Where are archives held?

Archives are held in hundreds of repositories across the UK. These repositories include private organisations (such as charities and businesses) as well as public organisations (such as universities, schools, museums and local authorities).

Different repositories will hold different material depending on the nature of the host organisation. For instance, all counties, and most cities, have record offices which collect material relating to their geographical area; businesses and charities collect material created in the course of their own activities; museums and other specialist organisations collect material relating to the particular subjects around which they were created; and universities collect a mix of material including that created internally and also relating to specific research specialisms.

How do I know where archival material has ended up?

It can be difficult trying to identify whether specific records have survived and where they might be found. Generally material relating to a specific locality can be found in the local area. With this in mind, the relevant local authority record office is a good place to start. Material relating to private organisations may well be with the creating organisation. However, if that organisation does not have a repository or no longer exists, then the material may have gone to the closest local authority record office or university. A major difficulty is often found when trying to locate the papers of individuals. The final location might be dependent on ties or working relationships which that individual had with a particular place or organisation. Alternatively, the material may remain in the hands of family members or executors, or may end up in specialist repositories based around a subject which the individual was known for.
What resources are available to help me locate archival material?

There are a number of ways to locate archival material. These include looking at bibliographies and footnotes in secondary material, asking the advice of archivists, using online search facilities, and consulting paper catalogues created by archival repositories.

**Bibliographies and footnotes**

Secondary material, where well researched, should cite references for sources used. Therefore starting with secondary reading can be a good place to begin. Not only will you gain background and contextual knowledge of a subject area, you can also gain useful pointers towards relevant archival material and where it might be held.

**Asking advice**

Archivists have a great depth of knowledge about the collections in their care and with which they have worked. Take advantage of this. Ask questions to find out whether the type of material you are interested in might have survived, and where it might have ended up. It is best to email the archive service with as clear an outline of your research topic, giving an idea of the types of sources you are trying to locate. Before doing this, however, it is a good idea to check the online catalogue of the service where possible to see if you can identify any material that might be relevant in the first instance.

**Online search facilities**

Armed with background knowledge and some idea of what you are looking for, you will next want to use some of the reliable online search facilities available to you. Whilst using a Google search to try and find material might bring up references to particular subjects, it is unlikely to find specific archival sources.

Better places to start are a number of dedicated portals which allow you to search for collections held by archive repositories across the UK. The following table outlines the most reliable portals currently available for locating UK based material. There may well be others that are subject specific which individual course tutors can direct you towards.
### Table showing the best online search engines to use when trying to locate archival material

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Search Engine</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The National Archives ‘Discovery’ <a href="http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/">http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/</a></td>
<td>The main national search engine for locating information about records held at The National Archives and other archival repositories in the UK (including those in Scotland). In addition to the search interface, there are numerous research guides on a wide range of subjects. These can be useful if you are interested in browsing what might be available for studying a particular subject. If you are trying to determine whether the papers of a specific individual or organisation have survived, it is best to go directly to the advanced search feature of the online catalogue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Archives Hub <a href="https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/">https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/</a></td>
<td>A portal to archives held in many of the UK’s universities and colleges (including those in Scotland). Most collections will be discoverable through the Discovery site, however not everything will be and so it is always useful to use Archives Hub in conjunction with Discovery.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCAN <a href="http://www.scan.org.uk/index.html">http://www.scan.org.uk/index.html</a></td>
<td>The main portal for discovering archives held in Scottish repositories. It does not include material held elsewhere in the UK. If you are only interested in material held within Scotland then this is a better place to start than Discovery as searches will not return material held elsewhere in the UK.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The National Register of Archives for Scotland <a href="http://catalogue.nrscotland.gov.uk/nrasrregister/welcome.aspx">http://catalogue.nrscotland.gov.uk/nrasrregister/welcome.aspx</a></td>
<td>Contains surveys of material still in private hands, and private papers which have been deposited in libraries and museums. This is a good last resort if you cannot locate the papers of a particular Scottish individual or organisation by using SCAN.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When using online search facilities, think critically about the types of searches you use and the keywords that might best help you locate what you are looking for. Try using variant person and place name spellings, as well as synonyms on a subject. Be aware that meanings of words have changed over time. Things that might seem politically incorrect to us from a modern perspective may well have been used to describe something from an earlier period. Throughout all, remember that what you are searching in these portals are archivists’ descriptions of records, not the actual text of original material.

Read the notes and guidance produced by each portal, this usually gives you pointers on how best to direct your searches. This information will also help you understand what categories of records are included in each of the individual portals, as well as helping you to narrow down to particular areas, subjects, or records creators so as not to overwhelm yourself with the results returned.
Paper catalogues

Having located references to collections through the various online search facilities above, it is also useful to consult individual collection catalogues. These are usually available in hardcopy paper format from the individual archival repositories which hold the collections in question. You may also be able to access them in downloadable PDF format from the websites or online catalogues of individual archival repositories.

When using archive catalogues it is helpful to understand some of the basics of archival description. Material created by the same body and deposited by that creating body or its representatives is treated by archivists as a discrete ‘archival collection’. Individual items within these collections have a shared ‘provenance’ and are related to each other because of the circumstances of their creation or collation. To reflect this, archivists describe collections hierarchically in levels. Archivists will also design a structure for a collection which reflects the original order of creation, i.e. how the creator structured the material. This original order can tell you a lot about how organisations and individuals functioned. This is because individual record series often reflect a particular function or activity.

The first level of description is the CLD, or collection level description, which gives an overview of individual collections. CLDs provide the collection reference number, title, covering dates, creator information, collection structure, access issues, and pointers towards related material in other collections. CLDs will also give a general description of the types of records to be found within the collection.

U DX5 Transcripts of Hull and Hedon Parish Registers and Hull Corporation Records

Historical Background: The borough was created by royal charter in 1299. It was governed by a warden appointed by the crown until 1331 when he was replaced by a mayor and four bailiffs chosen by the burgesses from among themselves. The bailiffs were replaced by a bench of twelve aldermen in 1440 and they, with the mayor, remained the governing body of the town until the corporation was reformed under the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835.


Description: Transcripts of historical material relating to Hull including Parish Registers for Hedon (1549-1720); Holy Trinity church, Hull (1558-1653); St Mary’s Lowgate, Hull (1564-1715) and Sculcoates (1538-1806). There are also transcripts of Hull Corporation Bench Books (1609-1681).

Extent: 10 volumes

Related material at Hull History Centre:
Hull Corporation Bench Books V - VII (1609-1681) [C BRB/3-5]
List of Freeman and Burgesses (to 1740) [C BRG/1-2]
List of Freeman and Burgesses (from 1741) [C BRG/3-5]
Copy of Freeman Rolls, from 1741 [C TRE/448]
Transcripts of Hull Corporation bench books II-JV by JR Boyle [U DX28/5-7]

Related material in other repositories:
Parish registers for Hull and surrounding villages, East Riding of Yorkshire Archives Service, Beverley

Access conditions: Access will be granted to any accredited reader
Below the CLD, archivists will usually then arrange a collection into series of similar record types, for example ‘letters’, ‘subject files’, ‘minutes’, ‘reports’ etc. and will describe these series as SLDs, or series level descriptions. SLDs can give you more detailed information about the particular series of records they are describing, such as the extent of material within the series, and the sort of information recorded in that particular record type. Below the SLD, archivists will then describe individual records at item level. Item level descriptions give you more details about individual records such as title, date, format, and information content.

Catalogues can therefore provide a great deal of contextual information, and show how individual items within a collection are connected to each other, as well as providing pointers to other potentially relevant material.

Further information

Should you require any further advice, this guide has been prepared by the Hull University Archives team who are happy to help in any way they can. Questions should be directed to HUA staff at 
hullhistorycentre@hcandl.co.uk
by marking enquiries ‘FAO HUA Archives Staff’ in the subject line.

The History Centre’s website contains further guides to collections held at the History Centre, which comprises the University of Hull Archives and Hull City Archives and Local Studies. These guides might also be of use to researchers looking to identify resources. The website can be accessed at www.hullhistorycentre.org.uk.