

Back to the Future: Arrangements for the collection and storage of sporting archives and access to them

Slide 1. Introduction

I have been asked to speak today about collecting sporting archives and arrangements for their preservation, storage and access.

Why me?

As you have just heard, I am an archivist. I work in the Manuscripts Division of the National Library of Scotland. Archivists are very much a minority profession: when I am asked what I do I am usually met with blank looks of incomprehension. Basically, my job is to ensure that archives are preserved for present and future use by their creating organisations and by the public. This involves identifying, collecting and preserving unique material relating to the history and culture of Scotland. In doing so, I contribute to the national network of archive care.

Why collect archives?

Archives are the raw material of history. They contain information for researchers, whether as evidence of current trends or for historical study. As well as preserving material for posterity, archivists provide and promote services to the public that enable and encourage the use of their collections. It would be impossible to cover everything I do in detail today, but I hope to give you an overview with specific reference to sporting archives.

Slide 2. National Library of Scotland

For those of you who do not know the NLS, although we came into being in 1925 with the passing of the National Library of Scotland Act, we have a much older history. At that time, the non-legal books and manuscripts collected by the Advocates' Library since the 1680s passed to the nation forming the core of our collections. So, we have more than 300 years of collecting behind us. The Advocates' Library was a working, lawyers' library, but from its earliest days, it collected manuscripts. As might be expected, initially these were predominantly legal, but very soon the library's interests widened to cover records of Scotland's history, the church, medieval manuscripts, family and estate papers, literary archives, political papers. In fact just about anything and everything to do with Scotland's history and culture. That is, apart from official records - these were the province of the Scottish Records Office, recently renamed the National Archives of Scotland. This slide shows our main building in George IV Bridge, Edinburgh, where the manuscript collections are housed.

Slide 3. NLS Acquisition policy: general principles

To this day, the NLS continues the very wide collecting policy started by the Faculty of Advocates in the 1680s. Potentially, we are interested in anything and everything to do with Scotland, its history and culture, and Scotsmen and women at home and abroad. With such a wide collecting policy, it is just not possible to give the same emphasis to all areas. Rather, we build on our strengths and fill gaps. If we already have material of a notable individual, a family, an estate or an organisation we will think seriously about acquiring more if it comes our way.

We give priority to unpublished material over material that is already available. If we have to choose between some thing that is newly discovered, and a manuscript that has been published and so already in the public domain, we will opt for the former, all other things considered.

We make every effort not to compete with other repositories. If we feel material would be better placed elsewhere, we advise accordingly. Sometimes, there may be special circumstances in which we might take material even though a more appropriate repository exists. This might be due to lack of funds or space problems, or perhaps the specific conditions laid down by the owner, which can't be met by a local repository.

We also are aware of our responsibilities. The emergence of local archive offices in Scotland has been much slower than elsewhere in Britain. Until the 1970s they were the exception rather than the rule and, even now, the network is incomplete. Often, apart from the National Archives of Scotland and the NLS there was no repository available for individuals or organisations to place their archives. Consequently, our holdings include much that you might not expect to find in a national library's manuscript collection.

Slide 4. NLS Acquisition policy: sport

As I have already said because our holdings are so diverse both geographically and in terms of subjects covered, it is just not possible or desirable for us to be equally active in all areas. As a result, we have different collecting policies for different areas of interest, one being sporting archives. This slide shows the section on sport taken from our Acquisition policy statement:

Sport. The Library's strong interests in this area, particularly in golfing material, will be maintained, with particular emphasis on the papers of national sporting organisations, or those with special interest for the national or international history of the sport concerned. Papers of local sporting bodies will be acquired only in the absence of interest from a local repository.

Why collect sporting archives? Why are we interested?

Until recently, the history of sport in Britain was very much a minority interest, but with the growth in popularity of social history, sport and leisure have emerged as serious subjects of study, and are now recognised as important parts of our culture and history. Sporting archives in their many different guises are considered important as evidence. Material that might once have been discarded or overlooked is now recognised as worthy of retention.

Slide 5. What are sporting archives?

At this stage I should state what I mean by sporting archives. My definition of the term is very wide. Sporting archives might be:

- papers of individual sportsmen or women
- records of a sporting organisations
- records of the governing body of a sport
- records relating to a sporting event
- miscellaneous ephemera

I'd like now to look at each category in a little more detail.

Slide 6. Papers of sportsmen and women

Records left by sportsmen and women are scattered throughout our holdings. Some have been in the Library for centuries as part of the Advocates' collections. The Faculty of Advocates' did not deliberately set out to collect sporting archives but a good deal came to them coincidentally as part of family, estate or personal archives. Others are important manuscripts in their own right.

We know that by the mid-18th century, the Advocates held some important sources for the history of sport in Scotland. These include the diary of James Melville. Dating from 1574, this is one of the earliest known records to mention golf. There are also mountaineering diaries, accounts of cricket matches, and a great deal on field sports. Albeit unwittingly, the Advocates' Library laid the foundations for our interest in sport.

As I said earlier, NLS continues this wide collecting policy. With extensive holdings of personal papers, and archives of major families and estates, we have much of interest for the study of sport and leisure. The image shown here is from Katharine Ellice's illustrated journal of a yachting holiday off the West Coast of Scotland in the 1850s, part of the Ellice of Invergarry family archive. Other personal papers with sporting interest might be correspondence, account books, or working papers perhaps relating to a book, to give but a few examples.

Slide 7. Records of sporting organisations

After the Second World War the NLS, like many other institutions, saw a change in the type of material being offered to it. Personal and family material continues to arrive, but in addition we are now offered the archives of businesses and organisations. In our case, these include several sporting organisations. The records of the Scottish Mountaineering Club, the Camanachd Association and for a time the Scottish Football Association archive all came to the Library. (Sadly for us, the latter was taken back by the SFA when they were given lottery funding to set up the Scottish Football Museum at the new Hampden Stadium in the mid 1990s.

Records of sporting organisations tend to include a number of types of key documents:

Minute Books - usually the most important records created by an organisation. They are the permanent records of decisions taken by the officers of the Club. They may include information about important events in the Club's history, the opening of new buildings, alterations to courses, names of members, results of competitions, and financial records. Even if everything else is thrown away, minutes tend to survive. They should be kept permanently as the record of principal management decisions and events. Many sporting clubs have only one chronological series of minutes but larger more complicated organisations may have separate volumes perhaps for buildings, courses or competitions.

Meeting papers Supporting papers to the minutes should also be preserved as they often give information not recorded in the minutes. Meeting papers may include reports and lists of committee members. Usually they are produced in bulk for all board or committee members. Only one copy needs to be kept.

Annual Reports or Year Books. If the organisation is a registered company, there should be a series of Annual Reports in which the Directors report on the year's activities. These records may also include lists of members and photographs. These should be kept.

Directors' files. May include important correspondence.

Financial records A wide range of accounting and financial records may be created: balance sheets, audit papers, ledgers, journals, days books, invoices, cash books, bank pass books, cheque books, etc. especially if the organisation is a business or has its own Club House. There may well be duplication of information here and decisions have to be taken about what should and should not be kept.

Registers of Clubs and individuals may have been kept, and possibly also of competitions.

Programmes of events organised.

Property records. Many sporting organisations own real estate. Their archive may include title deeds, supporting legal documents, rentals, plans, architectural drawings, photographs of property and insurance records.

Photographs. This is one of an extensive series of photographs in the Scottish Mountaineering Club's archive.

Slide 8. Records of sporting Clubs and Societies

Although we have a particular interest in the records of national sporting organisations, we also have the archives of a number of Clubs and Societies. The Royal Highland Yacht Club, the Edinburgh Skating Club, the Mortonhall Curling Club, Lothians Coursing Club, and Grange Cricket Club to name but a few. Golf clubs are strongly represented including the Honourable Company of Edinburgh Golfers, arguably the world's oldest golf club. Although geographically our remit covers the whole of Scotland, given that we are based in Edinburgh the concentration of material relating to east central Scotland is to be expected.

Many of the records you can expect to find in Club archives will be similar to those of the national organisations - minute books, financial records etc.

Members' records. These may include applications, proposal books and lists of members.

Operation If the Club exists to organise events, then there may be competition registers, lists of entrants, related correspondence, photographs and promotional material including posters and programmes, visitors' books. Registers should be kept as should correspondence, after weeding out the routine. One copy only of all programmes and posters is necessary. Photographs may be bulky and routine but are often of great significance in Club life as records of events, teams and venues. They should not be discarded lightly. The social side of Club life is often of great importance: this can give rise to a whole series of records including menu cards, song sheets and visitors' books. This image shows one of the highly decorated 19th century menu cards for the Edinburgh Skating Club's annual dinner.

Staff records. These can include wages and salaries books, personnel registers and files, pension records, training records, and health and safety records.

Other records Clubs often generate various histories, published or not.

Slide 9. Major sporting events

As you know, important sporting events generate huge quantities of records. The Commonwealth Games is one example. A long established event of more local significance but still important, are the

Kelso Races. The image shown here is of the programme for a meeting in the early-nineteenth century. Records of such events may include similar material to that found in the papers of any other sporting organisation:

minutes and board papers, articles of association, policy documents and financial records. Inevitably, there will be large quantities of ephemeral records, such as posters and leaflets for publicity, programmes for visitors and photographs of competitors and the event itself.

So far, I have only mentioned traditional paper archives, but increasingly we are faced with a range of different formats including audio-visual broadcasts, and electronic information such as email or web pages, all of which present their own problems beyond the scope of a general paper such as this.

Slide 10. What else?

This is what I termed earlier ‘miscellaneous ephemera’:

Illuminated manuscripts may include sporting scenes as marginalia. Paintings, drawings and sketches, photographs, and even poetry can also be considered sporting archives. These are just a few examples. The illustration here is by Arthur Elliot and is one of only a few known images of golfers on Musselburgh links in the 1880s.

Slide 11. How do we acquire sporting archives?

There is no doubt that, if we sat back and waited, we would receive some material. Our reputation as custodians of the nation’s heritage means that some owners come to us of their own accord, but much more arrives when we take the initiative. This may be through our outreach programme or as a result of actively identifying and contacting owners of material.

Slide 12. Reputation

The NLS is known as a major archive repository. Undoubtedly, this has a snowball effect. Owners of material often approach us with requests for help in caring for their material. Triggers may be concerns that historical material should be kept in the correct conditions, that it should be catalogued, or that it should be publicly available. Sometimes a move to new premises results in the discovery of previously forgotten material. On other occasions, the motivating factor is simply the need for space for current records.

Our reputation also stands us in good stead with other repositories. Material is transferred to us when other institutions feel we are a more appropriate home than they could be. The Lothians Coursing Club archive (part of which is shown here) was passed to us by the National Museums of Scotland after the family of a former secretary approached them for advice about the Club’s records.

Word of mouth is important. Often one deposit leads to another. Recommendations put in for us by the Scottish Mountaineering Club have been the source of papers of several Scottish mountaineers. The Sligachan Hotel Visitors’ Book is an example of this. This Skye hotel has been a popular place for climbers to stay since the late-nineteenth century. The entries in the Visitors’ Book often include illustrated accounts of climbs by well-known mountaineers.

Slide 13. Outreach

Our active outreach programme also helps. We give talks to local organisations, take parties round the Library, and mount exhibitions— these can be displays of material in the Library, photographic versions that travel around the country, or online exhibitions. Occasionally, we publish books about our holdings. Our strong interest in golf developed because of an exhibition of sporting archives ‘Scotland at Play’ in the late 1980s and a subsequent book ‘A Swing Through Time: Golf in Scotland, 1457-1743’. This led to a number of speaking engagements. Several golf club archives came to us directly as a result of this publicity. One being the North Berwick Golf Club archive. This slide shows one of the Club’s minute books.

Slide 14. Actively target owners

Often we are proactive. If we know of an important archive not in a repository we may decide to contact the owner setting out what we can offer. We explain the significance of archives as records of cultural activity, and give an indication of the range of material we hold, much as I have done here. We mention the need to keep archives in the correct environmental conditions, and point out that placing their records in a repository may free much needed storage space. We offer professional staff to appraise, identify, sort, arrange and list the archive. We mention our enquiry service and our supervised manuscripts reading room for consulting material. Finally, we say that this is all free. There are always those who prefer to keep their own records and this is their prerogative, but many others do take us up on the offer.

Slide 15. On what terms do we acquire manuscripts?

We acquire material in a number of different ways:

Purchase

Occasionally, we buy material though, I have to say, very little relating to sport. Sometimes we buy from individuals by private treaty, sometimes from dealers. Generally, purchases tend to be for important single manuscripts. Books of Hours, letters of famous Scots, material relating to the Jacobites or other particularly emotive topics in Scotland’s history, find their way into the sale rooms more often than archival collections. That said, just about anything related to golf is extremely saleable. If we are rarely approached about purchasing golf manuscripts it is because we can’t afford it. Football is showing signs of going the same way.

Donation.

Occasionally, owners present their archive to the Library as an outright gift. We also receive material as bequests and occasionally papers come to us in lieu of death duties. In these cases, the owner makes over his rights of ownership in the manuscripts themselves to the Library, subject to any conditions that may be agreed at the time. Donation tends to happen more often with material belonging to individuals than to the records of organisations. This is probably because committee members are temporary custodians rather than owners and are reluctant to take irrevocable decisions. Most donated Club records in the Library are those of disbanded organisations. The archive of the Edinburgh Skating Club dating back to the 1780s, is good example of this. When the Club folded in the 1960s, the committee looked for a suitable home for the archive and approached us.

I have left deposit to last, as I want to consider this in a little more detail.

Slide 16. Deposit

Most Clubs archives come to us on deposit. By deposit I mean a long-term loan. Material held on deposit is cared for in the same way as papers belonging to the Library, but the depositor retains ownership and can remove material if he wishes to. In the past, deposits tended to be accepted on very liberal terms, but in recent years owners have deposited material only to later take it away once it has been sorted and listed. This has led to agreements setting out the terms and conditions of deposit, becoming commonplace. These agreements safeguard the interests of the depositor as well as the repository.

Deposit agreements

Period of deposit. We usually request a minimum period of years for a deposit and reasonable notice of withdrawal. As we are committing taxpayers' money we do not want to spend a lot of staff time and effort sorting, arranging material and producing finding aids, and paying storage costs, only to find the papers are taken away six months later. If material is to be withdrawn for sale, the Library should be given first refusal.

Inventory. We agree to keep the archive separately, to identify, sort, arrange and describe it (i.e. produce a finding aid) just as we do for material belonging to us.

Appraisal. Not all material is worthy of long-term preservation. Accordingly, we like to get the owners' consent for disposal of low-grade material.

Insurance. We agree a valuation with the owner and arrange cover under the government indemnity scheme.

Storage. We agree to store the material in the same conditions as material belonging to the Library.

Access. We agree to make the archive available to bona fide readers in our supervised manuscripts reading room.

Copies. Under the Copyright Act, 1988, we are able to make one copy of unpublished material for research purposes unless the copyright owner has expressly forbidden this.

Publication and exhibition. We agree not to process any requests for publication or exhibition without first seeking the owner's permission.

These are the general terms, but we are always willing to discuss specific requirements.

Slide 17. What happens next?

Once the formalities have been completed and is agreed material is to come to the Library, we can move on to the practicalities.

Generally, we will already have seen the material before we agree to take it. It may be that things are straightforward and we need simply to make arrangements for collection. BUT it may be that appraisal is required.

Records are bulky and often of short-term value. If the archive is that of a major sporting event such as the Commonwealth Games the answer is most likely, yes, it does need appraisal. The two Edinburgh Games of the 1970s and 1980s are no exception. Major sporting events generate huge amounts of information - at the time, during, and after the event. As is the case with any organisation,

the records will contain information for the organisation's management, administration and future planning. Information say about transporting athletes from the competitors' village to the stadium will be generated and be vital to the smooth running of the event at the time, but is it really necessary to keep it for posterity? Records are bulky. They soon accumulate and fill up space that can't be spared. Much of this material is often only of short-term value but some will hold important information for researchers. As a very rough guide, archives might represent between 5 and 10 per cent of the total documentation created but every case has to be treated on its merits.

Guidelines for appraisal

Is there evidential value?

Do the records contain information on the origin, structure, procedures and important functions of the organisation?

Is the material still current or semi-current?

This is not likely to be the case with major sporting events but is something to be aware of with Club records.

Are there duplicates?

Is the information available anywhere else? Even if it is in summary form elsewhere there may be a case for disposal

Is it confidential?

If material is highly confidential especially about individuals, retention needs to be justified. If it is to be kept then safeguards must be put in place so that access is restricted as long as is necessary. One consideration should be the Data Protection Act, 1998, which now extends to paper records as well as electronic databases. It covers all living persons, but there are exclusions for material, which if kept for its historical significance is not likely to cause damage or distress to the persons mentioned. Is the archive the data controller or the data processor? This makes a difference as to who is responsible for what. Alongside Data Protection, we must also be aware of Freedom of Information and the rights of individuals to know what information is being held about them.

Is the material is low grade? What condition is it in?

If low-grade material is in very poor condition and does not justify the cost of preservation, it may be discarded.

Delivery

Generally, archive staff arrange for the packing and collection of material. This can be very dirty and heavy work. Protective clothing is often necessary - we usually take overalls, gloves and dust masks with us. Material is then packed into strong boxes and skips and transported to the Library in our own vehicles.

But...

Of course there are exceptions. We sometimes find people arrive in the Library totally unannounced bearing minute books, etc., in polythene bags and cardboard boxes. Occasionally, piles of papers are left anonymously at Reception. This, of course, makes it rather difficult to keep records. While, we don't like to look a gift horse in the face, we prefer to have well-documented accessions.

Slide 18. Processing the archive

Once material arrives at the Library it is recorded in the Accession Register. This is a running record of material received. Each new consignment brought in from one source on one occasion regardless of whether it is a single document or an entire archive is considered as an accession and given an identifying number. The Accession Register should include:

- Date of accession
- Accession number
- Brief description of type of records, covering dates and quantity
- Source
- Space for remarks about cataloguing status, condition, power to destroy etc

The Accession Register is indexed regularly and quarterly lists of recent accessions are sent to the National Register of Archives. An abbreviated form of these lists appears in our Annual Report. If the new accession consists of a single or very few items this may be as far as we go in producing finding aids until we are ready to catalogue in detail. Treatment of entire archives and large collections is very different. Without a detailed list or inventory we would have no clear idea of what an archive consists of, it would be difficult to find any specific item, and impractical to provide access to readers.

As soon as possible after its arrival staff unpack the archive. In the process we do some basic preservation work: opening up folded material and flattening it. Ironmongery - paper clips, pins - and elastic bands is removed at this stage. If urgent repair work or fumigation is required our in-house Preservation staff are called in.

In the course of unpacking we start to identify, sort, arrange and describe the material. The first important principle of archive arrangement is that records must be listed according to their provenance (that is according to the organisation or individual that created them). Records of different organisations or creators should not be mixed, nor should the records of departments within that organisation be merged. Attempting to group by record types (for example putting all the minutes or all the ledgers for different organisations together) just causes confusion. The same applies to correspondence files. Here, it is vitally important to understand who assembled the file and why. When listing I usually ask myself a series of questions as I consider each item. Who created this? Why is this here? How does it relate to the other material in the archive? If the archivist does not observe provenance the evidential value of the archive is seriously compromised.

The temptation to merge records of separate organisations in one large catalogue by subject should also be resisted. Archives almost invariably contain information on numerous subjects no matter why they were compiled. The subject that might appear important to one cataloguer might seem trivial to another. The records of a Cricket club may contain information on the local history and economy of the area and even on labour relations. Arranging by provenance makes it easier to subject index the archive later.

The other important principle of archive arrangement is that the original order should be retained. This is really provenance at a lower level. Provenance ensures an organisation's records are kept as a group, original order ensures that the original arrangement and the relationships between records are maintained. This means that if an organisation kept records in sequences, say a series of minute books or ledgers, these will be retained or they will be restored where series have become disarranged. The same applies to files or bundles of loose papers. If it is clear they have been kept together for a reason they should not be split up. An archivist would only attempt to impose order on an archive when it has become completely muddled or so disarranged that the original order cannot be identified.

Before starting to list, it is helpful to have some idea of what records you should expect to find in that particular type of archive and to devise a basic classification scheme as a guide. That said, every archive is unique and organisations may have created records found in nowhere else. Every archive has to be treated on its own merits.

Archival description

Once you have identified the material, sorted and arranged it, you then have to describe it and number it. The British archival community has been much slower than libraries to standardise description. Even now, individual repositories cling to house styles that have evolved over decades. It is only now that automation is becoming more common and the prospect of a national archive network of at least collection level descriptions is more than a pipe dream, that real progress is being made.

The material should then be placed in acid-free folders and boxes and the reference numbers marked on the items themselves as well as the files and boxes. The archive is now ready to move to the strongroom where material is stored.

Slide 19. The strong room

As archives are unique they require an exceptional level of protection. The object of a good strongroom is to ensure the permanent preservation of the material placed there in the best possible condition. It will either be purpose built or purpose converted and should conform to BS5454:2000, the British Standard for the Storage and Exhibition of Archival Documents. All archive repositories are subject to inspection and approval by the Historical Manuscripts Commission.

The basic requirement is for a robust, secure structure, able to carry substantial loads. Records are usually stored on adjustable shelving in fixed bays with alleyways wide enough for trolleys to pass easily between them. Mobile shelving is often used as this can provide up to twice as much storage capacity in the same space. This does have disadvantages in that load bearing capacity of the floor must be much greater, air cannot circulate as freely, speed and ease of access is reduced, it is more expensive, is more likely to malfunction, and cannot cope with documents that hang over the edges of shelves. This is important, as documents do not come in standard shapes and sizes.

The strongroom should provide a stable environment with protection against threats from water, fire, light, unsuitable atmospheric conditions, dirt, dust, mould, vermin, insects, thieves and vandals.

Material should be easy to find, withdraw and replace.

Slide 20. Access: the reading room

The archive is now safely in the stored in the strongroom - and is available for consultation. High standards of care are important when making material available.

Unless the owner of a deposited collection has restricted access, our policy is to make material available in our supervised manuscripts reading room to all bona fide researchers, but we insist on seeing acceptable identification before admission. Passports, driving licences, matriculation cards or identification card from a national organisation as all acceptable.

Researchers are then asked to sign the reader's ticket application form, which includes the Library's regulations, before being issued with a reader's ticket. They are asked to leave outer coats, umbrellas and large bags in the cloakroom before entering the reading rooms. Once in the manuscripts reading

room they have a short interview with a member of the professional staff so that we can be sure they know of all material we have they should see. They then go through to the reading area, which, you see here. We have additional regulations here over and above those in our General Reading Room: pencil only must be used, volumes must be read using specially made foam supports, and only a limited quantity of material is issued at once. That said, we aim to provide a congenial atmosphere for research, to be helpful and welcoming and to assist rather than hinder our readers in their research, It is never wise to be complacent, but given the high satisfaction levels recorded in recent reader surveys, I like to think we succeed.

Slide 21. Access. Remote users

As well providing access in the reading room we offer an information service and answer numerous enquiries by letter, fax e.mail and telephone. We are not able to undertake research for enquirers, rather we tell them where they should look whether in our holdings or elsewhere and what they should expect to find.

We are also involved in outreach to make our holdings better known. I mentioned earlier exhibitions, talks and publications - increasingly, we are looking to digitise our holdings. So far, sport has not been involved, but with the drive to provide material for lifelong learning and the peoples' network in electronic form, sporting archives would seem obvious candidates. Recently, one of our most precious medieval manuscripts, The Murthly Hours, was made available electronically. This slide shows a page from this book of hours. Note the archer shooting at birds in the border - is this another sporting archive?

Conclusion

The NLS has extensive holdings of sporting archives. This is an important area of our collecting policy and will continue to be so. As you have seen, our definition of sporting archives is wide: they can be records of a sporting event or of a club, the papers of a sportsman or woman, or an illuminated manuscript. These records are fully integrated with the rest of our holdings and arrangements for their care are much the same as for other material held here. Sporting archives are important as evidence for our culture and history. I hope what I have said today will have given you an insight into necessary arrangements for their collection and storage and for access to them.