

Info-byte:

What are Archives and Why Do They Require Special Management?

What are archives?

- An **archive** is an accumulation of records and documents from one organisation or individual. The organisation or individual is also known as the **provenance** of the archive. Where the provenance is not clear, much evidential and informational value is lost.
- Archives are a by-product of activities and functions, not deliberately and consciously created for their own sake. Rare exceptions might be medieval chronicles and letters or testimonies (written or oral) recorded with the intent of putting the author's viewpoint on record.
- **Archive** can also mean the physical repository where archives are kept.

Why are archives special?

Archives are worth spending time and money on to maintain permanently because:

- They are unique — archives will usually be the only record or evidence of the decision, policy or activity which they document.
- They have been selected for preservation due to their continuing value as primary source material documenting the culture and history of the individual, organisation and society.

What other important characteristics do archives have?

- The original order of the archives provides evidence of the links between records, reflecting the links between functions and activities. Archives are arranged and described according to the way they were organically created – unlike books which tend to be described according to title, subject or author.
- Keeping the original document can be essential, particularly if it is older, because watermarks, seals and signatures give vital information. Also the way that information is arranged in the document can help to identify the type of record.



the **Archive-Skills** consultancy

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What are Archives and Why Do They Require Special Management? (cont'd)

Further information

- The Society of Archivists
- *Keeping Archives* edited by J Ellis, Thorpe (2/1993)
- *Managing Business Archives* edited by A Turton, Butterworth-Heinemann (1991)



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