Archives & Records Association
Cumann Cartlann agus Taifead
Ireland/Éire

Spring 2020 Newsletter

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A Word from the Chair

Dear Member,

Welcome to the spring 2020 newsletter, and a huge thank you to all our contributors.

Firstly, I hope you are all keeping well in these trying times. I know many of us will be working from home, and job situations may be uncertain. So, please look after the physical and mental well-being of yourself and those around you!

As you know, ARA Ireland has postponed our planned training event which was scheduled to be held on 26 March in the Irish Architectural Archive. The seminar which focused on digital archives promised to be an interesting and informative session and we are hoping to run the event later in the year.

The ARA Ireland AGM which was planned for 26 March has also been postponed until later in the year. Can I remind you that there are several openings for committee positions including Chairperson, Campaigns Officer, and Newsletter Editor. We are also looking for an Irish representative for the ARA Legislation and Standards Working Group. Nominations are open to all members, so if you are interested in putting yourself forward for any position or need further details, please email us

arairelandregion@gmail.com.

In this edition of the newsletter you will find the first in a new series of articles on conservation. The series 'Simple Care of Collections' will offer simple conservation guidance for archivists. A big thank you to Zoë Reid for this edition's article, 'Flat Out' – How to Unfold Archival Documents Safely'.

Once again, please stay well and safe!

Best wishes,

Gerard Byrne
ARA Ireland Chair

A New Home for ESB Archives

Deirdre McParland
Senior Archivist, ESB Archives



Exterior View of ESB Archives, St. Margarets Road, Finglas.

From humble beginnings, ESB Archives was established in 1991. Our archives and offices were housed in an old stationary store and warehouse in Harold's Cross, just off the canal. The building was not fit for purpose with no environmental controls and was prone to fluctuating temperatures and humidity throughout the year. With no reading room facility, researchers shared a small area in our staff offices. The home did not reflect the inspirational content to be found in our collections.

After many years of collecting and preserving our most important records, similar to many archives, we were running out of space. With over 8,000 archive boxes documenting over 90 years of ESB history, we were completed maxed out of storage on shelves. We had also inherited a backlog of over 500 crates of records. Stored in our accessions room or as we came to rename it 'the room of doom', the records were inaccessible and archival value remained unknown.

Spanning a period over twenty years, there were many attempts at securing a permanent purpose-built home for ESB Archives. The appetite and momentum for a new purpose-built archive was finally achieved. Following much planning and surveying potential new sites for a dedicated archive building, benchmarking other archives in Ireland and the UK, the plans for a new purpose-built archive were approved and finalised in 2015. A site adjacent to ESB Networks, St. Margaret's Road, Finglas was to become the new home for ESB Archives.



Accessions room in Harolds Cross, aka 'The Room of Doom'.

Project Plan

As archivists, one of our aims is to have intellectual control on our collections, so we can continue to learn, find and make available new information. Knowing our collections is also critical when prioritising future cataloguing and digitisation projects. When a new archives team was appointed in 2015, our initial brief was to develop a digital platform, www.esbarchives.ie. In addition, we prioritised leveraging the profile of our archives through internal and external collaborations and

enhancing the reputation of ESB. The backlog of accessions remained on the back burner for the first few years of our appointments. However, once the construction of our new archives building commenced in the summer of 2018, we sprinted into action and prioritized appraising and accessioning the backlogs of our collections in preparation for this once in a lifetime move.

The first step was to survey the entire contents of our collections and identify different formats and storage of our archives, from boxes on shelves, pallets and crates. A total of 8,000 boxes and c. 500 crates of records were surveyed, along with 13 pallets of maps. Once this initial inventory was completed, specific tasks were delegated to all the team to ensure the project would be achieved on target. We had a core team of four including two archivists, myself and my colleague Tanya Keyes. During the summer months, we received additional resources with two students temporarily joining the team for three months.

Appraising and arranging such a vast collection was both mentally and physically challenging. As the project manager for the entire preparation and move, Gantt charts soon became my BFF and were instrumental in ensuring that all the team remained on track with meeting weekly targets.

I produced weekly and monthly progress reports to the team ensuring that all of our team were aligned with our individual goals. Motivational bribery in the form of extra quantities of chocolate, biscuits and archive cake also helped team spirits and provided much needed energy!



Appraisal days clothing

Throughout the project safety was paramount. When working with previously unprocessed collections, we did discover some mould damaged records so overcoats, goggles, facemasks, gloves, although not the most glamourous accessories soon became our daily uniform. Mould damaged records were isolated from the main collection ensuring no cross – contamination in our new home.

There were many joyful moments throughout the year. As we ploughed through previously unopened crates, we discovered some significant collections including a record series belonging to the Chief Accountant dating right back to 1929 offering a bird's eye view of decision-making processes over a fifty-year period, past press releases, previously unseen photographic albums with descriptions (the archivists dream) and many more collections.

Preservation

To ensure that all collections were boxed and preserved securely during transit and into their new home, we re-housed thousands of documents, photographs and glass plate negatives from their original storage into archive standard acid free

sleeves, folders and boxes. Unique codes were provided to previously unprocessed collections ensuring everything was accounted for and matched to databases.

The final stage of our preparation was a final count of our entire archives. With exact box numbers for each of our collections, all records were allocated a specific row and shelf number in either our paper, film or media repository with corresponding dates for the upcoming move. We also took this opportunity to merge previously scattered collections, further enhancing the intellectual control of our collection.

On the Move



First day of collections moving from Harolds Cross

Following a tendering process, the physical transfer of our archives by a specialized removal company began at the end of June 2019. We operated the move with military precision, everything was counted and verified with an average transfer of 1200 boxes a day. Our paper records were transferred over a 10-day period, 10-hour days, averaging out at two deliveries a day. Our artefacts, audio visual, film and map archives followed soon afterwards.



Selfie Time – Tanya receiving the collections on the first day in Finglas.

We supervised and managed the move at our two locations, I was based in Harold's Cross and Tanya was based in Finglas, ensuring great care and correct order of collections were maintained throughout the move. We remained in constant communication with each other and several 'roger that' calls every day, along with the odd selfie.

Business as Usual

Throughout the project, we managed all our other work commitments, researching enquiries,

delivering specialized talks, curating exhibitions and media interviews. Internally, we continued to communicate and engage throughout the company on the project, utilizing our internal social media engagement platform yammer. We provided weekly updates to the company on our progress to ensure our visibility remained strong throughout the year.

The Building



ESB Chairman Ellvena Graham and Pat O'Doherty ESB Chief Executive officially opening ESB Archives

We officially moved into our new home at the end of July 2019. Following a settling in period to allow time to address snags, the building was officially opened on the 29th January by ESB Chairman Ellvena Graham OBE.

Our archive adheres to the newest international standards for conservation of cultural heritage, BS EN 16893. The ESB Project Brief called for a high-quality design offering a stable environment utilising low-energy passive design principles and offering a durable, low maintenance solution. Bearing the change of archive building standards from BS 5454 to BS EN 16893, we invited our architect along to the Passive Aggressive Conference, '*Changing the Climate in Archival and Museum Storage*' held in October 2018. As our design was based on a low-energy passive design in the first instance, few adjustments were required to account for the new standard.

The building was specifically designed to accommodate best practice in archive management, with accommodation arranged to optimise and align with the natural flow of the archive process. The building includes three repositories, accessions room, isolation room, cataloguing and digitising room, staff offices, reading room, exhibition and meeting room. It has been assessed as achieving a BER A1 rating and is currently targeting a BREAM Excellent rating. No surprises that electricity is the primary source of energy for heating and cooling. Solar panels installed on the flat roof over the staff accommodation supplement the building's energy requirements. The green roof adds insulation to the repository to protect it from the extremes of summer sun. It also slows down rainwater leaving the roof as part of a "sustainable urban drainage scheme".



Solar panels supplement the buildings energy requirements.

In addition to meeting the required standards for an archive, we also included a brief to have the archive positioned as a center of excellence in heritage

innovation and expertise. This resulted in the design of a dedicated multi-purpose research and meeting facility open by appointment to welcome all researchers, visitors and ESB staff. We now use this space on a daily basis to inspire, welcome and provide specialized workshops, events and seminars to teams throughout ESB. By doing so we authenticate our company strategy and values. Knowing, sharing and understanding where we have come from is the platform to motivate, inspire and instill a sense of pride in us all and to our customers.



Reading Room utilised for specialised talks and workshops for ESB staff

Brighter Future



Interior view of main repository



Interior view of reading room

Our experienced archive team are experts in leveraging the content of our archives and specialists in business archives. Together, our specialised experience in the utilisation of our archives content, speaking at national and international conferences and seminars and now our new archive building has provided an even more visible platform for the archive team to advocate for the archives profession. We are delighted to share and will continue to welcome and offer advice to many of our archive colleagues over the coming months and years.

I think I speak for all our team, when I say that every day we are like kids in a sweet shop! The rows of shelves in our storage vaults are all electronically driven. We now have a beautiful and warm light filled office and the rattley windows and howling winds of our Harold's Cross office are alas a distant memory! The Harolds Cross site was sold in the summer and the cost of our new archive was largely offset by the sale.

We continue to look to the future as we have the capacity to preserve 20,000 boxes of archive records in all formats. All our repositories maintain the correct temperature and humidity levels for our archives, have four-hour fire protection and offer unparalled security.

Our new archives building was a collaborative project and involved the expertise and determination of so many talented people in ESB including our architects, engineers, planners, surveyors to name a few. The establishment of our new archive underlines ESB's longstanding commitment to preserving the rich stories since its foundation in 1927 and ensures the continued preservation of our archives for generations to come.

Announcing the 'Digital Preservation of Reproductive Health Resources: Archiving the 8th' project

Digital Repository of Ireland

The Digital Repository of Ireland is celebrating the launch of a new project to archive material relating to the 2018 referendum on the 8th Amendment. DRI will provide long-term preservation and access to at-risk materials generated by grassroots women's reproductive health movements during the campaign in the run up to the referendum.

The three-year project is funded by a Wellcome Trust Research Resources Award in Humanities and Social Science. It will collect, catalogue and preserve much of the born-digital content generated by campaigners.

DRI will work closely with organisations which were involved in the campaign, including Terminations for Medical Reasons, Together for Yes, Coalition to Repeal the 8th and the Abortion Rights Campaign. Because of the voluntary nature of many of these organisations, this data is now at risk of being lost in the aftermath of the referendum as hard drives fail and websites go down over time. The project will help campaigners to identify digital materials suitable for archiving and to prepare it for long-term preservation.

Working with the Irish Qualitative Data Archive (IQDA), DRI will also preserve the data from a number of research projects, such as 'Re(al) Productive Justice Project'[1], 'Physician Advocacy and Reproductive Rights in Ireland', and the 'What Works Project'[2].

Materials preserved as part of this project will be made available to researchers and to the general public. Selected material of European relevance may also be aggregated to the Europeana platform.

A wealth of material to be archived

The materials to be archived include a wealth of posters, leaflets, emails, websites and organisational documents such as minutes and agendas. These records and ephemera document the process of referendum campaigning by grassroots organisations.



Screenshot from An Coimisiún Reifrinn/Referendum Commission, *Your Vote Means Everything: The Independent Guide to the Referendum on the Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy*. Source: Refcom.ie

The data also includes hundreds of stories shared by Irish women who have travelled for terminations outside of Ireland since the introduction of the 8th Amendment in 1983. These often harrowing

accounts illustrate the broad range of circumstances and factors that influenced Irish women's decisions on abortion.

The material to be archived will be of great interest to researchers concerned with women's reproductive health, Irish referenda, grass-roots campaigning and social change in Ireland, among other research topics.

This women-led project was launched on International Women's Day

The project is led by three women researchers, Dr. Kathryn Cassidy from Trinity College Dublin, Dr. Aileen O'Carroll from Maynooth University and Dr. Natalie Harrower from the Royal Irish Academy, and was launched to coincide with International Women's Day on March 8th.

The project will also investigate best-practice in cataloguing and archiving these types of materials. In particular, it will explore suitable vocabularies for potentially controversial Reproductive Health topics, as well as investigating methods and tools for archiving social media and web-based content.

Lead researcher on the project, Dr Kathryn Cassidy, welcomed the funding: 'there is a window of opportunity here to capture and preserve the conversation that occurred around the referendum, a conversation which took place to a large degree online, on websites and social media. It's really important to act now before some of these sites become unavailable. This funding is therefore very important and timely. It will allow us to make this data available on the DRI platform, and make it a part of the historical and contemporary social and cultural record that the DRI aims to preserve'. Dr Aileen O'Carroll of the Irish Qualitative Data Archive, Maynooth University, said: 'we know that in previous referendums the records of the groups involved in campaigning have been lost. Today these records are located on hard drives and in email boxes and are even more vulnerable than in the past'.



Photo by Aileen O'Carroll

DRI Director Dr Natalie Harrower added: 'the campaign leading to the referendum on the 8th Amendment to the Irish constitution marked an extremely significant moment in Irish history, with passionate arguments from both sides, and personal stories being presently publicly in unprecedented ways. The impact of the referendum is not just its outcome, but also the mark that the debates, processes and stories make on history from various angles: social, political, electoral, medical and women's history. We are grateful to the Wellcome Trust for investing in this project, and hope that the archive will serve as a rich source of this history for researchers and the general public for many years to come. We are seeking to represent the widest array of voices possible, and encourage organisations involved in

the referendum campaigns - from all perspectives - to get in touch with the DRI.'

DRI is keen to hear from organisations with relevant materials

DRI is keen to hear from organisations with relevant materials from either side of the campaign. Queries can be sent to the DRI team at: dri@ria.ie.

Endnotes:

1. *Re(al) Productive Justice: Gender and Disability perspectives, funded by Wellcome.*

2. *What Works? Sharing Best Practices in how Civil Society Organisations use the Internet in Organising and Building for Socio-Economic Rights and Trust. Funded by the Irish Research Council (IRC) and sponsored by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC).*

The Irish National Committee of the Blue Shield: 2020 Update

Zoë Reid
Chair, Irish National Committee of the Blue Shield

In September 2012 the Irish National Committee of the Blue Shield (INCBS) gained accreditation from the international governing body Blue Shield. The Blue Shield network, often referred to as the cultural equivalent of the Red Cross, was formed in response to the changes in international law and today works globally to protect cultural heritage in emergency situations.

One of the major achievements of the INCBS since then has been to promote the ratification of the UNESCO 1954 Hague Convention. In August 2018 the government of Ireland ratified the 1954 Hague Convention and the 2nd Protocol.

The INCBS consists of two representatives of each of the nominating bodies - International Council of Museums (ICOM), International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), International Council of Archives (ICA) and International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA). The committee also has the mandate to co-opt other members who have an active role in the mission of Blue Shield. Members will serve a maximum of four years and be eligible for reappointment for a further term of four years.

The Irish committee are indebted to the work of previous committee members (2012-2020) Lar Joye, Cathy Daly, Deirdre McDermott and Kasandra O'Connell for their hard work to ensure that the key objective of the committee was achieved in 2018. A special note of acknowledgement should go to Lar Joye who as Chair of the committee was unfailing in his drive and dedication.



Lar Joye, out-going Chair of the Irish National Committee of the Blue Shield speaking at the 'All the Remained' event on the Four Courts Blaze of 1922.

At his last public event as chair Lar gave a presentation on the role of Blue Shield and the work of the committee in Ireland, at 'All the Remained'. This was part of the Out of the Ashes lecture series, which in its second year considers the deliberate targeting of cultural heritage as a means to control social memory and to erase identities. This event on the Four Courts Blaze of 1922 included a panel discussion with Catriona Crowe MRIA, Former Senior Archivist, National Archives of Ireland and Zoë Reid, Senior Conservator, National Archives of Ireland.

The current committee comprises of:

ICA: Zoë Reid (Chair) and Daniel Ayiotis

ICOMOS Ireland: Helena Bergin and Fergus McCormick

IFLA: Elizabethanne Boran (Secretary)

ICOM Ireland: Jessica Baldwin and Hugh Maguire

CPP/ World Heritage Expert: Patrizia La Piscopia

The new committee is now focusing on the continued promotion of Blue Shield, through public events introducing Blue Shield to the public and the wider heritage audience and specific training events. During 2020 keys aims are:

• Heritage Week 2020 - 17th August, an INCBS event marking two years since the ratification by Ireland of the 1954 Hague convention.

• A dedicated INCBS website.

• A short training course held outside of Dublin.

For further details and updates please check:

• Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/IrishBlueShield

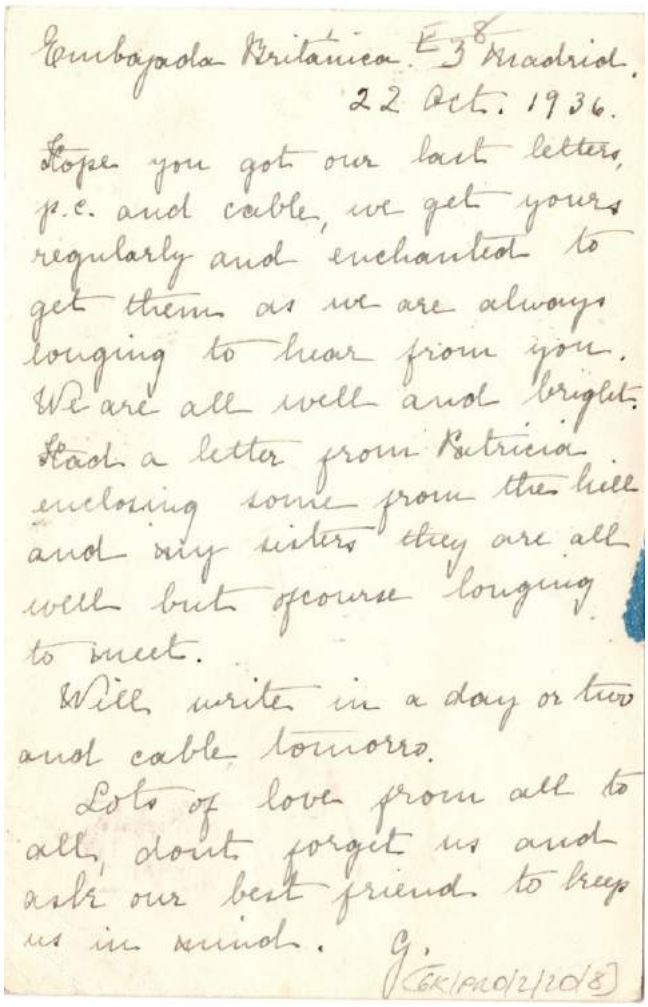
• Twitter: @IrishNCBS

• Website: http://www.icomos.ie/index.php/blue-shield/objectives

• https://theblueshield.org/

Letters from the Spanish Civil War, IBVM Archives

Áine McHugh
IBVM (Loreto), Institute & Irish Province Archives



Embajada Britanica. E 3 Madrid.
22 Oct. 1936.

Hope you got our last letters, p.c. and cable, we get yours regularly and enchanted to get them as we are always longing to hear from you. We are all well and bright. Had a letter from Patricia enclosing some from the hill and my sister they are all well but ofcourse longing to meet.

Will write in a day or two and cable tomorrs.

Lots of love from all to all, dont forget us and ask our best friend to keep us in mind. G.

Postcard from Madrid 1936

A newly released collection of correspondence from the IBVM (Loreto) Institute Archives captures the daily lives of IBVM (Loreto) Sisters 'trapped' in Spain during the Spanish Civil War (1936 – 1939). Stored amongst the papers of the Superior General the letters, telegrams and postcards, of the Sisters in Seville, Madrid and Zalla provide unique eye witness accounts of the Spanish Civil War. In July 1936, many Irish born IBVM Sisters in Spain were evacuated by the British embassy; Spanish born Sisters were excluded, and in the following weeks they dispersed into private accommodation, forced to disguise their identity as women religious. Negotiating their difficult circumstances, the Sisters in Madrid availed of the protection of the British diplomats and the British diplomatic post bag enabled regular correspondence with evacuated Sisters now in Ireland, in which the Sisters detailed their enforced separation, isolation, hunger, fear, anxiety, and constant desire for evacuation. The letters from Seville, Madrid and Zalla reveal the daily lives of the Sisters at a time of crisis, their adaptability in undertaking new ministries, personal resilience, and creation of sympathetic local and international support networks, the support and protection offered by British diplomatic officials. A unique and unparalleled collection, it offers potential in exploring and understanding the lives of women religious in times of persecution and war.

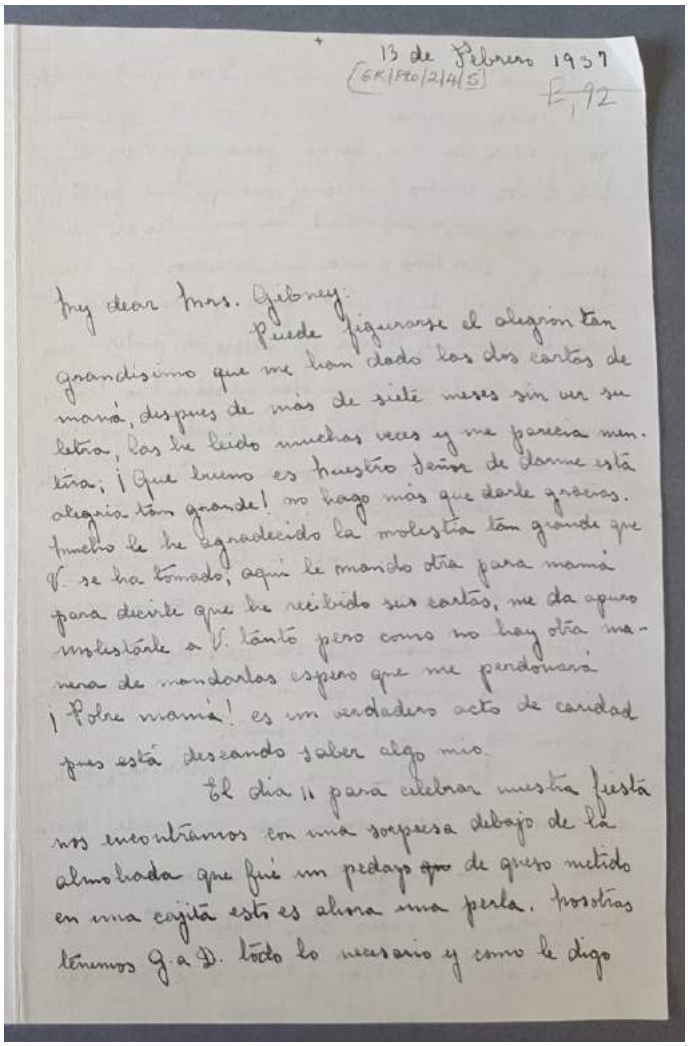
The Spanish Civil War officially commenced on 17-18 July 1936, when a coup d'état led by the Spanish Republican Armed Forces, attacked government forces. In response the British Embassy in Spain immediately evacuated its remaining citizens, including many of the Irish born IBVM Sisters in Spain, including their Provincial Superior, M. Baptist Gibney IBVM. The Spanish born Sisters were not allowed to join the evacuation and some Irish born Sisters chose to remain with them in solidarity. Many of the evacuees were eventually brought to Loreto Abbey Rathfarnham, and thereafter engaged in a long

and sustained correspondence with the Sisters who remained in Spain. The Sisters lived outside the convents, in houses and apartments, disguising their identity as women religious and coming together occasionally for meals and constantly hoping for evacuation. The British Embassy offered protection to both the convent buildings and the Sisters, and perhaps as importantly, a vital source of communication, as letters and parcels were sent through the diplomats. A Loreto convent in Hertfordshire, England (St Alban's) became a very effective Loreto parcel depot! Sorting post from Spain, relaying it onto Loreto Abbey Rathfarnham or indeed returning it to Spain, to family members and relatives living in hiding, the community in St Alban's provided a life-line for the Spanish Sisters. Food parcels were a highlight!



Two postcards sent from Madrid. Note the redirection from St Alban's to Dublin, both carry the stamp of the censor 'CENSURADA', even that which is marked by the stamp of 'William J. Sturges.

Food in the cities, especially Madrid, was increasingly in short supply, there were often long queues for food rations and the diet was meagre and bland. For some, rice and garlic were daily staples, on one occasion potatoes were described as a 'banquet'. Tinned soups, stocks, chocolate, tinned milk and coffee were sent and gladly received, from time to time the parcel was raffled amongst the Sisters, and letters are filled with descriptions of the most delicious coffee or warmed milk in a diet otherwise of rice and garlic. The food parcels were not always filled with the greatest insight, on one occasion a loaf of bread from St Albans arrived "*like a flower pot ready to bloom, all green and as stone, it was fed to a dog*!"



A letter in Spanish, February 1939. English language translations of all Spanish letters are available.

The Sisters eventually secured evacuation, through the Red Cross, the British military or through their own agency, reflecting their ingenuity and independence. The relief which greeted their newfound freedom was expressed by M. Gabriel Latorre IBVM, from Habas, Northern France: "*Today, even though it seems a lie, we've been here a week. It's peaceful and quiet, totally unlike our old life, it's like a dream. We're leading a life of great repose and I think that in a few days we're going to be completely replenished because this year was spent in the middle of so much tension that it has left us utterly exhausted*."

A surprising culinary addition was the discovery of a recipe for "raisin jam"', reflecting the "*Now, I'll tell you how to make the raisin jam*" , which we have not yet had the opportunity to put to the test! For those who are interested, in these days of enforced isolation and working from home, the recipe for raisin jam is:

"*The raisins are cooked and passed through a strainer. To that add for every quarter kilo of raisins one glass of apple juice and orange peel but it is better with apple juice*."



A recipe for "raisin jam" is included in the letters.

For those who wish to try it out, be warned, "*I make very little because it doesn't have sugar and turns bad quickly and when it's past it the apple juice separates and thickens. I don't really like it and it isn't very presentable either*."

For further information please contact the Archivist, IBVM (Loreto) Institute & Irish Province Archives, 55 St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2, telephone: +353 1 662 0158 or email: archives@loreto.ie.

Endnotes:

1: *GK/PRO/2/9/12*

2: *GK/PRO/2/18/5*

3: *GK/PRO/2/1/17, English language translation*

4: *GK/PRO/2/1/17, English language translation*

(This article was previously published in 'Archive News' Feb. 2020, the newsletter of the IBVM, Irish Province Archives.)

Simple Care of Collections Series: 'Flat Out' – How to Unfold Archival Documents Safely

Zoë Reid
Senior Conservator/Collection Care, National Archives of Ireland

A great many records that come into the care of an archivist or a conservator arrive in a state of deterioration. The three key treatments that a conservator can apply to an archive collection are surface cleaning, flattening and repair. Under each of these terms sit an extensive range of treatment options dependant on the papers, writing material, size of the documents and condition.

Surface cleaning is often thought of as the first step, however, in so many archives, documents are folded or rolled which means they are very difficult to handle whilst trying to clean them and therefore at risk of damage. Getting documents flat should therefore be the primary step that needs to be taken before any other conservation or archival activities, such as arrangement, pagination and surface cleaning begin.

Folding paper

Paper is often folded without thinking about it, it is folded to make it smaller, to make it fit into an envelope, but what is that fold really doing to the paper?

Paper is made from lots of fibres all matted and woven together. When a fold is created in a paper some of the fibres along that fold are broken. Other fibres bend, and the paper remains intact. Once broken those fibres will stay broken even if the paper is opened out and flattened. Repeating the action of folding and unfolding the paper will cause more fibres to break and eventually the paper will tear. Every fold in a sheet of paper weakens the document.



Damage caused by folding

Flattening documents safely

Caution should be taken when opening out folded papers; depending on how the paper was made and the conditions in which it has been stored, each document should be treated with care. Some papers will have retained flexibility, while others will have become very fragile over time. Paper has a memory: it remembers the folds, creases and curls.

Getting documents flat should in many cases be the primary step that needs to be taken before any other conservation or archival activities, such as

arrangement, pagination and surface cleaning.



Unfolding

The aim of any humidification treatment is to reintroduce moisture into the paper to relax the fibres. In her 2002 publication on 'Practical Considerations for Humidifying and Flattening paper' Stephanie Watkins reminds us that 'Water is a tool and can be used in many forms (gas or liquid) and size (droplet, mist, or vapor)'[1]. In many cases, especially with brittle papers, moisture does indeed have to be reintroduced before any physical manipulation, opening of the document, takes place.

Due to the hygroscopic nature of paper, it can easily absorb moisture from the air; there are, however, a few practical steps that can be taken to ease out the folds and curls on a document if the paper is not too fragile. Too often we ignore the obvious in favour of elaborate techniques; time and a little pressure can be effective tools.

Opening a folded or a rolled document and placing it flat on a tabletop with some weights in the corner, will expose the paper to the humidity in the room and will result in the document 'settling out', reducing the paper memory. How long this will take will depend on the thickness of the paper and the ambient humidity in the room. It is possible though to layer documents on top of one another, the addition of a large flat weight such as a board to add pressure will also be of benefit. This works particularly well with vellum document or documents on heavier paper.



Glass weights used to hold a document open

For documents with a lot of creasing these can be smoothed out with the hand, small tools such as spatula might help to unfold corners or areas bent in on themselves. Flattening out a document in the centre of a pile of 100 pages will see a reduction in the paper's memory of the folds over time, making the document easier to handle.

Unfolding some documents and housing them flat in mylar will over time also provide satisfactory results; once folded documents are flat and placed in a pile in a drawer, with a light board on top or simply the weight of the other documents in the pile, the creases and folds will ease out and the paper will lose the tendency to fold back in on itself.

Patience is a great skill for any conservator or archivist to have.

Endnotes:

1. *Watkins, Stephanie Practical Considerations for Humidifying and Flattening Paper AIC The Book and Paper Group Annual 21 (2002) 61-76*.

Conradh na Gaeilge Collection, NUI Galway

Niamh Ní Charra
Project Archivist and Project Manager

In 2017, Conradh na Gaeilge announced they would be donating their archive to NUI Galway where it is to be safely stored and made accessible to researchers and interested parties in the James Hardiman Library Archives. In the summer of 2018 it was subsequently announced that the material had been transferred, and the identity of the archivist engaged to process the collection was revealed. That lucky archivist is me, and I have been working my way through this amazing collection ever since.

Further on I describe the steps undertaken to process such an enormous collection and the work completed to date. But first an introduction on the organisation itself and what it contains:

What is Conradh na Gaeilge?

Conradh na Gaeilge [The Gaelic League] is an organisation which was founded in 1893 to promote the Irish language in Ireland and abroad and the collection encompasses material from this period through to 2018 when it was accessioned.

Following on from several 19th century organisations promoting the Gaelic Revival, Conradh na Gaeilge became the main organisation to spearhead the Irish language revival. Its existence has subsequently coincided and overlapped with the revolutionary years leading up to and including the War of Independence, The Civil War and the foundation of the Irish Free State, the early years of the Republic, the turbulent period known as the Troubles which saw human rights issues and political strife come to the fore in Northern Ireland, through to the emergence of a relatively prosperous state. As such the material gives a unique insight into the last 125 years or more of the history of the island of Ireland, with many of its members prominent and active in a wider context.

What is in the Collection?

The main body of material comprises records generated by Conradh na Gaeilge headquarters, although it also includes material returned to them by various branches in Ireland and abroad, most notably the London branch.

Over the course of its existence, staff were actively involved in promoting and observing the use of Irish across all aspects of everyday activities, and as such the collection includes material relating to the running of classes and events including the annual Seachtain na Gaeilge campaign and Oireachtas competitions. It also includes material relating to Irish language publications, to correspondence with businesses, Government departments, and members of the general public, and to research carried out on minority languages elsewhere.

A significant portion of material covers several language rights and fundraising campaigns. In the latter half of the 20th century Conradh na Gaeilge,

along with other organisations, was instrumental in community campaigns which led to the creation of Irish language radio and television stations (Raidió na Gaeltachta and TG4 respectively), to the enactment of the Official Languages Act [14 July 2003], and to making Irish an official language of the European Union [1 January 2007]. Campaign material in the collection also includes documents relating to prisoners' rights and civil rights in Northern Ireland, in particular during the period of the Hunger Strikes [1980-1981].

Project Plan

When I started working on this project, it is safe to say the work before me was daunting. Three large cairns of boxes lay before me, many bursting at the seams. To date this collection is the largest ever to be transferred to NUIG. By the time I had gone through all of these boxes, I estimated the equivalent of 850 bankers boxes had been processed. While it is always a good idea to have a project plan, for a collection as vast as this it is absolutely vital.



One of three piles of boxes waiting to be processed.

As all professional archivists will know, there are multiple steps which need to be completed before a collection can be made available: know what you have, make it safe, appraise it, decide on an arrangement, catalogue it, consider what should be made accessible, digitise where possible and suitable and then release it. This of course makes no reference to all the other work including outreach and communication with donors and special interest groups which also takes place. Due to the sheer vastness of this collection I decided to divide the overall project into three sections.

Phase 1 - The First Pass: Box-listing and rehousing the collection.

Phase 2 - Arrangement: Deciding on a logical arrangement.

Phase 3 - Cataloguing: The fun bit!

In smaller collections, it is sometimes easier and desirable to carry out these steps simultaneously but for such an enormous and sprawling collection, tempting though it may be to start at the first box and go straight to listing in detail, it is vital to stick to these steps to ensure the entire collection is made safe. This discipline ensures that at the end of the contract duration a situation where one box is completely listed and another box hasn't been touched is avoided.

Phase 1 – the First Pass

It took seven months to complete this first stage, after which the collection was made physically safe, a box list was completed which gave information on what was in the collection, excess duplicate files were removed and either returned to the donor or securely destroyed as per donor agreement, and published books were removed to be handled separately.

At the completion of this phase the collection was stored safely in 615 archive boxes.



Boxes on shelves.



Example of duplicate flyers.

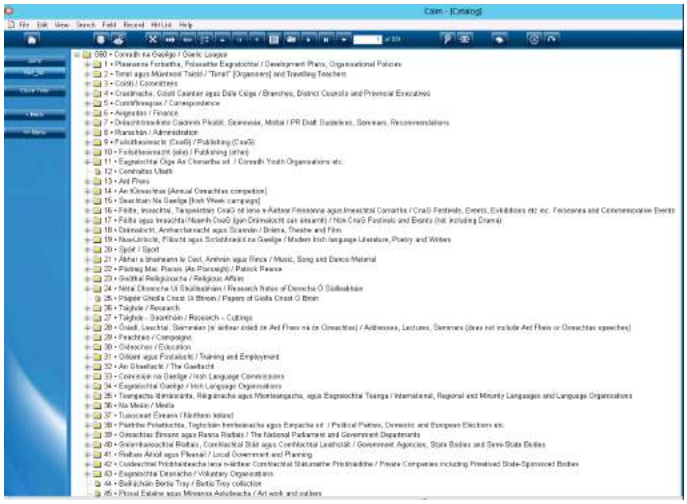
Phase 2 – Arrangement

The next stage in the process was to decide on an arrangement. This stage was broken into two parts:

- Intellectual arrangement
- Physical Arrangement

Intellectual arrangement

Firstly I needed to come up with a logical arrangement that made sense of the collection and made everything as discoverable as possible. Normally with a collection the archivist would try to retain any existing arrangement within it. Unfortunately this was not possible here. During the 125+ year period covered in the collection Conradh headquarters moved six times, and had 32 presidents covering 35 terms. Material was stored in several locations including offsite storage, and had no discernible arrangement. Different secretaries had different work methods over the decades, and the material had clearly been moved and mixed up several times from when it was first generated. (This is completely normal for such a large and long running organisation!)



A screenshot of the record tree in CALM showing all 45 series.

Physical Arrangement

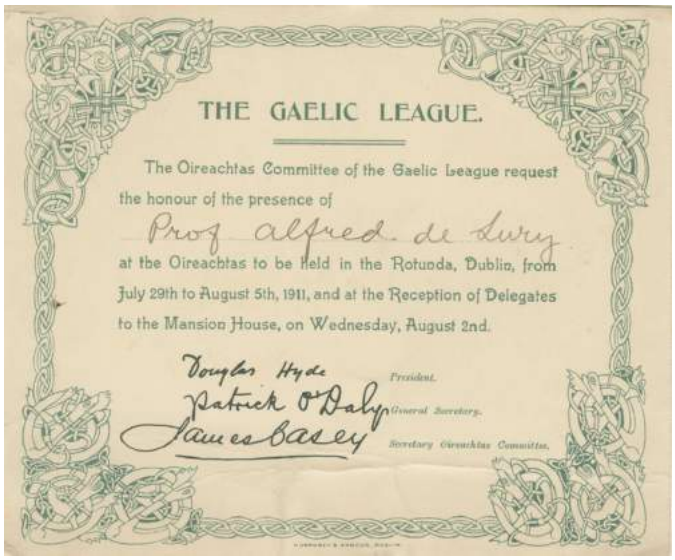
Once I had come up with an arrangement, I then needed to physically put the items together under this structure. This meant starting at the first category of the arrangement and removing items relevant to that category from every box that held such items, which in some cases was numerous. As you can all imagine this is a time-consuming, but

important step. Until the physical part of arrangement stage was completed, items relating to a specific topic were still scattered throughout the collection.

For smaller collections this stage can be avoided by grouping items together as the collection is being appraised. Unfortunately for larger collections, while it may seem a slight duplication of work, it is necessary to include this as a stage in its own right to avoid items falling through the cracks, and the arrangement being compromised down the line. I guess my engineering back-ground came in very useful after all!



A cheque made out to Patrick Pearse for Scoil Eanna which he endorsed on the reverse.



An invite to the 1911 Oireachtas signed by CnaG president Douglas Hyde

So what is the Arrangement?

The material comprises approximately 125 years of material spanning the period from 1893 to the acquisition of the collection by NUIG in 2018. As mentioned earlier there was no discernible arrangement so one was imposed. This comprises three main sections totalling 45 series.

The first section (series 1 – 13) covers the organisation itself and its structure and includes annual reports, policy documents, employee files, administration material, finance material, publications, Ard Fheis [annual congress] minutes, PR and material from various branches and committees. The second series (series 14 – 21) relates to Arts and Culture in general and includes the annual Oireachtas competition, festivals both in Ireland and abroad, music, sport, drama and literature. The final section (series 22 - 45) broadly relates to research including the papers of Donncha Ó Súilleabháin and Giolla Críost Ó Broin and material relating to Patrick Pearse, Northern Ireland, politics, Government departments, businesses and the Bertie Troy collection. It also contains an extensive series relating to various campaigns involving the organisation.



Craobh an Chéitinnigh branch window display 1940s.



Central branch logos for its 50th anniversary (1944).

Phase 3: Cataloguing

Following the previous stage which took four months, phase three commenced and continues apace. With a collection of this size, the safest way of ensuring best practice is maintained is to describe the collection from collection level down to file level or even item level in stages, ensuring each stage is complete before moving on to the next. I'm happy to say that Collection Level description and Series Level description are complete and I am now working on listing to a lower level of hierarchy. I am even happier to announce that because there has been so much interest in this collection and because it is so vast, rather than waiting until the entire collection is described fully, I am instead releasing parts of the collection in tranches, as they are completed.

What has been released and what is to come?

To date, three tranches have been released covering 30% of the collection. A further 7 tranches will be released at intervals over the coming year, as work is complete. Series are being prioritised for release based on a number of factors including size, interest for the researcher, recommendations from the special interest group, ease of release and GDPR concerns (or lack thereof). Researchers and the public can access the archive catalogue here to see what is currently accessible – this link automatically updates as new releases are added.

In addition, and just in time for this year's Seachtain na Gaeilge, we have launched a mini digital exhibition. This describes the collection in general and the arrangement (as outlined here). Using images representing all 45 series, it also gives a brief description of each. This allows researchers to both understand the context of what is already accessible, and to be aware of what is yet to come – very handy when it comes to expectation management!



RTE campaign.

It has been and continues to be a pleasure to work on this iconic collection. Topics range from raising children through Irish to apartheid in South Africa, from organising Féile to campaigning for Civil Rights, from the work of the Timirí [organisers] nationwide to the minutiae of company finances. Apart from paper items such as letters, reports, programmes, posters, chequebooks, invites and

flyers, the collection also contains medals, brooches, badges, trophies, paintings, balloons, stickers, watches, pens, and even a framed £50 pound note! There are samples of bilingual packaging including a Welsh Tayto bag, a Monaghan Milk Carton and a Canadian Post Office envelope. Languages covered include Welsh, Breton, Manx, Scots-Gallic, French, German, Swedish, Finnish, Flemish, Basque, Greek, Bengali, Urdu, Hindu, and Mandarin. It is a fascinating collection that I hope you all get to enjoy.



Fleadh na Leanbh (Children's Fleadh), Oireachtas 1909.