authenticity of organically accumulating records in a legitimate functioning system of archival practice underpin the necessity of qualified practitioners. Although it may be expedient to align practice with current strategic priorities, the discourse provides a more enduring link to overarching principles of good governance. The contingency of social, cultural and emotional values which, like policy and strategy, change are dissonant with evidential and informational qualities which are permanently required for transparency and accountability. Interviewee 08 resolved the dissonance between expediency/contingency and endurance/inherence by positioning the experience of change in archives as actual evidence of constancy:

…if you’re an archivist in an institution or a local authority you kind of know back to the mists of time what happened and you know how departmental structures have shifted and changed and how policies and strategies have come and gone, and so you know that big picture, so to some extent you should be quite comfortable with it and understand that life is always shifting and changing…[[549]](#footnote-549)

In so doing they echo the discursive construction from *Archives for the 21st Century* of archival heritage as a fixed point in the flux of change, invoking the possibility of a timeless and unchanging system of values. Archives practitioners and institutions may “align” or “twist” themselves to conform to the zeitgeist but they ultimately represent a set of principles which are organic and natural.

This is an especially comforting proposition to retrench to at times of uncertainty and challenge for archival institutions. The final question of the interview asked respondents to consider the future of archives. Almost all interviewees interpreted this as a question not about archival heritage or archival practice, but about the future of institutions and archivists. For many respondents, the future was uncertain. Interviewee 07 feared the ultimate loss of archival heritage because of the “the degrading of archival institutions,” including their merging with other heritage organisations. They associated this decline with “the dilution of skills…where you’re going to have less people who are professionally qualified, who are competent to actually manage archives as they need to be managed.”[[550]](#footnote-550) The future of archival heritage was hereby firmly linked with the health of both institutions and status of practitioners.

This position was reiterated by interviewee 10 who thought that public sector archives (e.g. the “backbone” of local authority and county record offices) were in particular trouble. They feared that “the majority of archivists first of all don’t have the political nouse to fulfil those strategic priorities and demonstrate complex relevance and secondly they don’t have the knowledge…”[[551]](#footnote-551) However, community archives and models of shared custodianship were not an answer to this problem:

I’ve dealt with various community archives, and some of them are very well run actually, but their sense of priorities is different and actually like so many places this lack of interest in serious policy structure and procedural structure could be their undoing…[[552]](#footnote-552)

While community archives were “very well run actually” their different priorities couldn’t provide the requisite policy and procedural framework that ‘the sector’ naturalises and uses to structure its work. Only Interviewee 02, borrowing from Verne Harris, asserted that archives will and do survive without an archival profession or institutional structure, on the assumption that the work was so fundamental it would re-emerge elsewhere:

…you know archival work can go on perfectly happily if there were no archivists on the planet or nobody called themselves an archivist because it would have to, society would fall apart without this sort of work, you know companies wouldn’t function, we wouldn’t know who we were and couldn’t prove our birth certificate and you know all of that. So archives? Pretty rosy future…[[553]](#footnote-553)

Evidentiality and the challenge of postmodernism

Taken as a body of texts the seventeen interviews reflect a broad range of perspectives and practitioner backgrounds. The mode of expression and content is diverse. Nevertheless, there is a persistent tension between assertions about the evidential values of records, the status of archives practitioners, and ‘the sector’ on the one hand, and ideas about social, cultural and emotional values, community archives, and ‘unqualified’ forms of archival labour on the other. Interviewees relied on discursive techniques to modify or negotiate the latter, so that it continued to fit within a system in which evidential values are privileged. Alternatives to the systematic ordering of ‘the sector’ and established conceptualisations of archives were delegitimised and marginalised. At the same time, however, practitioners did situate themselves within an evolving narrative of dynamic and postmodern approaches to archival practice with references to social justice, participation, and community.

In the first instance, the interviews constructed a narrative about the organic legitimacy of archival practice, so long as it occurs in a particular way and is undertaken by particular people. Ideas about the archives sector as a natural and biological entity are integrated and reinforced as part of this logic. We have seen how the language employed – of human and animal bodies and of ecological networks – constructs institutions as a functioning ordered systems. The qualified archivist is identified as the proper worker in this system, as they understand the theories, procedures, and practices that justify and structure it. This in turn reinforces the need for postgraduate training and maintains the distance between qualified and unqualified people. This is not new. In 1991, Brothman argued that certain forms of narrative about archival work imply “some naturally evolved adaptive forms of structural functional integration” and pre-suppose “the documentary model in society.”[[554]](#footnote-554) These interviews demonstrate both how this integration continues to impact on what archives can be and do in society.

In turn the structure, funding, and authority of ‘the sector’ is deeply connected to government, at both national and local levels. To survive the system must “align” with and serve the priorities and instrumental demands of a moment in time. Interviewees recognised this as a cynical necessity. However, their relationship with government was more than skin deep. While an interviewee might roll their eyes at “tedious and irrelevant” policies on localism and cohesion, they also made significant claims for the inherent value of archives for democratic transparency and accountability. Archives were invoked as evidence of decisions that held people and institutions to account and from which we could learn the lessons of the past. This discursive element was strongly expressed across the sample, resonating with the claims of the *Universal Declaration on Archives* and the strategic documentation of The National Archives. It explicitly casts archives as knowing actors and archives practitioners as guardians of democratic rights and accountability, akin to Jenkinson’s gatekeepers. Interviewees were willing to assume this role. However, there was no explicit recognition of the potential conflict of interest inherent in holding government to account while also being funded and employed by it. Jarrett M. Drake, comparing archival practice to journalism has asked: “…can you imagine a world where instead of having independent newspapers and news agencies that are not connected to power, the only sources for news were the corporations and governments themselves?”[[555]](#footnote-555) This way of ‘doing archives’ in proximity to state power shapes how archival heritage is defined and identified. When rhetorics of democracy are privileged, the records produced by government, governing agencies, and authorities, by decision-makers and by processes of citizenship, are most easily legitimised by archival institutions. The ascription of values is accordingly bound up with legal instruments, whereby certain types of archives are explicitly protected for their evidential and informational quality. These materials conform to core principles of archival standards and are recognisable as analogues of authorised thought and activity. They stand in contrast to the “rubbish” or ephemera that community archives or individuals may value for social, cultural, or emotional reasons.

However, the late twentieth century challenge of postmodernism - and of calls for plurality, social justice, and archival activism – has been felt. None of the interviewees in the sample expressed the most recent and radical positions about decentralised, deinstitutionalised practice put forward by critical archival studies. However, most interviewees, when asked about community archives or other uses of the term archives, expressed an appreciation of the validity of different archival ideas. The passion and enthusiasm of individuals was praised. Similarly, interviewees were willing to consider relative values of archives and their contingency. However, there was a tendency to retreat from “the wilder shores of postmodernism,” especially when those positions conflicted with core tenets of the authorised archival discourse.[[556]](#footnote-556) Respondents were willing to accept, for example, that archival values were contingent on factors of time and place but not that there were any direct consequences for the permanent preservation or appraisal of archival material. Interviewee 20 could recognise the subjective values of the Stanley Kubrick archive but at the same time continue to assert that it had intrinsic value. The dissonance in their position was banished by recourse to an example of the repurposing of a previously undervalued collection, the records of residential schools in Canada, for the justice needs of Indigenous communities.

The role of archives and archives practitioners in social justice are made visible in the interviews by references to the activation of archives for human rights and transitional justice processes. The activities of the Hillsborough Independent Panel, the International Criminal Court and the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions were cited as demonstrations of the power and values of archives. They are also evident in more generic statements about the role of archives in supporting identities and engaging with marginalised communities. However, these references were linked most frequently to pre-existing discourses about evidence, truth, and authenticity rather than connected to activist ideologies. Even where subjectivity and multiplicity were acknowledged the same interviewee would follow by expressing conflicting positivist views about values. Interviewee 14, for example, described their work with a local activist group that distributed “fake archives” to disrupt claims about the past in their local area. Initially they spoke positively about this group and claimed a close association, but later returned to discursive formations that stressed order and the authority of the archival practitioner. Interviewees apparently held such opposing views simultaneously in a dissonant tension. This may be because, as Evans has suggested, even when social justice principles are accepted, the context of neoliberal inequality in which archives operate work against them:

While the academic and professional discourse reflects increased sophistication in understanding of the multiple, complex and often conflicting role of archives in society, archival infrastructure continues to be representative of, and configured around, traditional orthodoxies.[[557]](#footnote-557)

The close analysis of documentation in and of the interview texts suggests that Evans’ distinction between “professional discourse” and “archival infrastructure” is less operative than it appears. The findings in the English context suggest that the “traditional orthodoxies” that Evans identifies stem not from practice but that both orthodoxies and practices are rooted in authorised discourse that weaves an evidential values typology into structures of power and systems of control which are linked through the development of standards, legislation and strategies to the government and the state. The centrality of evidence and authenticity to archival work has been used to critique the concept of archivist as activist before, as with Greene’s argument that while the archivist can no longer be objective in a postmodern world, they should still strive for neutrality through transparency. By this logic, biases of any kind should be avoided, because “social activism in archives posits that there is some defined, universally accepted power structure against which archivists must work.”[[558]](#footnote-558) Interviewees appeared to be caught in a middle ground between the possibility for activism epitomised by Caswell, Drake, Cifor, and the suspicion of it, articulated by Greene and backed up by a deeply entrenched net of ideas.

Strategies to manage the dissonance of these diametrically opposed positions by repeatedly invoking evidential value systems suggests a discursive coping mechanism. Interviewees did not actually display the shift in perspective anticipated in a postmodern environment; on the contrary they continued to express ideas about what archive are, what they do and who should look after them of long standing. Where they shared contemporary perspectives on social, cultural, and emotional values they used a convergence of postmodern and traditionalist ideas to reconfigure established modes of thinking. Ascriptions of ‘softer’ values by communities were in contrast to the ‘hard’ evidential and informational values perceived as inherent by archives practitioners. The ability to interpret and recognise these different priorities reinforced status quo dynamics of power and communication between qualified and non-qualified people. Critically, social justice activities were identified as an acceptable face of postmodernity. They fulfilled requirements to recognise the subjectivity, rights, and individuality of people without eschewing the critical qualities of archival evidence. High profile examples like the Hillsborough Independent Panel demonstrated the continued relevance and applicability of traditional ideas about the definition and value of archives. They neutralised postmodernist ideas by reaffirming the necessity of archival ways of looking at the world.

Spun in this way social justice narratives did not require practitioners to recognise a new value paradigm that includes subaltern values. Instead, they made alternate perspectives safe within the authoritative expert-led evidence-based discourse. Dissonance was reconciled through deflection, whereby new justifications were made for existing practices and priorities. This has been expressed explicitly by Craig Gould, who argues that the core principles of archival practice, of “evidence, context, selection and aggregation,” are not incompatible with the democratisation of archival work.[[559]](#footnote-559) He suggests that the archivists’ work of privileging certain types of information over others, whether that be to underpin dominant societal structures or fight for social justice, inserts them “directly into the moral and political discourse.”[[560]](#footnote-560) Democratisation and privileging actions are not mutually exclusive, and “the future of archives…lies not in democratisation or privileging but in a form of democratisation and privileging or, to be more precise, in democratisation by privileging.”[[561]](#footnote-561) Archives may be “of the people, for the people” while still remaining under the systematic control of ‘qualified’ practitioners.[[562]](#footnote-562)

This complex and pervasive dynamic has significant impact on how archives practitioners and institutions interact with communities; and on how they operate during significant cultural and social moments. We are recalled to the Archives listserv post on statues, which sought to find ‘balance’ between inclusion and justice and the preservation of evidence and authenticity. Any such balancing act requires a negotiation between value positions, but in the context of archival practice evidentiality has long ago primed the scale. It *is* the scale and the starting point from which actions are justified and reasoned. This fundamental *im*balance, which is made visible through these interviews, shapes inclusion, diversity, and decolonisation work and inhibits success at all levels of activity. We can see this in the context of three large-scale community engagement projects in the next chapter.

**Chapter Five**

**Managing Discourse in Practice**

Whereas previous chapters have focused on identifying and exploring authorised and remade discourse about the values of archives, this chapter considers how discourse impacts in practice. Specifically, how typologies of evidential and affective values intersect with the ‘outreach’ and ‘community engagement’ activity that has become central to the work of archival institutions. This work has been driven, in part, by critical archival approaches that foregrounds participation and autonomy but also – and oftentimes antithetically - by neoliberal agendas that instrumentalise participation in culture and heritage to tackle social problems. For example, by foregrounding the values of archives in creating or corroborating the narratives of “shared history”, “cohesion” and “resilience” evoked UNESCO and The National Archives in strategic documentation.

My analysis draws primarily on a detailed case study of the *York: Gateway to History* project. This project was awarded a £1.68m grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF, now the National Lottery Heritage Fund) in December 2012, supplemented by a further £250,000 from the city council.[[563]](#footnote-563) Its purpose was to “create a 21st century Archive and Local History service for York…which reflects all communities and cultures, past and present, in this ancient city.”[[564]](#footnote-564) The project was developed and delivered over a five-year period, from 2011 to 2016, initially by City of York Council (CYC), the owners and custodians of the city’s civic archives, and subsequently by Explore York Libraries and Archives (Explore). Explore is a non-profit community benefit society which was contracted by CYC to provide the city’s archive service after May 2014. My case study focuses on key elements of the community engagement activity which took place in two principal phases: during the consultation exercises that informed the development of the HLF bid in 2011 and 2012, and during the delivery phase in 2015 and 2016.

This case is reinforced by comparative reference to two analogous archival engagement projects in Yorkshire during the same timeframe: the £1.58m *Heritage Quay* project at the University of Huddersfield (2012-2017) and the £4.09m *West Yorkshire History Centre* project delivered by West Yorkshire Joint Services (2012-2018). These projects were also funded by the HLF, including both capital building works and engagement programmes, and consequently generated similar bodies of documentation and media output. At the heart of all three projects were claims about the importance of archives to community, apparently in sympathy with recent research on the importance and necessity of community archives in generating inclusion and diversity.

The sociology and politics of community

Historically, the notion of community has been associated with “the search for belonging in the insecure conditions of modernity” arising from the revolutions in America and France in the late eighteenth century and further compounded by industrialisation.[[565]](#footnote-565) In this way it has been used to refer to social groups, often focused in Britain on place and class as defining characteristics; an understanding which still has traction in the popular use of the term. Benedict Anderson’s seminal work on the “imagined” community shifted this focus to some extent, re-figuring communities as cognitive and symbolic structures which may or may not be place-based.[[566]](#footnote-566) Consequently Cohen argued that community is not a “thing” with a constituent body of members, any more than an archive is a collection of papers, manuscripts, or digital files. Instead, it is a boundary-making concept that people use to differentiate themselves from others, as “a cluster of… ideological map references with which the individual is socially oriented.”[[567]](#footnote-567) For Soja this cognitive construct of the community creates a “third space,” in which communication and collective action are central to identification and belonging.[[568]](#footnote-568) Such a broad theorisation of community as symbolic and communicative allows for overlapping virtual, spatial, and emotional understandings. So that while it is now much-contested and challenged by globalisation and the rapidly changing digital environment, community remains a meaningful designation and has a lively and broad colloquial usage, which draws on and extends the sociological designation. The people of Bishopthorpe, a village on the outskirts of York for example may refer to themselves as a community and the Bishopthorpe Local History Group may identify as a community group formed around their community archive.[[569]](#footnote-569) At the same time, a social media group like York Past and Present on Facebook can be a community, even though its members live around the world, because it is bound together by messaging, shared resources, and project activities. Archiving may be both a method and a result of community action, in which archives are identified and ascribed values that are oriented around that which is shared between members of the community. This logic applies both at a national level, where an institution like The National Archives produces a body of archival materials that reflect the values of the nation as constituted by the state; and at more granular levels of activity, both institutional and independent.

Within civic life, community has been conceived both nostalgically, as irretrievably lost, and as a utopian ideal yet to be achieved.[[570]](#footnote-570) In terms of the authorised archival discourse, this opposition recalls the repeated emphasis on archives untapped potential. The community, like the archive, is a precious fragmented survival of the past (nostalgia) whose value is nevertheless endlessly deferred into the future (utopian). Political interpretations have been equally ambiguous. Community has been positioned as both an alternative to the State, “defined against the governed, institutionalised… nature of society” and as an agent of the State that “breaks through” and shapes society at the margins or edges into conformity.[[571]](#footnote-571) In the latter case it is a form of governmentalisation that co-opts individuals, families, and social units into identifying with and performing the work of the State.[[572]](#footnote-572) Rose has called this “government through community,” describing community as a “sector” which can be mobilised to “encourage and harness active practices of self-management and identity construction, of personal ethics and collective allegiances.”[[573]](#footnote-573) However, as an alternative to the State it has been seen as the basis of activism, as for example in recent successful anti-fracking campaigns in Lancashire and Yorkshire; resistance to gentrification and housing injustice in London; and through the Black Lives Matter movement internationally.[[574]](#footnote-574) Either way, community is a site of contact between people and the structured institutions that shape society. It is an active space in which individuals collect to learn and do together.

In the UK, community has been central to political rhetoric across the spectrum during the last thirty years. It has been consistently associated with the desirability of stability, cohesion, resilience and, most recently, strength and safety in society; and identified as a key to participation and “active citizenship.”[[575]](#footnote-575) Delanty has shown the centrality of ideas of community and communitarianism to the New Labour ideal of a “stakeholder society” developed in the mid-1990s. He argues that it was used effectively in the 1997 election to break the Conservative monopoly on ideologies of the nation. The invocation of “stakeholders” created a new “technology of power and social management” which required people to self-organise as communities.[[576]](#footnote-576) Such communities could benefit from government policies, as shareholders of ‘public value.’

Thereafter community became one of New Labour’s most enduring underlying ideals, from the *New Deal for Communities* programme launched in 1997, to *Improving Opportunity, Strengthening Society* in 2005, the *Strong and Prosperous Communities* white paper in 2006, and *Build More Cohesive, Empowered and Active Communities* under Gordon Brown’s government in 2008.[[577]](#footnote-577) The insistence on community was reflected across the policy spectrum, including in archives-relevant policies such as *Bringing Communities Together through Sports and Culture*.[[578]](#footnote-578) It also had significant impacts on the priorities and objectives of key funders, upon whom archival organisations have become increasingly dependent for investment and support. The HLF, for example, adopted its ‘people and communities’ focus in 2004.[[579]](#footnote-579)

Often described with a modifying adjective, such as cohesive, empowered, active or integrated, the community was envisioned during the early 21st century as a powerful mechanism for delivering social change. In *Leading Cohesive Communities*, a 2006 guide from the Local Government Association, the ideal was to create a “common vision and sense of belonging for all communities” in order to build social capital between groups.[[580]](#footnote-580) The purpose was to create “commonality in diversity,” motivated by “the need to find unifying common ground which will inspire assent across the board.”[[581]](#footnote-581) The insistence on the potential of archives to reinforce community belonging and identity through “shared stories” found in *Archives for the 21st Century* is closely aligned to the same rhetoric.

Community continued to be central to the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government between 2010 and 2015, and remains significant to the current Conservative administration (2015 - present).[[582]](#footnote-582) Ideologically, however, there was a shift away from Labour’s vision of community as a tool of the State towards the privatistic construct described by Etzioni, in which community absolves the State of social responsibilities.[[583]](#footnote-583) David Cameron’s ‘Big Society,’ announced in July 2010, stressed the role of individuals and communities in solving their own problems, by being “liberated” and “empowered” to take actions for themselves rather than depending on local authorities or central government.[[584]](#footnote-584) It was closely aligned to the programme of public sector cuts that was central to the Conservative’s austerity policy. At the same time community was seen as the first line of defence against division in society. For example, in 2012 the Department for Communities and Local Government published a strategy, *Creating the Conditions for Integration*, which made explicit the role of community in combating extremism and intolerance. Establishing “common ground,” taking responsibility, and participation were key to “a strong society.”[[585]](#footnote-585) However, the desire to promote “shared aspirations and values” and focus on “what we have in common rather than our differences” was non-specific and elusive.[[586]](#footnote-586) It became closely connected with the ‘localism agenda’, which focused community activity on places and stressed the value of place for identity.[[587]](#footnote-587) The divisions, differences and challenges precipitated by Brexit at home and abroad has led to renewed focus on communities. A discussion paper, “By Deeds and Their Results,” published in July 2019 emphasised the need for “a strong thriving foundation of communities at home” to preserve Britain’s “strong outward-looking presence on the world stage,” reinforcing the governmentality of the community as a microcosm of the State.[[588]](#footnote-588)

Archival institutions, in common with other heritage organisations, have responded strongly to the centralisation of community, developing collections, engagement strategies, and funded programmes for working with different groups in society. These programmes stress the value of engagement for promoting participation and inclusion, generating cohesion, and creating the “common ground” through “shared stories” advocated in The National Archives’ strategies. Most recently, archives have been instrumentalised to deliver increased health and wellbeing, tackle extremism, and help people find employment. In 2016, The National Archives released an *Outcomes Framework for Archives* that aligns with a framework for culture and sport developed by the Local Government Association, the Arts Council, Sport England and English Heritage.[[589]](#footnote-589) It sets out how to “measure and evidence the difference archives make” to “Health and Wellbeing,” “Stronger and Safer Communities,” and “Learning and Education.”[[590]](#footnote-590) Key phrases that reflect these agendas (like “cohesive communities” and “shared stories”), and which are reinforced by the authorised archival discourse, dominate strategy and practitioner advocacy, aligning with the local and national government objectives which help to leverage support for institutional activities. This was evident in the practitioner interviews, where ideas about public use of archives were explicitly connected to the production of better citizens and stronger democracy. Røyseng has argued that instrumentalization occurs when cultural and heritage institutions absorb and recycle policy soundbites as “ritual utterances” in this way.[[591]](#footnote-591)

Strategic and guidance documentation produced by the HLF demonstrates the extent to which the UK’s principal heritage funder has aligned its strategies and priorities with the same rhetoric. The organisation’s 2002-2007 strategy *Broadening the Horizons of Heritage* envisioned that “The lives of individuals and of communities can be changed by it [heritage], not least in those very places where poverty or decay are paramount.”[[592]](#footnote-592) Taking explicit direction from the government department responsible, they undertook to “reduce economic and social deprivation” and “to promote a greater appreciation of the value and importance of heritage for our future wellbeing and sense of identity.”[[593]](#footnote-593) The subsequent plan, *Valuing Our Heritage, Investing in Our Future*, extended these claims about the impact of heritage which “changes lives, brings people together and provides the foundation of a modern, confident society.”[[594]](#footnote-594) In the early 2000s they commissioned research into the ‘Hidden Histories’ of Black and ethnic minority communities that emphasised the potential of heritage to “help create a complete picture of our collective UK heritage” and encouraged communities to “seek out their heritage stories” to add to the “shared national heritage.”[[595]](#footnote-595) This stressed the need to identify and value diverse heritage in order that it could be absorbed and integrated into national narratives, an ambition most fully expressed in the HLF’s 2013-2018 strategy: “Heritage Lottery Funding has truly broadened the horizons of heritage, ensuring that people from all communities see their heritage reflected in our national story.”[[596]](#footnote-596) In this framework community was centralised as a unit that benefited from HLF funds; projects should be designed to “re-energise areas, creating distinctive vibrant places to live and work, and fostering a sense of community.”[[597]](#footnote-597) In 2018 research commissioned by the organisation towards the next iteration of the strategy focused further on the ways “in which heritage can have an impact on social, cultural and economic issues, contributing to wellbeing and the local economy.”[[598]](#footnote-598) Between 1994 and 2011 the Heritage Lottery Fund awarded £281m to over 1000 archives and library projects with some element of engagement and community activity.[[599]](#footnote-599) Up to 2019 almost one third (29%) of all HLF monies were given to museums, libraries and archives projects.[[600]](#footnote-600) This context is a strong incentive for archival institutions to adopt “ritual utterances” and make instrumentalist claims, naturalising a rhetoric that connects archival engagement with communities to government agendas. During the same period, “community heritage” projects (introduced as a category in 2012) only received 1% of HLF funds, with a further 4% for “intangible heritage.”[[601]](#footnote-601) These community led projects – which define heritage as “what people value and want to hand on to the future, regardless of official recognition or designation” in line with a critical values approach[[602]](#footnote-602) - have struggled to meet the criteria for applicants. The dominant funding model favours institutions working with communities, rather than communities working for themselves.

Archival institutions in York have benefited significantly from this landscape. The York Minster Library and Archive received a grant of £967,000 in 1996; the Borthwick Institute for Archives was awarded £4.41m in 2001 and Search Engine, the Archive of the National Railway Museum received £995,000 in 2005.[[603]](#footnote-603) The Yorkshire Film Archive, which is based in the city, also received over £400,000 in project funding. The same is true of the wider region. In addition to the investments made at Huddersfield and West Yorkshire, the Hull History Centre project received £7.69m in 2006 and the Treasure House, home of the East Riding Archives, was built with a £3.91m grant in 2000. The North Yorkshire County Record Office has had three engagement grants in the last five years totaling over £200,000. [[604]](#footnote-604) This was the political and funding environment in which the *York: Gateway to History* project was conceived, designed, and delivered.

The York City Archive

York’s City Archive was founded in 1957, towards the end of the boom period for local authority record offices initiated by the National Register of Archives in 1945.[[605]](#footnote-605) It was initially housed in the basement of the City Library (now York Explore) before being moved to an adapted wing of the York Art Gallery in the early 1980s. Its core collections are comprised of the records of City of York Council and its predecessor bodies from the twelfth century to the present. It has also acted as a “document museum for the local area,” collecting a range of archival heritage relating to the city’s businesses, organisations, and people.[[606]](#footnote-606)

Between 2000 and 2008 the City Archive was subject to a prolonged period of uncertainty following an acrimonious dispute over proposals to co-locate it with the University of York archives outside of the city. Allegations made by both sides led to the suspension of the then City Archivist from duty in July 2000, after she broke protocol to write to councillors to oppose the plans.[[607]](#footnote-607) Although she was later reinstated after being given a disciplinary notice, the outcry led to the formation of an advocacy group, the Friends of York City Archives (FOYCA), which effectively campaigned against any alteration to the management arrangements.[[608]](#footnote-608) The objectives of the group focused on maintaining the independence and city centre location of the archive. Charles Kightly, the first chairman of FOYCA, wrote that a partnership with the university “would end 800 years of direct control of the archives by the city,” which was essential to the “archives’ separate identity.”[[609]](#footnote-609) He further suggested that “many ordinary users of the archives, being accustomed to the essentially open and public environment in which the archives are now available, may find the closed, academic environment of the university alien and daunting.”[[610]](#footnote-610) The Friends expressed a desire for continued autonomy and strong feelings of ownership; they clearly positioned themselves as “stakeholders,” to use New Labour language. One campaigner made the direct claim that “the archives do not belong to the Council but to us, the citizens of York.”[[611]](#footnote-611) Throughout the campaign advocates also stressed the “friendly service” and social aspects of visiting the Archive.[[612]](#footnote-612) Highly emotive language was employed to express the affective value of the archives to the Friends’ group. In a letter to the local press the University was accused of “attempting to steal our archives and historical documents” and “modernise” a service which was described as “a quiet, earnest but good-humoured home of research and learning.”[[613]](#footnote-613) On being told that they would be consulted about the move “later,” Kightly reportedly said “that is like saying you are going to be executed, but we'll discuss the way in which it is done afterwards.”[[614]](#footnote-614)

The use of strong language and life-and-death similes is indicative of the powerful feelings the archives evoked in the local people who were familiar with them, either as researchers or volunteers. Responses from the Council and the University that offered arguments in favour of the project - for example, that it would provide vastly improved preservation storage and secure access to international standards - did not speak to these concerns. Although it was consistently stressed that the collections would remain in the legal ownership of the Council and that the partnership arrangement with the university would be subject to a clear contract, this did not assuage the “theft” and displacement of the archives felt by the campaigners.[[615]](#footnote-615) While arguments over ownership and the right to make decisions about the archives shared the same terminology, the parties were talking about different things. The University Press and Public Relations Officer Hilary Layton speculated that wider audiences of the archives “must be mystified by the appearance of a division [between campaigners and the Council/University] when, for them, none exists.”[[616]](#footnote-616) The inability of both sides to understand or recognise the others’ position suggests differences in their ascriptions of values to the archives. Whereas the Council and University underlined the legal position and the informational and economic potential of the move, the Friends and campaigners foregrounded the emotional experience of visiting and using the archive and the social values of communal ownership.

In June 2002 the Council decided to withdraw from the proposed partnership and consider other options.[[617]](#footnote-617) The future of the Archive continued to cause controversy for the next six years as moves to York’s medieval Minster church, transfer to the city’s museums, and then an external provider was considered.[[618]](#footnote-618) After the retirement of the former City Archivist in 2008 City of York Council commissioned an options report on the future of the archive. This identified its “USP” or unique selling proposition as “its continuity as the record of civic life and accountability for 800 years,” invoking the language of the evidential typology of values. The report recommended merging the Archives with the Local Studies department as part of the city’s library service.[[619]](#footnote-619) It further envisioned a bid to the HLF of between £1.5m and £2m to relocate the Archive back to the City Library and develop access to the collections there.[[620]](#footnote-620) The report suggested that a key to the success of future development was increasing “community and stakeholder involvement” and noted that the Archives were “underused,” ranking 66th out of 90 record offices for visitor numbers relative to size.[[621]](#footnote-621) This report and its recommendations were accepted by the Council’s Executive the following month.[[622]](#footnote-622) It established a connection between the future of the archive, the records of civic history, and an ability to engage with communities, conceiving a virtuous circle whereby the Archive would involve communities in its development leading them to visit and use the archives in turn. The pre-existence of a passionate and engaged community of Friends went unacknowledged.

The *York: Gateway to History* project was subsequently developed to create “a 21st Century Archives and Local History Service for York – a service which serves and reflects all communities and cultures, past and present, in this ancient city.”[[623]](#footnote-623) The project was divided into two streams of work: the extension and refurbishment of the first floor of the City Library to store the collections and create a public service; and a two-year Activity Plan that aimed to “make the service and the collections easier to use for everyone.”[[624]](#footnote-624) A bid to the HLF’s Heritage Grants scheme was successful in 2012, when the project was awarded £1.68m.[[625]](#footnote-625) Building work began in late 2013 and was completed by December 2014. The Archive reopened to the public on January 5, 2015, providing access to the archives after a closure of almost two years. During the building works a project team was recruited, including a Community Collections and Outreach Archivist as well as a Community Collections Assistant and an Education and Public Programmes Officer who were to deliver the engagement elements of the project.

The development of the *Gateway* HLF bid required a period of consultation with existing and potential users of the archives. This was overseen by the consultant who had authored the original report, and who had subsequently been employed to develop the project. He had previously led the development and delivery of the Search Engine archives project at the National Railway Museum. A firm specialising in heritage development were contracted to conduct the consultation and review the findings. The results and analysis were written up as an Activity Plan, which set out thirteen engagement activities to be delivered as part of the *Gateway* project. Three of these activities represented sustained attempts by the Archive to engage with the public and were central to the project’s primary aim to “serve and reflect all communities, past and present”: namely, the creation of a “Community Advisory Group,” the recruitment of “Archives Champions,” and the development of “community collections.”

York: Gateway to History

During the period between the 2008 Taylor report and the conception of the *Gateway* project, the virtuous circle that connected the values of the Archive/archives and its relationship with community had developed to emphasise the potential to deliver Council objectives. In the Activity Plan it was conceived as a project to “drive the service forward so that it genuinely becomes a highly valued long-term community heritage asset, and one which is capable of delivering City of York Council’s strategic objective to ‘Build Strong Communities’.”[[626]](#footnote-626) The word “asset” suggested some form of ownership by communities, if figurative rather than literal. Its “high-value” implied its important role in those communities, while its “capability” to also deliver Council objectives turned it into a double agent. The Archive could serve the needs of *both* Council and communities, acting as a tool for Rose’s “government through community” and recalling the discursive connection between government, archives, and community established in authorised discourse. Although in common with the 2008 report the fraught history of the Archive was not mentioned, the use of “genuinely” in this context gesturing towards a previous state of affairs in which community engagement with the archives was not genuine. Wetherell has argued that practices that foreground shared community values and cohesion are predominantly designed to “move people on” from overly strong identifications with “the wrong kinds of solidarities.”[[627]](#footnote-627) Certain expressions of values are acceptable and therefore integrated, while others are not and so are ignored. In this case, the existing feelings of the FOYCA group, which focused precisely on the archives as an asset for the city *as a community*, were obscured. In their place a pristine blank slate of communities were imagined, awaiting engagement. The project was further positioned as a legacy of the city’s 2012 York800 programme, which celebrated the anniversary of “when the people of York achieved local self-government.”[[628]](#footnote-628) Although this idea was very quickly dropped from communications (and is not referenced in any press release after 2013 or in the 2017 project evaluation) it underlined the role of archives in civic life at the outset of the project. Their ability to tell the history of citizenship also enabled them to create good citizens in line with Council agendas for democratic participation.

Similar connections between archival engagement and government objectives are found in the project documentation of the *West Yorkshire History Centre* (WYHC) and the *Heritage Quay* projects. Neither had a background of community antagonism akin to the York case, and the *Heritage Quay* originated in a university rather than local authority context, but both nevertheless evidenced a concern with capitalising on the value of archives for social change. The *WYHC*, for example, would enable communities to develop “an increased sense of wellbeing through belonging to a community with a history.”[[629]](#footnote-629) The project Action Plan lists “being mentally and physically active,” “being socially responsible” and “playing an active role in community life” amongst the benefits that the project will have for communities.[[630]](#footnote-630) Further, it will “form part of Wakefield Council’s wider regeneration of the Kirkgate area of the city.”[[631]](#footnote-631) Increased use of the archive by “the community” was also a key outcome of the *Heritage Quay* project, seen as contributing to ”the development of healthy, prosperous families, and community development and regeneration” in the local area.[[632]](#footnote-632) As in York both projects stressed the extent to which the archives were currently unknown and unused by local people, motivating them to “attract much larger numbers of people from a much wider range of community backgrounds.”[[633]](#footnote-633)

Building the Gateway

The consultation or market research for the *Gateway* project took place during 2011 and 2012 and included an online survey, interviews and focus groups. The process was described as “inclusive” and specific attempts were made to speak to “people from different ethnic backgrounds, communities of interest…and people resident in particular geographic communities.”[[634]](#footnote-634) During this process a body of “Supporting Societies” was identified, namely FOYCA, the York Oral History Society, the York and District Family History Society, the York Association of Voluntary Guides and the York Alternative History group.[[635]](#footnote-635) Apart from the latter (which was founded in 2011) all of these groups had been closely involved with the Archive prior to 2008. The Oral History Society had operated out of the Archive building itself, and the Friends’ high level of investment in the future of the service has already been described. Despite this previous intimacy, the language surrounding these “societies” was notably formal. The project intended to develop “partnership agreements or joint working arrangements” with them “as necessary.”[[636]](#footnote-636) The effect was to position them semantically as different from the communities which were to be engaged through more open and exploratory activities. By referring to them as “societies” rather than “communities,” a term which is used to refer to all other groups, including local history societies, they were Othered. At the same time, their backing for the chosen aims of the project was assumed in the repeated modifying “supporting.” In fact, the priorities and anxieties of these groups (whose input forms a significant section of Appendix B of the Plan) were often divergent from both the rhetoric and the activities of the final document. For example, the groups stressed the importance of “space the Societies can use themselves,” for storage, access, and volunteering; and the sociable aspects of using the collections. They also foregrounded the knowledge and expertise of their members about the archives and their willingness to share it.[[637]](#footnote-637) The Oral History Society and Family History Society specifically wanted to co-locate with the new Archive to increase access to their own collections. A number of other local history groups also requested space and physical storage: “…the main priority for those in attendance was to have a repository for their collections to be held,” which was “more important to them than advice on how to care for the collections.”[[638]](#footnote-638) This echoed the concerns and needs of the York LGBTQ+ archive group, emphasising autonomy, the retention of authority, and the recognition of lived experience and expertise.

In fact, the new archive facility had much reduced storage capacity, and while there was more space for public activity none of this was identified for use by the “supporting societies.” The flexible and dynamic design did not address the societies’ desire to retain their group identities while being part of the new building. Only the Family History Society were the subject of a specific activity in the plan (Activity 7: Enhanced Family History Services) which envisioned them delivering their service from the Archive’s new Family History Room. After the funding was achieved it became clear that the expectations of the Archive and the Society about what this would look like diverged significantly. The Society wanted to retain their independence, volunteering protocols, and control over their collections, whereas the Archive wished to specify what would be made available and at what times. The lack of knowledge about the family history collections was consistently foregrounded in the Activity Plan, highlighting the need for cataloguing and intervention by archives practitioners and obscuring the Society members’ significant experience and expertise. The same experience and expertise that would be applied to the research that supported the *Who Do You Think You Are?* episode, which I would co-opt on screen. Ultimately the Society decided to retain their independent location elsewhere in the city.

A significant amount of effort was put into communicating with a wide range of other community partners during the project. The evaluation appendices list over 80 local groups who were contacted by the project. However, there was almost no evidence of communication with the “Supporting Societies” after the development phase of the project. By March 2016 the 48 references to them contained in the Activity Plan had been reduced to four mentions in the final evaluation. The Family History Society had formally withhdrawn from participation in 2014, and the Oral History Society also moved their collection to a new location in 2013.[[639]](#footnote-639) Although both groups later became involved in the project’s Community Advisory Group this was considered an opportunity to heal broken relationships rather than to enhance collaboration or co-production.[[640]](#footnote-640)

This marginalisation of the “Supporting Societies,” like the erasure of the Friends group from the history of the service, was indicative of a persistent orientation towards new audiences that was also evident in Huddersfield and West Yorkshire. The needs of potential audiences were expressed in opposition to the values of existing audiences, who were termed “current users” by both projects. Dismissive and denigrating language was used. In the case of the WYHC “current users” were described as “over 65 years old and white” six times on a single page of the Activity Plan.[[641]](#footnote-641) While this is true to the demographic reality, it serves to obscure other forms of diversity and difference within this group. It also serves as a cue to dismiss the things that they value about archival heritage, namely the quiet, sociable research environment of the existing Archive, as stressed by the York Friends.[[642]](#footnote-642) It does this by associating a demographic profile (white and over 65) with a negative perspective on archive users expressed by non-users during the consultation: “Archive users were pictured as old and academic and the atmosphere ‘dusty’, akin to a morgue.”[[643]](#footnote-643) This association devalues the values and potential contribution of these “old” visitors, whose presence turns the Archive into a dead and boring place.

The initial recognition and subsequent forgetting of the Friends, Supporting Societies and “current users,” reinforces the idea that work with them does not constitute “genuine” community engagement. They represent the “wrong kinds of solidarities,” even though their level of interest in archives is high. In the *Gateway* project they are associated with the Archive’s past, which the Activity Plan repeatedly sought to shed with references to creating a “21st century archive” for “21st century audiences.”[[644]](#footnote-644) The *WYHC* activity plan echoed this futuristic orientation as part of its rejection of all things “old,” stating its ambition to become a “21st century heritage institution”.[[645]](#footnote-645)

As far as the *Gateway* project was concerned community engagement with the Archive had been almost non-existent prior to the Activity Plan consultation and would require significant work. As the Community Archivist put it: “We started from quite a low base really here actually at York because we’d never really done community engagement…”[[646]](#footnote-646) In Huddersfield it was similarly perceived that “time and effort will need to be made to work with groups who do not have a natural propensity to engage with archive material.”[[647]](#footnote-647) “Natural propensity” implies that some demographic groups have an innate sympathy or understanding of archival value (e.g. white people over the age of 65) while others do not. People who fall outside this category require “work” through engagement in the same way that they are understood to require state intervention to form strong, safe, and cohesive communities. These two forms of work coincide when archival institutions frame engagement as an instrumental intervention, using the social values of archives to reinforce the necessity of practitioner expertise.

In West Yorkshire, the consultation with local people and communities was more extensive and involved than in either York or Huddersfield, and their contributions to the project design were included in the Activity Plan at length. Effort was clearly made to understand the demographics and social needs of two target communities: the former mining communities of the region and the Kirkgate community located adjacent to the new Archive site. Both had very little previous contact with the archives and were presented as archivally unaware.[[648]](#footnote-648) As a result no mention is made to the pre-existing community-generated archive and history projects amongst these groups, such as the Hemsworth Community Archive, the Fitzwilliam Archive Project, the Royston Local History Group and the South Elmsall, South Kirkby and Upton Community Archive.[[649]](#footnote-649) In fact, community archives are mentioned only twice in the document and only generically as a group to work with.[[650]](#footnote-650) Like the Friends, Supporting Societies and “current users” these groups and their archival values are written out of the world of the grant bid. However, in this case it is to strengthen an argument for the need for funded and expert engagement “work.” The implication is that such practice does something for and to local communities which they cannot do themselves.

In a higher education context, the *Heritage Quay* bid stressed the learning potential of the archives for community development. In so doing it also reinforced hierarchies of expertise and knowledge based on perceptions about the “natural propensity” to engage. Communities of interest were positioned at the bottom of the hierarchy while academic staff and student researchers were privileged. Although the university holds several specialist collections with highly knowledgeable fan bases, for example the Rugby League archive, these communities of users were to receive knowledge rather than to impart or share it.[[651]](#footnote-651) Academic staff and research students were to “develop content…to signpost users to interesting and relevant content.”[[652]](#footnote-652) The assumption that Rugby League fans and supporters group require engagement work and intervention gives the archival institution power and authority over not just the archive collections but also the enthusiasm of fans.

Keeping the Gateway

From the outset the language and iconography of the *Gateway* project reflected a complex dialectical relationship between the Archive, the history of the City of York, and contemporary political rhetoric around community. It was inspired by a 1950s railway poster advertising the city to tourists as ‘The Gateway to History’. The poster (see Fig.4) features six generic male historical figures – a Roman centurion, an archbishop, two medieval knights, a civil war soldier and an eighteenth-century gentleman – against the iconic backdrop of Bootham Bar, one of the gates through the city’s walls, and York Minster.

<Insert Fig 4. Caption: The original ‘York: The Gateway to History’ poster, E.H. Spencer, 1955. Credit: Science and Society Picture Library.>

In the poster the history of the city of York is presented in terms of iconic monuments and privileged men, an image in direct contradiction to the repeated ambition of the *Gateway* project to create an inclusive and representative archive. Its retro nostalgic appearance also belies the repeated promise of a “21st century archive.” However, the Activity Plan made claims that it “fits well with the community-focused message of the *York: Gateway to History* project” because “it represents York’s history primarily through people, with the city’s historic buildings appearing only as background…indicating that the story of York is the story of its people.”[[653]](#footnote-653) On the surface this aligned with emerging critical approaches to archives that put “people over stuff.” The fact that the people represented were all “high-status white men” was presented as an opportunity for the project to diversify the city’s image by redesigning the poster “as an illustration of the project concept that the archive will be representative of all York’s communities.”[[654]](#footnote-654) People were to be invited to nominate and vote for “local heroes” to be included on a new poster, which would then be used as publicity for the Archive. This presented the project as one of transformation, social change, and inclusion. At the same time, it implied that the project would change the way in which the history of the city was understood and perceived – the archive would establish a new visual model of its “shared history.” However, the poster redesign was postponed and finally dropped; the allocated funds were used to commission a piece of art instead.[[655]](#footnote-655) Meanwhile the original poster was retained and used as the project logo (see Fig. 5).

<Insert Fig 5. Caption: The adapted 'York: Gateway to History' project logo, 2012. Credit: Explore York Libraries and Archives.>

The dissonance of the poster image with the project’s objectives was in keeping with the ambivalence of the project name itself. The word ‘archives’ was notably absent from the title and instead the City Archive was made synonymous with York itself. The city is the unit of history that the project foregrounds; and it is intimately connected to its people, leading to descriptions of the archives as “...800 years of unique historical documents telling the story of the people of York and how they have shaped their city.” The project “will open up the city’s history through activities...”[[656]](#footnote-656) Thus, the city has a history, which is made up of the stories of the people of York, which are contained in the archives. The archives thus become tools not just for history making but for city making, linking it back to the languages of cohesion and citizenship. The project was not just about the archival institution but about York, with the archives positioned as agents that know more about the city and people than they know about themselves, reflecting that key element of the authorised discourse. It also recalls the claims made about the essential relationship between the formation of community and the archive. The intimation was that without the Archive the city’s “shared identity” could not be constructed.

The word ‘gateway’ also echoes the ideal of archives practitioner as gatekeeper established by Jenkinson and lately reintroduced by Gould. While 'gateway' offers a more open image, which is used to conjure an access route to the past, it nevertheless acts as a narrowing metaphor. The Gateway was conceived as an entrance “to the less visible archives held by other city institutions,” as well as a conduit for volunteers and researchers.[[657]](#footnote-657) It established the control of the Archive over others and positioned it as a figurative and physical barrier, acting as the connection between people and the past. The Archive knows about and contains the past; it also projects that knowing forward into the future through the survival of its collections.

“…the most inclusive archives service possible”

The creation of a Community Advisory Group was intended to focus on “providing guidance to the project team on creating the most inclusive archives service possible.”[[658]](#footnote-658) This group would be formed at the beginning of the project and would meet from early 2013 onwards, commenting on the building designs, service redevelopment, and community engagement. It was to be made up of educators, local archives practitioners and members of the community, as well as representatives from the “Supporting Societies” and equalities groups. The membership was to draw on a “range of disciplines and areas of expertise.” [[659]](#footnote-659) However, in actuality the advisory group was not formed until October 2014, three months before the refurbished service was opened in January 2015, meaning that it had little input to the design process. The membership of the group was also more limited than envisioned. The ‘Supporting Societies’ made up five of the nine groups or organisations represented and the remainder were education providers or local media. This again highlighted the significant investment and interest that the Societies had in the Archive. It is notable that while the purpose of the advisory group was to ensure inclusivity, the group itself was neither inclusive nor particularly diverse. Almost all members of the group (with the exception of two people who attended an initial meeting) were long term users of archives and of the York City Archive in particular. None of the equalities groups cited, including the York LGBT Forum (which was at this time working on its own community archive initiative) or the Racial Equalities Network, took part in the advisory process.[[660]](#footnote-660) A review of the minutes of the eight meetings that took place during the project indicate members’ familiarity with the Archive’s previous services and the archive collections. The group became a venue for discussing and debating the changes from the old to new service provision with reference to the convenience of existing users. The future of a large card index of newspaper articles was mentioned repeatedly, for example, as was the performance of the new digital microfilm readers. It would have been difficult for a non-user or member from a radically different perspective to contribute meaningfully in this environment. In evaluating the project, the chairperson suggested that it had succeeded by “get[ting] like-minded people together.”[[661]](#footnote-661) This may explain why several individuals only attended the group once or twice (the representative from the York Alternative History group, for example, gave apologies for all but the first meeting) and why it does not appear to have addressed its inclusivity brief.

Inclusivity was considered only insofar as the group was able to imagine non-users of the collections who might want to visit. This was limited to suggestions about the difficulty of timetabling school visits and ensuring academic researchers could visit for consecutive days. At no point did the group consider the *Gateway* brief to become a more representative and community-oriented Archive. Although the Community Archivist did make efforts to speak with people from minoritized communities, these groups remained outside the project’s circle of direct influence. The low importance assigned to the equalities groups is indicated in the Activity Plan itself, where they are relegated to the bottom of the list of representatives, and in the Evaluation by the way in which they are silenced from the narrative of the project.

Somewhat ironically, the Advisory Group did fulfil the needs of the ‘Supporting Societies’ and particularly the Friends group, who regularly sent three or more members to each meeting, taking extensive notes to circulate more widely afterwards. As previously mentioned, the relationship with each of the Societies had been difficult following the success of the HLF bid. The advisory group did help to heal these breaches, with one member of the Oral History Society reporting that it “has re-established relationships which had broken down. It’s now a different kind of relationship, but it is a relationship.”[[662]](#footnote-662) The make-up, late start, and foci of the group indicated a desire to maintain and control the status quo with regards different forms of expertise about the history of York and the archives. It created a forum whereby those ‘Supporting Societies’ which were closest to the Archive’s past, in terms of knowledge and skills, were able to air their differences and experience and made to feel influential. At the same time the Archive could neutralise and quarantine the negativity that had been generated by the lack of investment in these relationships up to that point. The boundaries between the institution and the Supporting Societies were re-established following a period of uncertainty, and at the same time they were kept separate from the positive narratives about community happening elsewhere in the project. Other communities were not actively engaged with the Advisory Group, and were excluded from the process of shaping the service that was apparently for them. An impression of collaboration was achieved without having to engage with different ideas about what archives are, varying expertise about the history of the city and any “sense of ownership” people might feel. The unique nature of the York Advisory Group may reflect the extent to which the Archive had to negotiate and neutralise the values of pre-existing communities, in order to engage the imagined communities who would transform the archives into a “genuine” asset.

However, the deployment of terms suggesting ‘ownership’ and a ‘stake’ in the archives were common across the projects, implying that one purpose of engagement was to redistribute the archive as a form of property. The *WYHC* project aimed to “generate feelings of entitlement to the records”; so that although “we store and manage them… the families and communities whose history these records reveal should feel that the records belong to them.”[[663]](#footnote-663) This is echoed in the *Heritage Quay* bid, which similarly aimed to “provide people with a sense of ownership of the collections and of the project.”[[664]](#footnote-664) However, there is a tension around the stated desire to share the archival asset which reflects the perspective expressed by practitioners in the previous chapter. In all three cases the ownership or entitlement to the archives is “felt” or “sensed” rather than actual as it would be in community archives. This recalls the way in which an interviewee suggested a business “felt” they owned their archives, which was “technically not correct” even though it was legally the case. It implies an underlying rationalisation that all archives, past present and future, are the property and prerogative of an archival institution. When FOYCA protested their rights to make decisions about the archive based upon their “sense of ownership” it was made clear to them how unreal it was. In the case of the *WYHC* the project documentation nervously reassured the reader that work with the community was separate from the Archives other functions: “We do not, though, see its role in the community as in any way detracting from its role as a place of secure storage for and access to nationally and internationally significant archives.”[[665]](#footnote-665) The fact that community “ownership” is considered as different from, and even in opposition, to its “nationally and internationally significant” activities is indicative of an ambivalence towards claims about the value of inclusion and collaboration. The same is true in Huddersfield, where suggestions that the project should engage with ‘” community archives”’ required the use of inverted commas around the term questioning the validity of the idea itself.[[666]](#footnote-666) In this way the rhetoric of community ownership was, as in the practitioner interviews, employed vigorously on the surface but weakened by underlying assumptions.

“…a route into communities…”

The recruitment of a group of “Archives Champions” was intended to increase the reach and profile of York’s Archive with communities. The “Champions” were envisioned as community brokers, recruited from pre-existing organised groups across the city, who would act as “a two-way channel to communicate messages about the Archives and Local History service to and from the communities and the individuals that they work with.” This would “provide a route into communities which are underrepresented amongst current users of the service…through trusted intermediaries within “gatekeeper” organisations.”[[667]](#footnote-667)

Thus the “champions” were positioned as conduits between the Archive and the wider community, representing organisations which were able to translate between two worlds. Again, this is reminiscent of the interviews in which archives practitioners expressed the impossibility of communicating the Archive across paradigmatic boundaries. The communities themselves were imagined at a remove, envisioned as having their own gates and gatekeepers. There was tacit recognition that they were difficult or even impossible to access, and that trust would be an issue. Just as the archives practitioner was figured as managing and overseeing the “gateway” to the past, the “champions” were seen as necessary to negotiate the relationship of the community with the Archive. As with the Advisory Group the project thus sought out relationships that reinforced existing ways of seeing and ordering the archival world.

Statistically the activity was the most successful of the whole programme. A “network” of 170 individuals from 78 local groups were recruited during the project, either through partnership activity, attendance at a workshop or on a one-to-one basis.[[668]](#footnote-668) The Community Collections and Outreach Archivist invested significant time on making these connections and assiduously documented the initial conversations. When the archivist was interviewed later, they repeatedly stressed the importance of talking and listening to the success of the activity: “our approach has been go out there, talk to people, listen to people and be responsive to what they want. And that…that actually has worked quite well for us.”[[669]](#footnote-669) The Activity Plan’s language of gatekeeping and control was notably absent from their description of this work and, unlike the other interviewees, they exhibited little concern for demarcating the boundaries of their practice as opposed to community labour. For example, when asked whether they defined archives differently in different contexts they interpreted the question in terms of alternate definitions circulating in local communities. In common with other participants they recognised this question as being about conflict and territory, but appeared comfortable negotiating between these territories:

I’m quite different cos my work doesn’t respect the traditions of archives…I will adapt how I talk to people and how I define things in order to build a successful relationship with somebody because I think that’s more important than anything else. So, I will talk to an archaeology group who will want to talk to me about all their Roman findings… if they’re talking about it as their archive I wouldn’t correct them because I don’t think it’s my place to correct them. It’s a word and I don’t think that my background and training should influence how they view the value of their collection… they’re not thinking about the definition, they use the word archive because it’s something that’s valuable.[[670]](#footnote-670)

Although they maintained their own definition of archives, grounded in the evidential paradigm of their training – “any documentation that talks about activities and evidence of activities that people are doing” – they didn’t appear to impose this on the groups they worked with. Instead, they made a distinction between the concept of archival heritage – which could be self-defined by the community – and what they perceived to be the limitations of archives within an archival institution:

…they talk about a lot of physical objects and I, at that point, say there’s nothing wrong with you defining it that way but on a very base practical level I’ve got to think about how you store that as an archive. How do we build the right spaces for that cos we can’t do it.[[671]](#footnote-671)

However, despite the uptake for this activity, the flexible approach of the practitioner, and the apparently positive conversations with many groups, the ambition to engage with members of four target communities wasn’t fulfilled. The Activity Plan cited York’s Black and minoritized racial and ethnic communities, refugee support organisations, Roma and Traveller communities and disability rights groups as “hard-to-reach” audiences that would benefit from the Champion programme. Initial contact was made with relevant organisations, including YUMI (York Unifying and Multicultural Initiative), the York LGBT Forum and the Wilberforce Trust, but did not lead to further engagement during the life of the project. Instead, most of the time spent on this activity went towards reinforcing and developing contact with groups and individuals who already had an investment in managing archives in discursively authorised ways. Specifically, local history groups, parish councils, local resident’s associations, and established organisations like the Scouts provided the majority of contacts. When asked to describe the *Gateway* engagement work generally the Engagement Archivist acknowledged that:

I think you talk about engaging new audiences but actually when I started this project the people who were the basics, the quick wins for this project were not really the new users… well they’re our local history groups, they’re the people who are part of groups that already use us.[[672]](#footnote-672)

These groups were almost all formally constituted, meaning that it was possible to interact with hierarchies of committee members via regular meetings and events. The ambition for inclusivity and diversity stressed in the project’s framing narrative was belied by the preference for “quick wins” and those “on our side anyway.” The proprietorial “our side” and the possessive “our local history groups” emphasises what is already shared between the Archive and those engaged, and the opposition of others. Existing relationships and values were reinforced and “new audiences” acknowledged but not integrated into activity. Inclusivity in both this activity and the Community Advisory Group acted as a smokescreen that gestured to the instrumental potential of archival heritage to fulfil challenging social problems like inequality without ever need to confront challenging new relationships or question existing orientations.

The design of the *WYHC* project suggests a greater willingness to accommodate diverse communities. The project activity plan recounts extensive consultation with both local and geographically dispersed communities and with communities of interest, and details activities to target their needs and wishes, including providing space for them to meet and to preserve their own archives. This contrasts with the communication anxiety evidenced in the York case, a divergence which is perhaps indicative of Wakefield’s different socio-economic context. The *West Yorkshire History Centre* is situated in a deprived area of the city in one of the largest urban conurbations in Europe, amidst the racially and ethnically diverse Kirkgate community. More broadly it sits at the centre of a circle of communities that have struggled to recover economically and socially from the collapse of the mining industry in the 1980s. The contrast with York is clarified in Joint Strategic Needs Assessment documents, detailing the health and wellbeing needs of each constituent population published in the years the respective HLF bids were submitted. York’s population is smaller and its people are significantly more likely to be older, to own their own home and to be educated to degree level.[[673]](#footnote-673) In 2012 the Black and ethnic minority population was estimated as 11%, but this was “due in part to the continuing expansion of university and higher education facilities within the city.”[[674]](#footnote-674) In contrast a quarter of Wakefield residents live in social housing and almost 15% live in places designated in the top 10% of most deprived areas in England; 18% of children were considered to be in living in poverty. Approximately 14% of people identified as Black or minority ethnic.[[675]](#footnote-675) Consequently community organisations may have been better established and inclusivity and diversity more prominent in local political discourse.

Nevertheless, the rhetoric wrapped around these ambitions for the *WYHC* reinforces ideas about the paternalistic role of the archival institution in helping people to understand the authorised uses of archives, rather than recognising the multiplicity of potential values. The bid concludes that the reason for “non-use” by communities is “that people are unaware of our services and do not know how to use archives.”[[676]](#footnote-676) This casts communities as blank slates who can be co-opted to use and value archives appropriately through advocacy, thereby “encouraging them to appreciate their historical and natural environment.”[[677]](#footnote-677) Yet while it may be true that communities are not aware of the Archive service, there is ample evidence from the consultation exercises that they have an existing set of archival values and an understanding of how to use archival heritage. Many of the Wakefield community archive groups previously mentioned were founded within mining communities, such as Fitzwilliam and South Elmsall. People who attended open days and reminiscence sessions, for example, were members and foregrounded the emotional experience of viewing photographs of former colleagues, friends, and family members.[[678]](#footnote-678) They were explicit that the value of the events was in spending time together and sharing stories with one another, an activity which is co-productive and does not require specialist archival knowledge. However, in order to maintain the Archive’s position within the authorised paradigm, as the principal evidentiary source of identity, history and memory, as well as its role in the ‘work’ of community cohesion, the project frames the archival values ascribed by the community as something which need to be facilitated, taught, or provided.

“…the full range of communities and viewpoints…”

This instinct is amplified in the *Gateway* project’s stated ambition “to extend and enhance the breadth and scope of the archive collections…so that they represent the full range of communities and viewpoints in the city.”[[679]](#footnote-679) This collections development activity was designed to “increase community cohesion” and to “provide additional archive resources to further engage new audiences.”[[680]](#footnote-680) It combined two different kinds of work: supporting a post-custodial model of community archives by training groups how to look after their archival heritage and acquiring archival material from communities in order to diversify the Archive's own holdings. The latter is positioned in the description of the activity as an outcome of the former. This reflects the logic of engagement and audience development found throughout the project; namely, that working with communities will lead to the deposit of archives from those communities, which will in turn attract more community members to visit and use the Archive. This might be thought of as an osmosis model of representation and integration, whereby the dominant culture of the Archive is gradually moderated by the absorption of marginalised perspectives. In turn marginalised and minoritized communities are inculcated into the values and systems of the institution.

As with the recruitment of Archives Champions this activity was considered a successful aspect of the project, leading to the deposit of 95 new collections or additions to existing collections, and to the creation of the *Gateway to Your Archive* guidance for community archives. This guidance was published as a hardcopy booklet and online download in February 2015 and subsequently six workshops were held to offer structured training on its content. Later the workshop was filmed and uploaded to YouTube with added sign language interpretation. The project evaluation states that it was developed in response to the requests of “representatives from a wide range of community groups across the city” who “expressed that they needed professional support and guidance… on collecting and cataloguing their community archives.”[[681]](#footnote-681) This appears to be in contradiction of the prioritised requests for central storage and space made by the same groups during the consultation exercise.

The guidance was produced in four sections: cataloguing, storage, digital, and access. Although the Archive did not suggest that attending the training would lead to any specific form of recognition, the construction of the original activity and its adaptation in delivery foregrounded the necessity of professional help and of building a relationship with the Archive service. The format of the training placed the community representatives in the position of learners and emphasised areas in which they were perceived to lack expertise on topics such as standardised cataloguing and optimum preservation practices. The archivist responsible for the programme felt that “we’re not saying you have to do it this way and if you don’t do it this way you’re not fit to look after your archive therefore we have to have it.”[[682]](#footnote-682) However, the content of the guidance reinforced and replicated dominant practices of collecting, preservation, and access, stressing the importance of the physical safety of the records, custody, and provenance. While the activity made space in which community groups could adapt and interpret these principles, it did so within parameters. In particular, it positioned the City Archive as a legitimising institution, and structured the relationship between Archive and community in such a way as to occlude alternative forms of expertise. For example, the communities’ knowledge about their own collections and the history of their organisations or places was unacknowledged in the guidance.

Authorised Gateways

The *Gateway* project embodied three characteristics which map to the authorised discourse of archival practice, which can be seen echoed in the *WYHC* and *Heritage Quay* projects. Firstly, the archival institution was constructed as synonymous with the place and people that it documents, as though it were an organically occurring feature of a city, region, or interest group. Its form and relationship to government institutions of either the past or present was naturalised, as was its ability to represent all citizens and their rights. This recalls the organic character assigned to archival institutions and infrastructures by both authorising documentation and practitioners. Secondly, the archives themselves were discursively positioned as a fundamental requirement of community, and specifically of a communities’ cohesion and sense of identity. This assumption has also been reflected and reproduced in archival studies, as in Bastian and Alexander’s suggestion that the relationship between community and archives is essential and symbiotic: “Through their formation, collection, maintenance, diffusion and use, records in all their manifestations are pivotal to constructing a community, consolidating its identity and shaping its memories.”[[683]](#footnote-683) This power of records is linked to the role they play as memory objects: “the ability of a community to conceptualise itself, now and in the future depends to a great extent on its capacity for remembrance and its ability to express that remembrance communally.”[[684]](#footnote-684) The language further echoes the way in which *Archives for the 21st Century* and the *Universal Declaration on Archives* position archival heritage as the foundation of not only a national past but also of the past of communities and the personal identities of individuals. Archives are conceived as active objects in the process of community formation not only providing information about the past but constructing the present.

Thirdly, that archives can be mobilised to meet political agendas, both locally and nationally. Practitioners are able to make claims about the affordances of archives which align with the objectives of government policies and, as a result, the priorities of funders. Archival heritage becomes available and useful for instrumental purposes, such as making good citizens and integrating communities into society.

Authorising Community

The confluence of the instrumentalization of community and the rise of the community archives practices in the last 20 years has led to a complex entanglement of neoliberal logic with the new archival values. The emergence (or rather, the recognition) of independent community archives has been facilitated by the shift in archival studies, which opened up theoretical space; the increased funding for local history and identity history projects, particularly from the HLF; and the desire to strategically align with government agendas to ensure the survival of the professional status quo. Each has appeared to reinforce the rightness of the others, as though they were the same thing, although their intellectual basis - in critical theory and dominant paradigms respectively – is incompatible. This helps us to understand their contentious and ambiguous place in the authorised discourse and the extent to which they evoke conflicted responses from ‘the sector’. Instead of confronting issues of shared authority, ownership, self-determination, and participation, the response has focused on how community archives can be co-opted to fit into existing paradigms through engagement with institutional structures and in relation to social policy.

This approach has been baked into the relationship over time. In 2003 The National Archives established the *Linking Arms* partnership in line with an Archives Taskforce report titled *Listening to the Past, Speaking to the Future*. This report stated (under the heading “Contributing to community cohesion”) that “archives in the community are as important to society as those in public collections.”[[685]](#footnote-685) It was a striking statement of value equivalency that appeared to acknowledge the validity of different perspectives on archives. *Linking Arms* envisioned a programme of activity that brought together archival institutions, the users of archives, and communities to “meet wider concerns over social exclusion that were reflected in the contemporary government policy on archives.”[[686]](#footnote-686) The Community Access to Archives Project (CAAP) was initiated under this umbrella in 2004. CAAP was to be delivered by a partnership of national and local Archives and the online archives community Commanet, which had been founded by a local historian to help community archives to put their collections online. Led by TNA the partnership aimed “to provide a framework for the development of relationships and activities with community groups by developing a ‘Best Practice Model’ for community-based online archive projects.”[[687]](#footnote-687) The language and aims of the project resonated with New Labour policies on social inclusion and community, with an emphasis on attracting “non-traditional users of archives” to participate.[[688]](#footnote-688) These non-traditional users were to be brought into contact with institutions through community archives and thereby be converted into Archive visitors. At the same time community archives would act as tools to deliver public value benefits. The advocacy reports created by the MLA during this same period made this strategy overt. In 2009, for example, they commissioned a report on community archives and the sustainable communities’ agenda, aiming to “establish ways in which community archives can support communities which are experiencing growth and regeneration…”[[689]](#footnote-689)

The recognition given to community archives, and the expectations placed on archives practitioners to engage with them, generated antagonisms and tensions. In particular, Mander observed the differences in standards between “official” and “unofficial” archives and “the fear of competition.”[[690]](#footnote-690) In 2004 the Society of Archivists (now ARA) held a workshop called ‘Building Bridges: Developing Links with the Community’ to introduce CAAP’s best practice model, a title implying the presence of some natural obstacle for archives practitioners to ‘bridge’ in the process.[[691]](#footnote-691) The National Archives failed to secure funding to continue CAAP in 2005 and it was reconstituted as the Community Archives Development Group (CADG), affiliated with the National Council on Archives and funded partly by MLA. Its terms of reference were “to monitor and inform developments in the field of Community Archives, and to act as an expert body on best practice in this area.”[[692]](#footnote-692) The language used presented the Group as a mechanism of oversight, control and even surveillance, making clear the necessity of practitioner expertise in best practice and implying a danger that required “monitoring”.

In 2006 the Community Archives and Heritage Group (CAHG) was founded by “interested volunteers and professionals,” providing a new focus for community archives activity taking place across the UK and Ireland.[[693]](#footnote-693) In 2009 CAHG formally adopted a constitution, which defined community archives work as both the “grass-roots activity of documenting, recording or exploring community heritage” and as “the outreach and partnership work of mainstream archive services with a wide range of different communities.”[[694]](#footnote-694) ‘Community archives’ are thus understood to include both the activities of independent, autonomous organisations and the practices of established institutions. The group has subsequently become a special interest group of ARA, the professional body for archives and records practitioners, and has a committee drawn from community groups, professionalised practice, and academia. Institutionally supported regional networks of community archives now also exist, including the Cambridge Community Archives Network (CCAN) founded in 2006 and *NowThen* in West Yorkshire, formed through the West Yorkshire *Our Stories* project (2009-2012).[[695]](#footnote-695)

However, the currents of tension and concern described by Mander remained evident during the *Gateway* project. While practitioners were evidently willing to support community archives’ work in principle, this was circumscribed by the authorised discourse in practice. The Family History Society and Oral History Society both withdrew from the project over disagreements about who should have ultimate control and power over their collections, how they were to be accessed and what was of most importance. The Archive asserted its authority to specify the quality and type of material that could be kept in its spaces, as opposed to the bodies of material which were valued by the groups. The *Gateway to Your Archives* guidance suggested that the first step to managing a community archive was to appraise the collection. In a section instructively titled “What should you keep?” the emphasis was placed on the validity of structured content such as minutes, financial information, and correspondence. It was recommended to dispose of duplicates and copies of material held elsewhere, both of which are often important parts of community archive collections.[[696]](#footnote-696) Hierarchical cataloguing was also emphasised.[[697]](#footnote-697)

One of the case studies highlighted in the guidance was a collaboration with Poppleton History Society, to make available a selection of their archives via the local library. The society holds material from the seventeenth century to the present day and had previously stored everything in members’ homes. They wanted to share their collections with the wider community and had approached Explore to do so. At first there was some resistance to this idea, reported by the Community Outreach Archivist, based on practical concerns about space and authority.[[698]](#footnote-698) Writing the experience up later as a case study, the archivist’s rhetorical emphasis prior to deposit was on the disorder of the records, which were physically scattered and poorly understood: “no one really knew what each other had.”[[699]](#footnote-699) The group was therefore “tasked” with appraising and cataloguing their collections to a template provided prior to the move into the library. In a blog post on the collaboration the group were praised, using phrasing that positioned them as good students who had been trained to complete a task, over which the archives practitioner had authority: “It was great to see them rise to the challenge and enjoy the process!” [[700]](#footnote-700)

Although it stated its intention to support the community archive on the one hand, the archival institution implied concerns about the validity and usefulness of their content on the other. The dissonance between these two positions was managed by recourse to core principles of archival practice, particularly provenance and order, and to evidential value. The primacy of original authentic documents (as opposed to duplicates or published ephemera) and the anxiety that these important materials were in physical danger of destruction or disorder reasserted the importance of the expertise of the practitioner and the need for expert intervention. The provision of guidance, templates, and praise reinforced an asymmetric power dynamic. Huvila has suggested that this asymmetry in heritage practice is “in spite of its user-oriented and compromising flavour.” As it privileges “archival or institutional regimes of worth” it “limits its usefulness for establishing a common ground between competing regimes.”[[701]](#footnote-701)

The same instinct could be discerned in the desire of CADG to “monitor” and provide “expertise” to community archives. The development of the CAAP best practice standard sought to assert authority over community archive spaces, reinforcing the established hierarchy of archival institutions. The *NowThen* project in West Yorkshire replicated this, introducing an accreditation scheme for community archives akin to the national Archives Accreditation Scheme (from which community archives are definitionally if not explicitly excluded). The scheme required community archives to complete and evidence seven study units, including caring for collections, public services, and legislation, which were then assessed and certified by the West Yorkshire Archives service. It is described as “a formal process which acts to grant credit and recognition to best practice…designed to raise and standardise best practice.”[[702]](#footnote-702) The formality, references to best practice, and standardisation serve to underline the importance of practitioner expertise. Community archives were legitimised and made safe by the process of being absorbed into the authorised paradigm.

When linked through institution-led projects to local and national government agendas this process of absorption is resonant with the assimilation of difference required for the wellbeing of communities. The practitioner discourse about the danger and risk associated with independent autonomous archives is analogous to the apparent danger and risk of independent groups and minoritized communities implied by government social policy. Both require integration with the dominant model of practice, whether cultural or archival, reinforcing conformity to Western values of order. The positive outcomes anticipated in communities are significant, aligning the authorised archival values of evidence, expertise, ownership, order, and control with social impacts of cohesion, integration belonging, and strong national identity. *Archives for the 21st Century*, for example, made sweeping claims about the effect of archives on people and the most recent iteration of the National Archives’ strategy continues to foreground their social impact potential.

However, the evidential basis for these impact claims is sparse. Flinn and Stevens have suggested the role archives play in “enhancing self-esteem and sense of belonging in minority communities…” However, while their work with community archives has shown how “the process of generating and developing it [the archive] engenders positive regard and civic and social engagement,” the data on Archives’ impact consists of reports to funders and anecdotal claims rather than academic research.[[703]](#footnote-703) An early study of the relationship between museums, libraries and archives and social impact expressed “concerns over the quality of ‘evidence’ put forward by the profession in policy documents in the form of personal expressions of conviction or practitioner studies that lack the explicit rigour shown in quality academic research.”[[704]](#footnote-704) Instead there is a reliance on the discursive naturalisation of the power and agency of archives established in documentation like the *Universal Declaration*. Verne Harris has warned against the implicit condescension of such assumptions because:

Truth be told…these ‘memory institutions’ holding the treasure of records with archival value, contribute relatively little to social memory. In my country [South Africa], the vast majority of citizens have not heard of such archives. …the tapestry of their memories, their stories, their myths, and their traditions, this tapestry is woven from other societal resources.[[705]](#footnote-705)

Indeed, critical work on community archives in the USA positions them not as tools of governmentality, but of liberation and resistance. Their values don’t rest on generating integration through shared narratives but on reclaiming the difference of communal pasts which have been “symbolically annihilated” by authorised archival processes. As in the case of the York LGBT Forum, it is that which is *not shared* which provides the basis for new futures through activism, and which cannot be contained within conventional archival infrastructures.

Through critical analysis of archival engagement projects in this way, we can see the discursive and actual barriers to radical and liberatory work when it occurs in the context of authorised discourse. A central claim of the *Gateway* project was that it would create an Archive which was representative of “all the people and communities of York.”[[706]](#footnote-706) This call to inclusivity is a facet of the discourse that normalises archival institutions as legitimate, organic, naturally functioning systems, which are able to contain the pasts, presents and futures of a city, region, identity group or nation in their entirety. The *WYHC* project similarly laid claim to 12,000 years of “our shared history” with “collections representative of all citizens.”[[707]](#footnote-707) While the engagement activity recognises a current lack or absence, it makes assumptions about the possibility of the solution and about the virtue of the outcome. The logic is firstly that the Archive has the capacity to contain, as the Universal Declaration puts it, “every area of human activity.” Secondly, it assumes that if the Archive becomes more representative of communities, then communities will use and value it in appropriate ways. This implies that the Archive can legitimise and mainstream minority cultures and values. One of the outcomes of this process, as envisioned in the *Gateway* Activity Plan, is community cohesion. Although the project does not use the rhetoric of “shared” or “common ground” explicitly, it presents the Archive *as* common ground, a space in which all communities and cultures can be embodied.

The emphasis on representation throughout the *Gateway* project and comparable initiatives is indicative of this process. It reinforced the independence of archives from the people and the communities who create them. By becoming “representative” the Archive may function as an interlocutor between communities and the archives that know more about them than they know about themselves. This generates a nuanced expression of the evidentiary paradigm, in which archives act as evidence of communities by representing them to the future. Since the Archive is the “gateway to history” the threat of non-representation is the threat of being excluded from history as well as from recognition in the present. Once inside the Archive the community becomes part of the “shared stories” that are considered a “cohesive” basis for a stable national society.

By co-opting the instrumentalist communitarian rhetoric of New Labour, Coalition and Conservative governments, a schema has developed in which archives practitioners are given social responsibility and power. This schema claims that the “genuine” value of archives is in representing and evidencing the similarities and shared stories that create cohesive communities. Robert Hewison has identified this commitment to the “social mission” of arts, culture and heritage as a constraining force, because the values potential of archival heritage can only be mobilised for specific outcomes and using limited tools.[[708]](#footnote-708) In the case of the *Gateway* project the Archive became involved in efforts to represent and evidence communities in order to neutralise difference, leaving little or no space for precisely the divisive, challenging, and fragmented groups and identities it set out to reach.

Within the *Gateway* project the community archive was accepted as an alternative space but interactions between the institution and these groups was governed by a set of rules. These rules, which set out how the Archive could share its expertise through training and providing support, overwrote the community’s own existing practices and diverted effort along new channels. Although the Community Archivist emphasised the importance of listening to what communities wanted, the outcomes of the project conformed to the authorised elements of archival practice. Physical preservation, safety, and the order of the archives remained the key focus, as did the evidential value harnessed by cataloguing. Those communities which were not already oriented towards these outcomes, which had already been identified as ‘hard-to-reach’ like the York LGBT Forum and Racial Equalities Network, were left behind by the process.

Discourse about community has long been related to ongoing debates of multiculturalism and integration in British society, which are in turn connected to concerns about national identity, immigration, and global power which fuel white supremacy, racism, and the culture wars. The Labour model of “liberal communitarian multiculturalism,” in which diversity is expressed in the language of cooperation, coexistence and shared values, attempted to overcome this issue by foregrounding tolerance and celebration of difference by the dominant social group.[[709]](#footnote-709) However, the ability of “moralizing policy and the construction of artificial harmony” to create unity is highly questionable.[[710]](#footnote-710) The underlying assumption of communitarian rhetoric, that cultural consensus exists or can be unproblematically created, is antithetical to liberation as conceived by the new archival values. Instead, engagement in this context acts as a cover for an assimilationist agenda, designed to obscure and silence real cultural and social differences in favour of dominant values and experiences. Blame for lack or loss of community, or for failures of engagement, are thrown back on to those who are different, absolving the dominant culture and beginning the cycle of assimilation again. The purpose of social policy since 1997 has been “to intensify some forms of identification while loosening the power of others.”[[711]](#footnote-711) To achieve this, minoritized cultures must be brought into contact with dominant archival paradigms and absorbed within the circle of “common ground” through engagement and representation. This is the discursive and practical context in which current calls for anti-racist and decolonial action are rooted, and from which they struggle to grow.

**Chapter Six**

**Remaking Archival Values**

Sara Ahmed reminds us that: “There is no guarantee that in struggling for justice we ourselves will be just. We have to hesitate, to temper the strength of our tendencies with doubt; to waver when we are sure, or even because we are sure.”[[712]](#footnote-712) The authorised archival discourse, composed of a typology of evidential values, and enacted through dominant principles and systems of the archival paradigm, is a mechanism to generate surety. It is the underpinning of a subject position which appears neutral, and which is thus safe from doubt. The discourse is entangled with our archival practices as a universally valid form of rationality. Critical archival theory seeks to unsettle and dismantle it, revealing its subjectivity and – by calling on radical intellectual genealogies - make space for values of affect, placing people before archives. Over the last twenty years, this remaking of archival values has opened up debates about power, justice and inequity which have generated real, significant change. We have seen the increasing acceptance of community archives as forms of archival practice and as valid subjects of archival study; the acknowledgement of lived experience as both expertise and evidence; the integration of marginalised voices into institutional collections, policies, and decision-making rubrics; and the recalibrations of national and international strategy and policy. This work is worthwhile and necessary. But we would be complacent to think the old is out in favour of the new; because authorised discourse is subtle, flexible, and responsive. It is with us even when archivists are working towards liberation, when that work takes place within institutions founded on, and in accordance with, logics that arise out of its sense-making stories about the world and how it works. Acknowledging this helps us to understand the dissonance, whereby a ‘field on fire’ with empathy and oriented towards justice, can also be stuck, stymied and in conflict. Discourse analysis provides us with a tool to identify and unpick the values, both old and new, that are ascribed, circulated, and reinforced by every single archival actor at every single moment of archival action. It is not an answer to the questions that challenge archivists, historians and communities, so much as a way to ask questions that, as Ahmed says, ‘tempers the strength of our tendencies with doubt,’ demands that we waver, even when we are sure. An acknowledgement of the operation of value generates insight that can inform the future design of archival processes and activity. The global ‘grand challenge’[[713]](#footnote-713) for both practitioners and institutions, I suggest, is the ongoing process of exploring different values, and creating spaces in which values holders can meet on an equitable footing, to bring archives into being in ways that are just and socially conscious. Because as well as revealing how patterns of behaviour are linked to values, critical discourse analysis also underlines the potential for tension and miscommunication between values holders, and the risk of the perpetuation of epistemic violence against those who the authorised discourse is configured to oppress.

**The Authorised Archival Discourse**

Drawing on Laurajane Smith’s theory of the Authorised Heritage Discourse allows for the identification of characteristics of a related but distinctive discourse within the archival field. Related, because it shares a lineage of nineteenth century ideas of racialised order, historical consciousness, and expertise; and distinctive because of the particular emphasis it places on the evidentiary and informational qualities of things, which it consequently identifies as archives. Within the discourse, specific ways of defining, interpreting, and engaging with archives have become normative, beyond theory and practice, so as to appear inherent and self-evident. Central is the ascription of evidential value as if it were an atemporal, universally valid form of rationality; a rationality which is sanctioned and reinforced by the political, legal, and cultural contexts in which archival institutions operate. This rationality is robust and can deflect, absorb, modify, or co-exist with the challenges of critical archival theory.

This is because the Authorised Archival Discourse is a tool of power. This power is not merely theoretical or material or institutional, although it is all of those, but has what Bourdieu called “symbolic power”, which is exercised by “constituting the given through utterances.”[[714]](#footnote-714) These utterances are encoded over and over and over again in the documentation produced and circulated by institutions who have political and cultural authority over archives in the UK and the West, such as UNESCO, the ICA and TNA. Consequently, it is also a manifestation of Foucault’s governmentality, in which archives are constructed in such a way as to manifest the will of the State. In the UK, the close links between the legitimate functioning system of archival institutions and state power is indicated by the position of The National Archives as both a non-ministerial department of government and sector leader. Analysis of the guidance, regulation, and strategy that TNA generates shows its role (and that of similar institutions) in the entrenchment of the discursive system.

A key feature is the elision of the categories of archives and evidence into ‘archives *as* evidence’. Through the presentation of archives as autonomous agents, which have impact on the world independent of human actors, a “unique” evidentiality is established. This evidentiality is seen to be total, encompassing “every area of human activity,” while at the same time being intimately connected to the management and governance of nation states. Thus, the *Universal Declaration on Archives* explicitly makes the link between the safeguarding of the former and the interests of the latter.[[715]](#footnote-715) At the same time, documents like *Archives for the 21st Century* and other national policies construct a narrative that positions archives at the intersection of the histories and identities of individuals, communities and the nation. From here archives may be conceived as evidences of “shared” stories, the basis of a communal memory that serves to homogenise the histories of diverse peoples into an acceptably “cohesive” narrative.[[716]](#footnote-716) This story can then be put to work in alignment with social and political agendas, to move people on from the “wrong kinds” of solidarity and subjectivity.[[717]](#footnote-717)

The persistent claim that archives represent shared stories and identities also seeks to establish dominant understandings of the past. Waterton has described such narratives as “consensual substitutes for what would otherwise be a range of highly emotive and dissonant experiences.”[[718]](#footnote-718) Archives thus become a mechanism for evidencing certain interpretations of events over others; namely those which highlight the positive and productive qualities of existing power structures and sublimate the controversial and traumatic. Although this discursive element is grounded in the rhetoric of inclusion and diversity it works to neutralise and contain these ideals within an authorising environment.

The discourse was evident in the orientation and values of the interviewed archives practitioners, who reinforced central ideas about expertise, order, and power. The development of professional identity was an important mechanism whereby such assumptions, grounded in evidential values, were absorbed. As Ibarra has argued, the initiation of newcomers to any given work role doesn’t just involve the acquisition of skills but also “adoption of the social norms and rules that govern how they should conduct themselves.”[[719]](#footnote-719) The discourse is bound up with identity claims about being an archivist and in the ways that this identity is signalled to others. In the UK, the origins of the accredited qualifications pathways in government, and their policing by the Archives and Records Association, specifically bind professional identity to the standards of authorising agencies such as the ICA and TNA. This is not entirely unconscious. As we saw in the interviews with practitioners in Chapter 4, systems of accreditation and authorisation are often perceived cynically as ways to leverage influence and ensure the resourcing of archival functions within a neoliberal system. In this way the authorised archival discourse offers a mechanism whereby practitioners’ real care for the preservation of records – in their apparent role as Jenkinsonian guardians of evidence and truth – can be aligned with practical solutions to budgetary and political pressures. In this way the discourse operates on the surface as a self-conscious manipulation of reality, at the same time as it reifies – through its values and assumptions - the principles that underpin the sense-making stories of that reality. Which is not to say that the discourse entirely circumscribes what an individual practitioner can think and feel about archives. On the contrary interviewees shared thoughts and emotions that were clearly divergent from it. There was a general expression of positivity around the emergence of autonomous community archives; the levels of dedication and passion of archivally-engaged activists, and a desire to work in just, equitable ways. Nor does making the discourse visible as I have tried to do dismiss or detract from the real passion and dedication to archival work which all of the interviewees expressed. However, statements that were divergent from the discourse were often followed by reversing or moderating claims, which indicated a cognitive dissonance between professional values and personal feelings.

This is the same distance between belief, utterance and action that could be observed in response to the discussion about the removal of statues on the email list in the summer of 2020. While the discourse is hegemonic it is not monolithic or static. On the contrary, it is adaptive to intellectual, social, and political challenges. The paradigmatic shifts of the last twenty years, which saw the expansion of the definition of the archive and a recognition of the power dynamics of archival practice, share space with the authorised discourse. The same is increasingly true, at an individual and institutional level, of the new archival values of affect, emotion, and equity. They have disrupted but not displaced ‘traditional’ ways of thinking and acting. This generates a fundamental discomfort. If archives are accepted as “one contested element” in a variety of tangible and intangible elements, used in the subjective construction of the past, then their totalising and normative evidentiality is called into question.[[720]](#footnote-720) In response, practitioners must find ways to reconcile incompatible approaches to archival work, especially at points of contact with communities when alternative values are brought to the fore.

Both interviews with practitioners and case studies of large-scale archival engagement suggest that while new ideas are expressed and highlighted on the *surface* of texts and talk, they are re-marginalised by the assertion of discursive assumptions. In this way, community archives are made the focus of archival engagement at the same time as community practices and values are depreciated. A conviction as to the proper stewardship of archival resources leads practitioners to seek control of materials which they may subsequently perceive as low in the hierarchy of priority or importance, or even label as “rubbish.” As the value of archives is seen to be contingent on the work of the practitioner, in generating order and providing security, archival materials which falls outside of their control and expertise is perceived to be in danger. Where such authorised practices and communities come into conflict, archives become a site of anxiety or contestation, much in the same way as the ugly, marginal, or difficult heritage sites described by Smith.[[721]](#footnote-721) Strategies to manage this contact were observed during the *Gateway to History* project, where activities which were proximal to the authorised discourse were prioritised above activity that challenged its assumptions.

Dissonance is also managed and moderated by recourse to narratives of higher principles of justice and truth grounded in the rhetoric of the Jenkinsonian tradition. Justice is associated with dominant values through the evidentiary practices of the Western legal system. While notions of objective truth and neutral justice have been challenged by post-modernism, so that Fowler can state that: “Archival institutions are not neutral places. Nor are their archives neutral.”[[722]](#footnote-722) Nevertheless, both truth and neutrality can resurface in debates around the role of archives in the pursuit of social justice, and the reimagining of the archivist as activist. This is exemplified by Procter’s assertion that, although archives have been turned into a “cultural commodity” for community engagement, “the persistent core function of archival activity” must be “the upholding of rights.”[[723]](#footnote-723) Interview participants were able to realign the qualities of archival authenticity, integrity and authority with these debates, recalling the use of archives in inquiries, such as by the Hillsborough Independent Panel, and justice forums, like the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Canada. Archives were seen to play a vital role in evidencing and informing these processes, and also in justifying the narratives of those who have been forgotten or unheard. They made safe the idea of diverse subjectivities by reaffirming the necessity of an authorised way of looking at archives within a juridical framework. At the same time, they also allowed practitioners to divert attention away from archival institutions’ own culpability in the enablement of injustices. There was little recognition that, in each of the cited cases, archives – their falsification, mismanagement and appropriation – were also central to the perpetuation of *in*justice. Instead, the power of archives to tell the truth was foregrounded. Such an inability to see or acknowledge the negative alongside the positive affordances of archives is symptomatic of what Drake sees as the oppressive characteristics of the archival institution, which is configured to silence and marginalise that which is difficult.[[724]](#footnote-724)

This justice rhetoric may serve the needs of communities but in limited ways that reinforce the rightness of authorised values. As in, for example, the prerequisite of expertise, and for the professionalised management and control of any archives that result. It becomes possible to reconcile the *Universal Declaration’s* claim for archives’ “role in protecting citizens’ rights” with the wishes and needs of marginalised communities, so that archival activism is envisioned in familiar terms. In the neo-Jenkinsonian literature this reconfiguration of established modes of thinking is best represented by Gauld’s argument for “democratisation via privileging.” He suggests that while the move towards justice has implicated archives practitioners in moral and political discourses, they are still required to act as “gatekeeper, as privileger of the historical record and narrative…” because “authentic and verifiable records” act as “a representation of truth and factual occurrences.”[[725]](#footnote-725) He goes on to argue:

It is by retaining and emphasising principles such as evidence, context, selection and aggregation that will enable the profession to be a gate opener as well as a gate keeper through encouraging participation…democratising while privileging.[[726]](#footnote-726)

As Punzalan and Caswell have pointed out, such approaches to archival justice adopt a rights-based framework that privileges Western perspectives on the law and evidence, which has limited utility in the fight against “more subtle, intangible and shifting forms of oppression.”[[727]](#footnote-727) These are also the perspectives encoded by the Authorised Archival Discourse: this attempt to reconcile ‘traditional’ principles with social justice actions works as a discursive coping mechanism to marginalise the threat of postmodern subjectivities and to maintain the status quo. Waterton has observed a similar phenomenon in the cultural heritage field: “the most important and perhaps most ardently concealed attempts to sustain the AHD have occurred within the context of multiculturalism and calls for social inclusion.”[[728]](#footnote-728)

The Remaking of Archival Values

Theorising the authorised discourse using a values-centred approach identifies two typologies of values ascribed to archives. Each of these is seen to be associated with a complex of related concepts and contingencies.  An evidential typology is dominant and fundamental to the authorised discourse itself, encompassing legal, historical, and rights values, circulated by archival authorities in the West and distributed in the form of international standards, and policies and strategies at a national and local level. It can be consistently observed in the professional documentation that frame institutional archives work, embedded both explicitly - by ‘*as* evidence’ formulations - and implicitly - via the language of evidentials. These evidentials – such as authenticity, integrity, truth, authority – act to call forth particular ways of understanding archives which, in turn, underline the logic rightness of specific archival practices. These practices both identify and preserve evidential values.

Evidentiality intersects with dominant historiographical and juridical ways of understanding the past, being conceptually dependent on Western epistemologies of time, space, and property. The development of early archival systems, especially those of medieval Europe, established a fundamental relationship between records and evidence, while the growing dominance of document/text-focused historiography during the nineteenth century further highlighted the role of archives in fixing and narrating the past. The development of the principles of archival practice, in the context of Western national archival institutions and encoded by instructional manuals, consolidated the relationship. The status of ‘archive’ was understood to arise from and be guaranteed by evidential values. These qualities were generated under specific conditions, namely as a result of the administrative processes of government or business, which were indifferent to posterity.

Within the typology, records which are most able to conform to these qualities (i.e. those produced by aligned bureaucratic and administrative systems) are most readily valued. This is often still seen to be the case even with regards to records of community groups, as expressed in the *Gateway to Your Archives* guidance in York. Consequently the recognition or ascription of such values is seen as a specialist skill, as is the management of archival materials valued in this way. Historians, legal professionals, and archivists are inculcated in ways of seeing archives which reinforce the need for their own forms of expertise and knowledge. Even working in a participatory action research context my own archivist/historian instinct was to impose an empiricist structure of legislation onto the archives as a pre-requisite to understanding them. This is what makes it possible for Fowler, even in a book about archival silences, to claim “Some [business] records cry out to be kept…” whereas others, such as luncheon vouchers and payslips, can “clearly” be discarded.[[729]](#footnote-729) The possibility that the latter may be of equivalent or even greater value to the former from other perspectives is not considered. Although alternative values may be acknowledged and different approaches to collecting and managing archives nominally accepted, they are subordinated to authorised values. Other forms of value are recognised but as subjective, transient and context dependent, while evidential values are naturalised as fixed and fundamental. In this way the typology continues to shape how archival heritage is recognised and legitimated, and how it can be activated for use.

In contrast, an affective typology of values can be seen to be at work in ‘unauthorised’ or less authorised encounters between people and the things they value as archives. This was visible, for example, in the emotive campaign of the Friends of York City Archives; but it was most completely expressed during the participatory action projects, which sought to create spaces conducive to personal and affective responses to archives. Both the LGBTQ+ and YPP groups recognised and engaged with archives, in the broadest sense, through values expressed in the language of emotions, solidarity, belonging, and identity. In the case of YPP these were generated through a sense of place and space, through lived experience, and in response to contemporary issues. The LGBTQ+ group ascribed similar values but differently, concerned less with place and more with autonomy, ownership, and a ‘family history’ of marginalised sexualities. Critical archival theory has given us the tools to understand this alternative relationship, by first making visible the dynamics of power that inform the evidential typology and more recently by theorising the archive as a space of memory, self-determination, and liberation.

The subjectivity of these values and their context-dependent ascription challenges truth and evidentiality claims by archives practitioners as well as the practices that arise from them. During Hungate Histories participants used the archive as one amongst many sources of information about the former ‘slum’, assigning equal credibility to websites found via a Google search and the memories of Facebook friends. Their desire to digitally cut, paste and reorder, and to map the archives using geographic rather than administrative or legislative structures, severed the apparently organic evidential link between creator, context, and value. Decontextualized in this way the records became available for a wider range of uses, from recalling personal memories to generating ideas about future housing policy.

However, these affective values don’t exist in a vacuum or outside of the realities of the world. Their ascription is messy, fluid, and dynamic – inflected by enduring social, legal, and political requirements for evidence, and by the need to speak the authorised language of evidentiality. Both YPP and the LGBTQ+ group expressed a yearning for archives which did not exist, and which could have told them stories which they wished to hear. In the latter case the LGBTQ+ project sought to bring these archives into being. This was expressed as a determination to become “visible”, a value that sits on the evidentiary spectrum. Some of the archivists interviewed expressed a similar desire, to support communities to preserve records that had meaning to them as a way of making visible through representation. We might read this as a point of alignment where evidential and affective values meet. For example, McKemmish has suggested that personal records created and collected by individuals and groups can, if handled systemically and with reference to the requirements of order and context, become “an accessible part of that society’s memory, its experiential knowledge and cultural identity – evidence of us” rather than only “evidence of me.”[[730]](#footnote-730) However, we should be attentive to subtle distinctions in how the ascription of these values is made, and especially to the difference between ‘making visible’ and preserving identity; the difference between being seen and being evidenced. The act of LGBTQ+ people making their past visible is driven from *inside* the community, by those who have been forgotten or silenced. They wish to make autonomous choices about what to archive, what to disclose and how; their ways of doing so may be entirely outside of the paradigm that assigns evidential value. In contrast, communities are evidenced from the *outside*, in a way that recalls the claims made by Bastian and Alexander about the ability of archives to construct communities – even when the archives come from the *inside* they are subject to *outside* scrutiny which determines their status as archive or ‘rubbish’. Claims to ‘evidence’ communities reflect the authorised formation found in *Archives for the 21st Century*, wherein archives are configured as knowing more about people than they know about themselves. This is also an expression of the autonomous agency of archives to “do” things claimed in the *Universal Declaration*.

The visibility sought by the LGBTQ+ group was distinct from the evidentiality naturalised in the authorised discourse. Indeed, the group saw visibility arising in opposition to institutional archives, from their own *unshared* stories, growing out of the experiences that made them different to others rather than the same. Not evidence of the wider societal ‘us’ but of a separate, specific, self-determined ‘us.’ Similarly YPP’s need for ‘evidence’ was grounded in an activist mode, which framed itself against both the archival institution and the Council that it represented. This value could only exist and be ascribed outside of authority. In this way the interplay of values, and the difficulty of negotiating between values holders, highlights the limitations of seeking to assimilate or include groups in line with the authorised discourse.

Instrumentality, discourse and engagement practice

The Authorised Archival Discourse works by privileging certain values-based subjectivities over others. As a result, it establishes and reinforces an oppositional tension between archival institutions and communities, and between ‘professionals’ and publics. Archivists and the people they’re working with are very likely to ascribe different archival values or, if they ascribe the same values, to ascribe them differently. Whereas some values of archives are given greater legitimacy by the discourse, others are excluded or misrepresented. While the evidential typology is centralised and normalised as self-evident, the affective typology is relegated or sublimated. This limits the broader uses of institutional archives by communities on their own terms, as in the case of York Past and Present. It also hinders communication between different value holders as in the case of the York LGBT Forum and the city’s cultural and heritage institutions. Although audience engagement, public participation and public history are now understood to form an integral part of archival work, activities jar with the discursive assumptions of institutions and practitioners. The aims of archival institutions in relation to engagement are often mismatched to the authorised values and ways of seeing that underpin their modes of operation and regulation.

This was expressed during the *Gateway to History* project by the prioritisation of certain activities above others. Those which challenged ideas about what the Archive should be and do, or which required the consideration of different world views, were de-prioritised. Communities who ascribed significant affective values to the city archives were disregarded to the point where relationships with them broke down. In contrast, activities which could be reconciled with the authorising discourse and the evidential typology, such as the production of training and guidance for community archives, became a focus. The desire to neutralise and absorb community groups by aligning them with archival principles was coded into the activities themselves. The project reflected at a local level Interviewee 06’s ambition at a national level “to plug them into that national network…because they’re very narrowly focused [they won’t] be aware of how they actually fit in to the wider landscape.”[[731]](#footnote-731)

Engagement practice is used as a mechanism to reinforce rather than overcome the boundaries between ‘qualified’ archival experts and non-experts. Non-experts must be taught a system of values and beliefs to integrate with the institution; they must adopt the rationality of the Authorised Archival Discourse. Those groups who claimed their own expertise and retained their own divergent ideas about both the values of the archives and how they should be managed were apt to be seen as troublesome and obstructive. In this way, the project highlighted a critical antagonism between the aim to engage communities and build new audiences and a sub-textual preoccupation with maintaining institutional power.

The alternative approaches which YPP and the LGBTQ+ archive group took to working with and interpreting archives, even inside the institution, demonstrated that the infrastructures of archival practice are unnecessary for meaningful engagement. Provenance, context, and order – principles normalised by the evidential values typology – were either less relevant or irrelevant to participants. As communities they brought their own values frameworks with them, including an understanding of the histories within which the archives might be situated. Although the archives they worked with or imagined were fragmentary and disordered, the groups found ways to integrate and absorb them into pre-existing and new narratives that held social and emotional meaning. This process reflects the “becoming” potential of the archives. As Withers has observed, because they are not “finished representations that embody or enact a particular temporal logic” they can be made available for “playing with time.”[[732]](#footnote-732) Although archives may be dateable and textually fixed (as in the case of the Hungate clearance records) they can be activated by a community such as YPP in ways that collapse linear time. Thus, the experiences of a Hungate resident in the 1920s can become relevant to the lived experience of an inadequately housed single mother in the 2010s. The two are juxtaposed, closing the distance between long-ago past (1920s Hungate), recent past (2000s) and the present (the Hungate Histories project). This potential is independent of the interventions of archives practitioners. Archives are brought into being and activated not through institutionalisation and control, as perceived by interviewed practitioners, but through such encounters with values-holders. Both the Hungate Histories project and the LGBTQ+ project foregrounded the predominance of affect in these encounters. The emotional connection between the archives and the individual or community was what drove their perceptions of what archives were and could be, and how they should be treated.

However, let me be clear: I do not argue that decisions and actions arising from the evidential typology are inherently bad or wrong. They enable a range of sanctioned, normative engagements such as those of academic historians, family and local historians, students, and education providers. The courts and those seeking justice through them depend upon evidential principles to substantiate truth claims about the world. The philosophical relationship between reality, evidence and the archive is an important (if not the only) defence against the proliferation of alternative facts and conspiracy theories. The salient point, however, is that the naturalisation of such values constrains and limits the possibilities for interplay between archives and communities beyond these politically and culturally endorsed activities. The Authorised Archival Discourse produces a practice that packages archives “in a form where affect and sensory pleasure can hide behind professional codes and disciplines.”[[733]](#footnote-733) This is manifested in protocols that dictate how archives are to be found, seen, touched, and shared, and which prime us to refuse collaborations and actions that fall outside of these bounds. I recall again my nervous laugh in the face of Una Stubbs’ emotion; I recall again my immediately instinct to say ‘no’ or, at least, ‘wait’ to YPP’s community digitisation efforts. How many times and in how many ways do our practices impede our progress in this way?

The ontological values perspective of this book admits the possibility of plural valid engagements because it recognises all archives as contingent. Archivists themselves are reconfigured as values-holders, rather than privileged experts, who activate archives’ potential just as communities do, but in different ways. The action research projects suggested that equal respect for the priorities and ascriptions of communities are powerful tools to overcome values-based differences. Members of both YPP and LGBTQ+ groups had previously had negative experiences when approaching heritage and cultural authorities with ideas and comments. They felt either ignored or needlessly obstructed. As Richard from YPP has explained in another context: “The point is we’ve got annoyed so many times with wanting to do something in York…And you can’t seem to break through that barrier to get there. You say “I want to do this” and you’re just looked at as a member of the public. It’s like it doesn’t really matter what you want.”[[734]](#footnote-734) This attitude can be discerned amongst the interviewed archives practitioners, who considered the opinions and feelings of community members to be less important than archival principles. While such principles do not necessarily arise out of the conscious ascription of evidential values (although some, like preservation rules, do) they are rooted in assumptions about evidence as a universally valid form of rationality, as a universally valid form of value. When community archives do not conform to these protocols their actions are perceived to be dangerous and thoughtless. Interviewees felt compelled to intervene and “be quite brutal” about the imposition of “proper” behaviour.[[735]](#footnote-735) Programmes of training for community archives in the correct ways of thinking about and caring for archives are developed, as during the *Gateway to History* project and by the West Yorkshire Archives Service. As Smith argues, this assumes that communities must be taught the values of dominant heritage practice.[[736]](#footnote-736) However, they will still never attain the status of the institutions that reflect the “backbone” of the archival body, represented, for example, by the attainment of Accredited Archive status as policed by The National Archives and professional bodies. The alternative practices which arise out of different experiences and sets of values may be acknowledged but are still liable to be treated as sites for management and containment.

Beyond the level of individual and institutional practice, we must also remember that the origins of evidential values in systems of colonial, white supremacist and patriarchal power makes them deeply problematic and suspect. The processes of assimilation we observe in local encounters between archives and communities are magnified and instrumentalised by central government policy on heritage and community. In Britain, the New Labour agenda to integrate arts and heritage into the “system of government” and as “a kind of fuel to drive the vehicle of social improvement” has led to the use of participation in dominant value systems as an indicator for community cohesion, social inclusion, and the right kind of belonging.[[737]](#footnote-737) This agenda has persisted under the 2010-2016 Coalition government, rebranded as the ‘Big Society’ and ‘localism,’ and then subsequently under the post-2016 Conservative government as ‘community resilience’ and ‘community strength.’ Underpinned by the focus of funders such as the HLF on local heritage, volunteering and community engagement, the rhetoric has been circulated by The National Archives and adopted by archival institutions. Policy and strategy emerging from government, such as *Archives for the 21st Century* and *Archives Unlocked*, reinforced it through an alignment with dominant evidential values. A connection was made between community engagement and the instruction of communities in the right ways to think about and use archival materials. This recalls Bennett’s theory of the museum as a “governmentalisation of culture” and as a Foucauldian technology of power, which seeks “to rhetorically incorporate the people within the processes of the state.”[[738]](#footnote-738) As Hewison puts it: “they [policymakers] see culture as a source of social instruction rather than of self-development.”[[739]](#footnote-739) There is a straight line between the instructive tone of government policy and the instructive qualities of institution-led engagement activities, between neoliberal and market agendas and the evidential paradigm.

Archivists, along with other heritage practitioners, have been assigned responsibility for mitigating societal inequalities by working with marginalised communities, encouraged by diversity and inclusion linked funding. Speaking broadly, Hewison has identified this commitment to the “social mission” of culture and heritage as a constraint on practitioners and institutions, because their potential can only be mobilised along narrow lines and using limited tools.[[740]](#footnote-740) Such engagement is also inhibited by the limits of discursively acceptable practices available to archives practitioners. For example, in the case of the *Gateway* project the archival institution acted to represent and evidence communities in ways that moderated difference and emphasised cohesion and sharedness. In doing so it left little space for precisely the divisive, challenging, and fragmented groups or identities it set out to reach. This is because engagement which is designed to move archival institutions towards more just and inclusive practises takes place within both a discursive and political space that depreciates affect and autonomy. In this way Authorised Heritage Discourse steers archival institutions into complicity with the state, collaborating with agendas that seek to domesticate communities as part of government agendas, even while individual practitioners commit to critical and inclusive praxis.

Where does change come from?

By mapping the Authorised Archival Discourse and the operation of evidential and affective values we make visible a discursive basis for “what is unjust with the current state of archival research and practice.”[[741]](#footnote-741) Namely, that a dominant system of values works to marginalise and de-legitimate the expression of a broader range of values. Making visible this discursive system is fundamental to the “analysis of power in all its forms,” which in turn is “crucial to understanding the context of record creation, of archival functions, of the formation of archival institutions, of archival outreach and use, and advocacy.”[[742]](#footnote-742) It adds to the intellectual toolkit at the disposal of archival theorists, archives practitioners, and those who use archives, especially historians. It surfaces assumptions about archives to begin the process of negotiating a discursive environment that is more hospitable to a wider range of values.

Critical ideas are increasingly recognised and absorbed at an international and national strategic level. The introduction of the new ICA archival description standard, Records in Contexts, is a self-conscious attempt to move towards a more flexible, dynamic, and less hierarchical form of intellectual control (albeit by drawing upon ideas long established in the series system of description developed in Australia in the 1960s).[[743]](#footnote-743) In the UK context, the National Archives’ own new internal strategy, *Archives For Everyone*, studiously avoids invoking evidentials in favour of affective language – although it still centres archives as a totalising force for national unity.[[744]](#footnote-744) This would indicate some reflection on the remaking of values within institutions, in order to come into closer alignment with critical archival positions. However, we must be continually attentive to these changes and to the discursive implications of these shifts, remaining sceptical as to the extent to which they represent systemic change. The same shifts can be seen in archival education, where conscious efforts have been made to dislodge Jenkinson from the centre of the curriculum; and in archival practice, where individuals and, in many cases, institutions are making sincere and impactful efforts to dismantle oppression and work collaboratively with communities. While the listserv conversations of June 2020 were distressing and dispiriting, they also indicated a will amongst many practitioners to do *something*, even though it wasn’t clear what that something should be. When we denaturalise ‘expert’ assumptions; when we recalibrate professional identity; when we decentre particular ways of doing and knowing; and when we make discourse visible, change can happen. People and practices, like values, are remade.

However, this can only take us so far. The bells of Western epistemology cannot simply be unrung. We have seen how authorised discourse is adaptive and resistant to the remaking of values. The discursive landscape in which archives operate is a function of broader currents of power in society – of capitalism, neoliberalism, neocolonialism, and white supremacy - and as such will not be easily dislodged. Just archival practices, to which political and funding agendas apparently aspire, cannot be delivered within systems that perpetuate and enable inequalities of power. Chief amongst these inequalities are mobilisations of evidential values which obscure or marginalise or depreciate the needs and efforts of those outside the authorised circle of expertise. Although the literatures of social justice, archival activism, and autonomy have been acknowledged and have entered the mainstream, the field continues to be, as Drake has said, “entrenched within power. We are trained and prepared…to see no other options.”[[745]](#footnote-745) The impact that this grounding in dominant Western archival values has on practitioners is evident in their interviews. It has led some critics to suggest that any archival practice within or in collaboration with an institution is complicit in authorised actions and agendas. Explaining his (now reversed) decision to leave the profession Drake questioned the possibility of change from within:

The purpose of the archival profession is to *curate* the past, not *confront* it; to *entrench* inequality, not *eradicate* it; to *erase* black lives, not *ennoble* them. Tigers cannot change their stripes. They are merely adept at blending into their surrounding environment until it is time to strike, and strike it will.[[746]](#footnote-746)

This suggests there can be no equitable ground on which archival institutions, archivists and communities can meet. The authorised discourse is too fundamental to the conceptualisation of archives and the work of archival institutions to be dismantled. Disruption is not only impossible but unnecessary; because without the discourse there is no archival practice. Without the discourse there is no *need* for archival practice.

But where does that leave us all, in the reality of a world of institutionalised archival labour and wage employment? Doomed to be stuck between the ice and fire; complicit in the discourse by necessity, in a state of dissonance with our determination to dismantle it? In the first instance, in seeking a way through, I turned to the critical notion of the archival ‘multiverse’ as a form of raised consciousness. In the multiverse multiple positions, orientations and subjectivities can emerge and be recognised, including both practitioner and community perspectives. In my research I sought to create a micro-multiverse, focused on my own small heritage city, and was inspired by Foucault’s quest for a “more general space,” in which familiar things are disrupted in order to construct new theories about them.[[747]](#footnote-747) I framed my work from an activist position, as being “interested in themes of equality and anti-discrimination, of claiming a place in history for those who have been hidden or voiceless.”[[748]](#footnote-748) Except, in this case, it was not so much a matter of claiming a place in history as claiming a role in ascribing value to archives, and thus in how archives should be identified, managed, and used.

My action research projects acted like Sheffield’s “archival interventions.” They were attempts to negotiate the discursive landscape I had delineated, by working with autonomous communities on their own terms to make spaces in the “multiverse,” where alternative models of archival values could be generated, ascribed, and activated. Both YPP and the LGBTQ+ group created figurative and literal spaces that were oriented towards affect and social action. Participants identified these values and produced meaning despite the challenge of navigating the limits that were encoded into the archives themselves. They did not require an archives practitioner to communicate this value to them through engagement; the engagement came *from* them. As Greg Bak and colleagues have argued: “There is no need to be a voice for the voiceless; instead listen to those who are already speaking.”[[749]](#footnote-749)

The success of these interventions (even on such a small scale) does suggest that it is possible to refigure archives as dynamic objects and archival institutions as dynamic spaces which are adaptive rather than resistant to the values of different communities. These spaces permitted the creation and re-creation of archival value from the perspectives of different subjectivities and phenomenological orientations. Such an interplay of archives and community embodies the conception of the archive as a place of constant and dynamic renewal. The archivist is decentralised as their values become only one set of ascriptions amongst many possible ascriptions. This intervention does not require the total disavowal of existing archival work. However, it requires the denaturalisation of dominant logics so that archival spaces are no longer sacred and principles for the selection, care and provision of access to collections are not self-evident. Chief amongst these is the decoupling of evidential values from the authorised archival discourse, so that evidentiality is one amongst many considerations rather than the self-evident and invisible starting point from which decisions are made. Fundamentally, it also involves acknowledging the construction of some values in opposition to others, recognising that dissent and disagreement are key components of the process of liberation. Engagement with the action research projects was most productive at the intersection of expectation and resistance. The values ascribed by archives practitioners played a provocative role in generating other values and vice a versa, which could co-exist so long as adequate space was made for them.

The relative success of these engagements arose from the interlocutionary logic of the co-production process itself. This logic assumes that the act of speaking and discussing the doing of something, including asking questions, asserting values, and declaring beliefs, acts as a force in shaping a relationship. Annalisa Sarinono has dubbed environments in which this is encouraged as “change laboratories,” as they provide people with the opportunity to “jointly analyse disturbances in daily work practices and identify contradictions in the reality and vision of their practice.”[[750]](#footnote-750) A historicised reflection on the structures, standards, and values of archival practice, bringing together archivists and others for whom archives had meaning, enabled York to become a ‘archival change laboratory,’ even if only briefly. *Briefly* is the operative word; briefly, and only with effort and discomfort. As with many short-term interventions, dominant values reasserted themselves immediately afterwards. Within a month of the end of the Hungate Histories project, the collections YPP had used on their own terms were subject to a funded programme of cataloguing and engagements as part of a project funded by the Wellcome Trust. The records were disciplined into order, connected to bureaucratic authority files. Only one member of the YPP group returned to work with the collections again under the aegis of the Wellcome programme’s volunteering group, who cleaned and repackaged the records under the guidance of a conservator.

How then, to sustain change in an institutional context? If it is not practical or within our power to dismantle the institutional structures that frame our daily lives, could we instead hold these spaces in a perpetual state of interlocutionary suspension? To aim to be in a constant dialogue, both with ourselves as practitioners and with others, not just in terms of self-reflection or ‘having a relationship,’ but at the level of semiotic mediation? Vygotsky conceived of human cognition as formed from interactions with others, with every conversation engineered “towards the construction of intersubjectivity between the actors.”[[751]](#footnote-751) In other words, what we say, how we talk, the signs we make, every action we take, communicates something about our position, which our interlocutors use to build new knowledge and vice a versa. The theory of interlocutionary logic says that to speak “is to establish with others a more or less significant space, each enunciation aiming at doing something.”[[752]](#footnote-752) And we should think of the way we speak broadly: archives are speech acts; practices are speech acts; the standards we assert are speech acts. To be in interlocutionary suspension is to be conscious, at all times, of the reality you are constructing *as a construction*; to be considering, at all times, how the features of your practice communicate your values and to work to make space for the values of others.

Such an approach demands, at its most basic, the questioning of key discursive principles, and a recognition that they “are not natural, but formed out of systems of values.”[[753]](#footnote-753) The dissonance between evidential and other value typologies must be centralised, making it visible and present for consideration and action. The distance between ‘expert’ and ‘non-expert’ perspectives has to be repeatedly collapsed, so as to facilitate the co-construction of new realities. Most importantly, interlocutionary suspension requires an epistemological scepticism about archives: what they are, how they should be kept, and how they can be managed. Historian Alan Munslow distinguishes this kind of scepticism from relativism, arguing that it is not a disavowal of “well verified factual knowledge” but an acceptance that we don’t know what this knowledge means.[[754]](#footnote-754) In other words: while archives may be recognised as a category of thing, we don’t know what these things are, how to manage them or use them until we understand the values that are being ascribed to them, in the time and place that ascription occurs. The objective is not the displacement of one typology of values and its replacement with another; nor is it the creation of a shared narrative of values – the arrival at the harmonious sweet spot invoked on the NRA-Archives mailing list. Instead, diverse and divisive values must be ascribed, respected and activated in a constant interplay of friction and renewal. This is the true remaking of archival values.

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2. Farhana Sultana, “Reflexivity, Positionality and Participatory Ethics: Negotiating Fieldwork Dilemmas in International Research,” *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies* 6, no. 3 (2007), 381-382. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Troilus and Cressida*, Act 2, Scene 2, lines 52-54. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Michelle Caswell, *Urgent Archives: Enacting Liberatory Memory Work* (London: Routledge, 2021), 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. For broad introductions to this scholarship, see Anne J. Gilliland, Sue McKemmish and Andrew J. Lau, eds., *Research in the Archival Multiverse* (Victoria, Australia: Monash University Press, 2016); James Lowry, ed., *Displaced Archives* (London: Routledge, 2017); and David A. Wallace, Wendy M. Duff, Renée Saucier and Andrew Flinn, eds., *Archives, Recordkeeping and Social Justice* (London: Routledge, 2020). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. For example, Kathryn Burns, *Into the Archives: Writing and Power in Colonial Peru* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2010) and Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Eric Ketelaar, “Archival Turns and Returns: Studies of the Archive,” in *Research in the Archival Multiverse,* eds. Anne J. Gilliland, Sue McKemmish and Andrew J. Lau (Victoria, Australia: Monash University Press, 2016), 228-268. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Caswell, *Urgent Archives*, 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
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10. Michelle Caswell, "Teaching to Dismantle White Supremacy in Archives," *The Library Quarterly* 87, no. 3 (2017): 222-235; J.J. Ghaddar and Michelle Caswell, “To Go Beyond”: Towards a Decolonial Archival Praxis,” *Archival Science* 19 (2019):71–85. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. As, for example, in the UK National Archives catalogue, where community ‘tagging’ of records has enabled members of the public to link records related to enslaved people together with the tag ‘black lives matter’. This kind of initiative, which is designed to ‘modernise historical descriptions,’ allows legacy catalogues to be updated without fundamentally disrupting the underlying value systems of established practice. The National Archives, “Help us tag records in our collections,” *The National Archives*, accessed Jan 4, 2022, https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/tags/index/whataretags. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. The NRA in the title is the acronym for the National Register of Archives, an index of information about the extent and content of archives in the UK managed by The National Archives, signalling the origins of the list as a national network for archival institutions and archivists. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Saima Nasar, “Remembering Edward Colston: histories of slavery, memory, and black globality,” *Women's History Review*, 29:7 (2020): 1218-1225. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. [name redacted]. ‘thinking about statues...’ Archives-NRA Jiscmail listserv, 10 June 2020. <https://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/wa-jisc.exe?A2=ind2006&L=ARCHIVES-NRA&O=D&P=68388>. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. All of these posts can be read in the mailing list archive for June 10-13, 2020. Accessed Jan 8, 2022. https://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/wa-jisc.exe?A0=ARCHIVES-NRA. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Alicia Chilcott, Kirsty Fife, James Lowry, Jenny Moran, Arike Oke, Anna Sexton, and Jass Thethi, “Against Whitewashing: The Recent History of Anti-Racist Action in the British Archives Sector,” *The International Journal of Information, Diversity and Inclusion* 5, no. 1 (2021): 47-49. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. ‘End Structural Racism in Britain’s Archive Sector’. Change.org, June 2020. Accessed Jan 8, 2022. http://www.change.org/p/archvists-end-structural-racism-in-britain-s-archives-sector. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Ketelaar, “Archival Turns and Returns”; Alexandrina Buchanan and Geoffrey Yeo. “Strangely Unfamiliar: Ideas of the Archive from outside the Discipline” in *The Future of Archives and Recordkeeping,* edited by Jennie Hill (London: Facet, 2010), 37-61. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. It is not possible to thoroughly explore this literature here. For an overview, see Yeo, “Concepts of Record (1),” 315-343 and Geoffrey Yeo, “Concepts of Record (2): Prototypes and Boundary Objects,” *The American Archivist* 71 (2008): 118-143. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Sue McKemmish, “Document, Record, Archive, Archives” in *Archives: Recordkeeping in Society*, ed. Sue McKemmish et.al (Wagga Wagga, N.S.W: Charles Stuart University, 2005), 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. McKemmish, “Document, Record, Archive, Archives,” 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Anne J. Gilliland, “Enduring Paradigm, New Opportunities: The Value of the Archival Perspective in the Digital Environment,” in Michèle V. Cloonan, *Preserving Our Heritage: Perspectives from Antiquity to the Digital Age* (Neals-Schuman, ALA Editions, 2014), pp.150–161 [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
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24. A.A. Schomburg, “The Negro Digs up his Past,” *The New Negro* (1925): 671; Hannah J.M. Ishmael, “Reclaiming History: Arthur Schomburg,” *Archives and Manuscripts* 46:3 (2018), 269-288 [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
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26. See for example, Verne Harris, “Claiming Less, Delivering More: A Critique of Positivist Formulations on Archives in South Africa,” *Archivaria* 44 (1997): 132-141; Terry Cook, “What is Past is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift,” *Archivaria* 43 (1997): 17-63; Brien Brothman, “The Past that Archives Keep: Memory, History and the Preservation of Archival Records,” *Archivaria* 51 (2001): 48-80, and Joan M. Schwartz and Terry Cook, “Archives, Records and Power: The Making of Modern Memory,” *Archival Science* 2 (2002): 1-19. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Andrew Flinn and Mary Stevens, “’It is noh mistri, wi mekin histri’ Telling Our Own Story: Independent and Community Archives in the UK, Challenging and Subverting the Mainstream,” in *Community Archives: The Shaping of Memory*, ed. Jeanette A. Bastian and Ben Alexander (London: Facet, 2009), 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Jeanette A. Bastian, “The Records of Memory, the Archive of Identity: Celebrations Texts and Archival Sensibility.” *Archival Science* 13, No. 2-3 (2013): 121. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. McKemmish, “Document, record, archive, archives,” 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Andrew Flinn, Mary Stevens & Elizabeth Shepherd, “Whose Memories, Whose Archives? Independent Community Archives, Autonomy and the Mainstream,” *Archival Science* 9, no. 2-3 (2009): 75. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
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34. Verne Harris, *Archives and Justice: A South African Perspective* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2007), 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (London: Routledge, 2002), 128. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Harris, *Archives and Justice*, 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain,* 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Caitlin DeSilvey, “Art and Archive: Memory-work on a Montana Homestead”, *Journal of Historical Geography* 33 No. 4 (2007), 897. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
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45. John Schofield, “Heritage Expertise and the Everyday: Citizens and Authority in the Twenty First Century,” in *Who Needs Experts? Counter-mapping Cultural Heritage*, ed. John Schofield, 1-12. (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
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47. Robert Hewison and John Holden, “Public Value as a Framework for Analysing the Value of Heritage: The Ideas” in *Capturing the Public Value of Heritage: The Proceedings of the London Conference, 25-26 January 2006*, ed. Kate Clark (Swindon: English Heritage, 2006), 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
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60. Heritage Lottery Fund, *Broadening the Horizons of Heritage: The Heritage Lottery Fund Strategic Plan, 2002-2007* (London: Heritage Lottery Fund, 2002) 1; 3. Accessed Jan 8, 2022. <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20080610172642/http://www.hlf.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/EE1EBF13-EB5E-4C01-9492-6A007F4D1982/0/strategicplan.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
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130. In 2021 Laura Millar spoke to the title ‘Just Temperate and Brave: The Importance of Evidence – and Evidence Keepers – in Chaotic Times,’ directly referencing Jenkinson’s notion of the archivist as ‘trusted and trustworthy guardians’ centralising evidence as a “bulwark” and the “essential foundation for justice, reconciliation, democracy and peace.” In 2019 Luciana Duranti spoke to ‘Jenkinson Disrupted?’; in 2017 Anne Gilliland used Jenkinson’s notion of “the physical and moral defence of the record” as her starting point to discuss archival ethics. See <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/information-studies/jenkinson-lectures>. Accessed Aug 19, 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. Email circulated to ARCHIVES-NRA jiscmail list, “Sir Hilary Jenkinson’s grave,” Mar 19, 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. For example, the definition of archives provided in the current *International Standard for information and documentation* *in electronic environments* makes explicit use of Jenkinson’s phraseology and criteria. It states they are:

     ‘Materials created or received by a person, family or organisation, public or private, in the conduct of their affairs and preserved…as evidence of the functions and responsibilities of their creator…’

     This exact phrasing is replicated in the *Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology* by Richard Pearse-Moses published by the Society of American Archivists in 2005, based on an earlier version of 1992. [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
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134. Ibid, 12-13. [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
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136. Ibid, 12; 38-39. [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. Ishmael, “Reclaiming History.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. Ibid, 271. [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. Cook, ‘What is Past is Prologue,” 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
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