

Salvage and Dig: community-based archives & social movement approaches to archiving the past for the present and the future

25 September 2019

Documenting social processes and Movements conference, The National Archives Norway

Dr Andrew Flinn, Reader in Archival Studies and Oral History, University College London

Participatory & activist approaches to history and knowledge production

‘History becomes, to put it simply, more democratic. The chronicle of kings has taken into its concern the life experience of ordinary people. But there is another dimension to this change, of equal importance. The process of writing history changes along with the content. The use of oral evidence **breaks through the barriers between the chroniclers and their audience; between the educational institution and the outside world.**’

Paul Thompson, *Voice of the Past*, 1978

‘history is too important to be left just to the professional historians’ Sally Alexander and Anna Davin, ‘Feminist history’, *HWJ* 1 1976

‘History is dangerous. History is important because the results of history are still with us... Those who are to conquer the company must first conquer the picture of the company. **A new picture must be created, a picture that puts workers and their work in the foreground’**

Sven Lindqvist, ‘Dig Where You Stand’, *Oral History* 1979

Gräv där du står / Dig Where You Stand

- Sven Lindqvist, *Gräv där du står* (1978) and article in *Oral History* journal 1979
- **'History is not dead. On the contrary, it is living the good life and running the big companies. And that, in the final analysis, is why workers' investigations of factory history is so necessary. Sixty years after the conquest of political democracy, the Swedish workers' movement is now bent on the conquest of economic democracy. In this situation, workers' investigations of their own jobs will have a definite political significance'**
- **'Do not fear the experts. [...] You know your job. Your professional experience is a firm basis on which to stand when judging other people's activities – and non-activities. They may be experts, each one in his area, but when they discuss your job, you are the expert. That is why your own job is such a good starting point for your research. Dig where you stand!'** (Sven Lindqvist, *Dig Where You Stand*, 1978)



‘Research is not mainly a defensive but an offensive weapon. It’s more suited for conquest than for defence’

Your Job in....

- The world
- The company
- The union
- The social democratic party
- Local history
- The library
- The record office
- Vocation guidance
- The factory inspectorate
- Death
- Genealogy
- Who’s who
- Letters and dairies
- The home
- Memories
- Vocabulary
- The museums
- The insurance company
- Monuments
- The strikes
- The law
- Unemployment
- The household
- Production
- Inventions
- Factory planning
- Psychology
- Research
- The barefoot researchers

Archiving ‘an inevitably political craft’ (Zinn 1970): archives and social justice’

In the context of this paper we articulate an archival approach to social justice that **recognizes systemic inequalities and inequities** (how individuals, groups, organizations, and communities are excluded from important decisions and processes affecting them and society) and **employs intellectual and physical resources** (e.g. theories, methodologies, pedagogies, and praxis) to challenge and change these structures of exclusion, marginalization and domination. This framework proceed from a shared recognition that **contestations over the selection, control, access and preservation of information resources implicates social justice endeavors.**

(Duff, Flinn, Suurtamm & Wallace, *Archival Science* 2013)

Active archiving & archival activism – 4 types

1. ***Active archivist or active archiving*** describes an approach which rejecting professional advocacy of neutrality and passivity, **acknowledges the role of the record-keeper in ‘actively’ participating in the creation, management and pluralisation of archives** and seeks to guide the impact of that active role.
2. ***Archiving activism*** describes an archivist or archival institution, whether formal or independent, **documenting political, social movement and other activist groups and campaigns.**
3. ***Archival activism*** describes activities in which **archivists**, frequently professionally trained and employed but not exclusively so, **seek to campaign on issues such as access rights or participatory rights within records’ control systems or act to deploy their archival collections to support activist groups and social justice aims.**
4. ***Activist archiving*** describes the processes in which those who self-identify primarily as **activists engage in archival activity, not as a supplement to their activism but as an integral part of their social movement activism.**

(Flinn & Alexander, “Humanizing an inevitably political craft” (2015))

Independent community-based archiving – a participatory and politically engaged practice?

‘A key premise of community archiving is to give substance to a community’s **right to own its own memories**...a community archive is **more overt in its mission** to include those fragments and perspectives that ordinarily **would not be recognised as valid or worth preserving** by a more conventional repository...Community participation is a **core principle** of community archives’ (Kathy Eales, *South African Archives Journal*, 1998)

‘Community-based archives (and other community-based heritage activities) are diverse, **real world interventions** into the field of local, regional and national even international archival and heritage narratives, **often critical interventions, politically charged with notions of social justice and civil rights**’ (Gilliland & Flinn, 2013)

Physical independent social movement archives



BLACK CULTURAL ARCHIVES

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Object Exchange: Ania Bas, a magazine by young people from London
Object Exchange was commissioned by Art on the Underground in collaboration with Black Cultural Archives and

Collections
explore.

Over thirty years ago, Len Garrison, a co-founder of Black Cultural Archives, asked the question 'Where are our Heroes, Martyrs and Monuments?' Founded in 1981, Black Cultural Archives began collecting

Learning
learn.

Our learning programme explores Black British history through our unique archive collection and is open to all ages. As part of an exciting programme of workshops, activities, exhibitions and events we often

Support
inspire.

Since its inception, we have not simply survived, but thrived thanks to the support of organisations and people like you. It's no small statement to say we couldn't do it without you. Thank you. As we move



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The Feminist Library

Archiving our herstories since 1975

The Feminist Library is a large collection of Women's Liberation Movement literature based in London. We have been supporting research, activist and community projects since 1975.

In 2019 The Feminist Library celebrated 44 years of archiving and activism. Totally volunteer run, we have created and looked after one of the most important collections of feminist material in all of the UK, and provided an inspiring learning and social space for thousands of people.

Help the Feminist Library Build its New Home

Good News! We have found a new home, the



Support the Library - Become a Friend

Although we have successfully fundraised for our move, we still don't have a reliable source of income for our running costs. The Friends Scheme is a way you can help, by giving a regular monthly donation (in exchange for some perks!) Our current 250 Friends cover around 60% percent of our running costs. It would be great to get this to 100%. Will you be our Shero and sign up, help the Library to survive and thrive for years to come? Secure our future from as little as £3 a month.



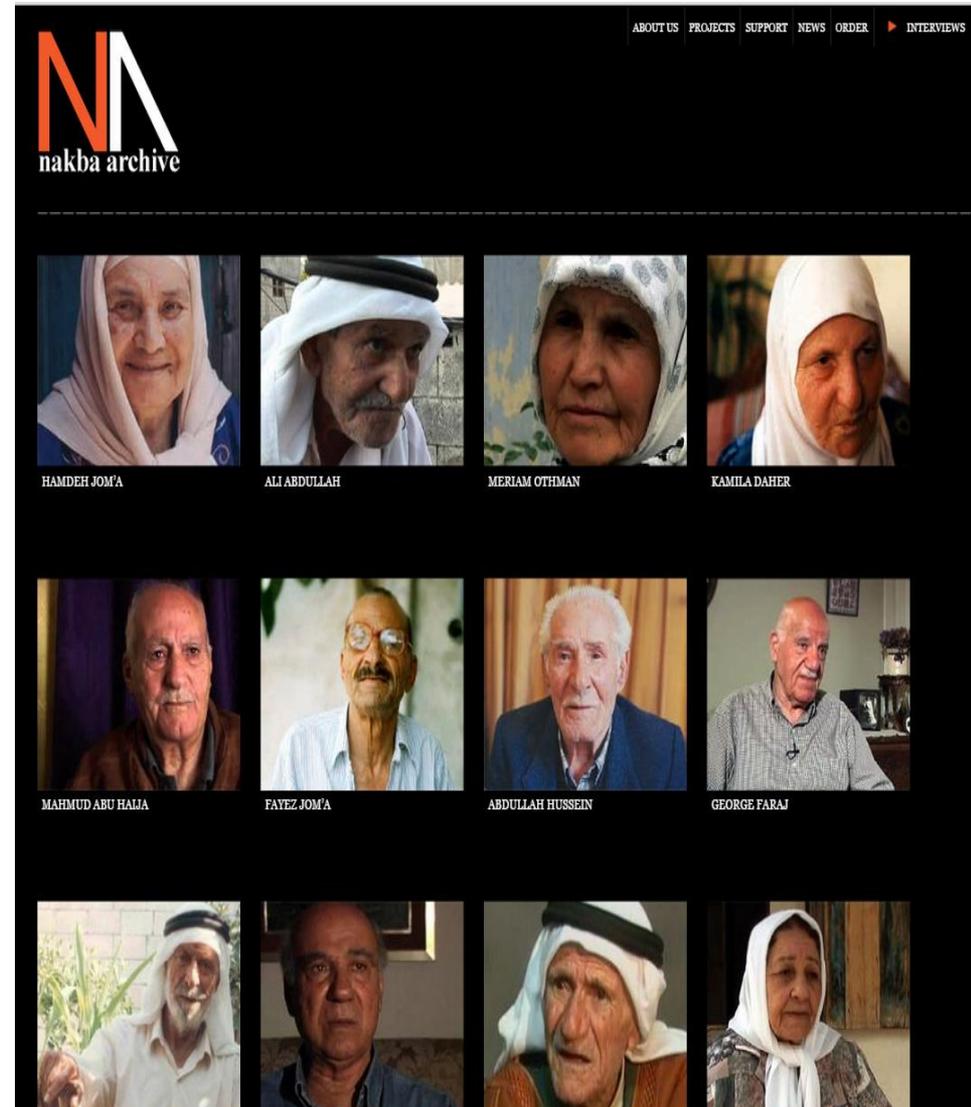
Recovery & preservation; creative and innovative use; aspiration & contesting the future

Around the world, community and social movement activists have often employed **creative and innovative tools and approaches**, which include experimentation with pedagogical strategies and practices, as **they construct and co-construct, document, recover and preserve histories and ideas**. On the other hand, where they exist, **such histories and alternative archives are in danger of being lost**, for example, as organisations dissolve at times of political, social and economic transition, or as people try to uncover social movement/organising history and ephemera during periods of repression, and among marginalised communities and groups when **the maintenance and preservation of documents has sometimes carried great risk**. Furthermore, these processes and practices of producing historical resources that are relevant for contemporary struggles can be **sites of experimentation, intergenerational learning and exchange, debate, tension, and contestation of ideas and memories**

(Choudry & Vally 2018: 2)

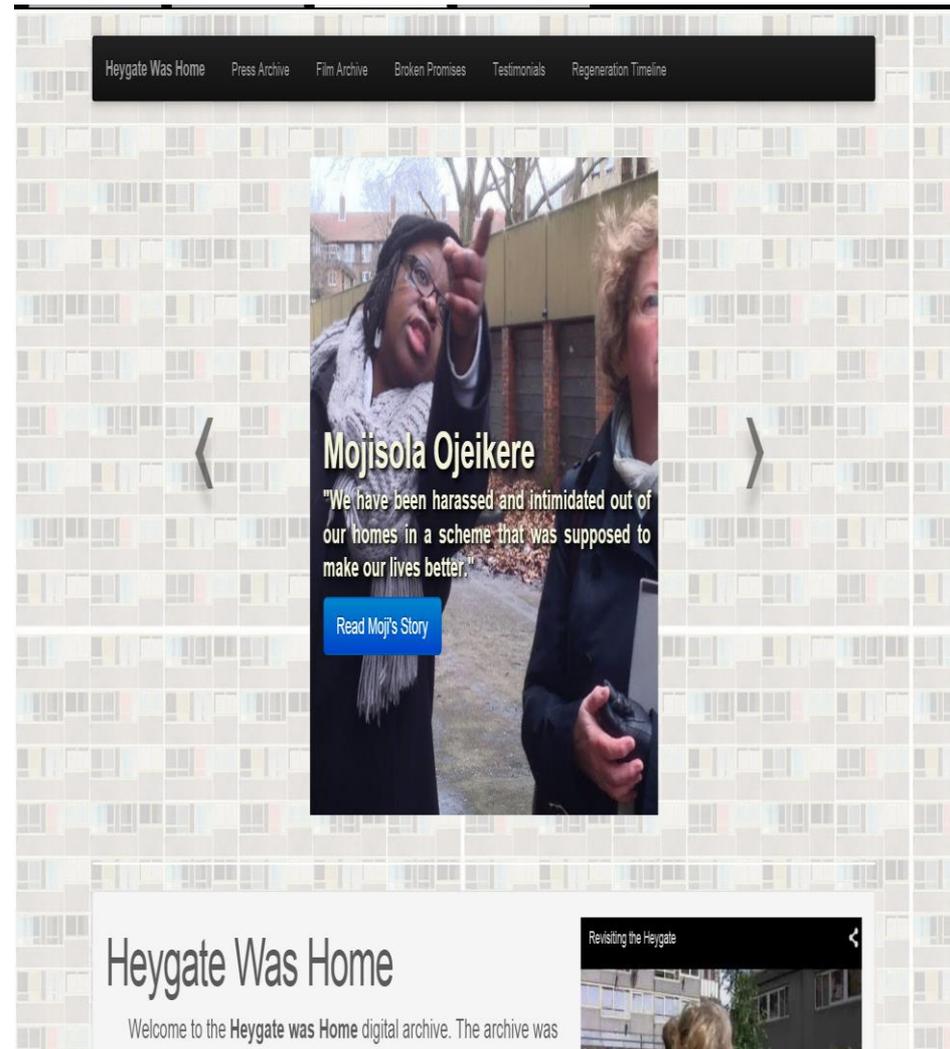
Recovery and preservation of memories

‘Archive fever is spreading among Palestinians everywhere...Of course this is **not an unusual obsession for any social group that experiences the trauma of dispossession and displacement** on a massive scale as the Palestinians did in 1948. Nor is it unusual that the archival impulse is still strong...after all 1948 was not a moment but a process that continues as I write.’
 (Beshara Doumani, 2006)



Saving community: change and redevelopment

‘...it became apparent that physically the environment was going to be like concreted over, as it were ... And the docks were going to be completely altered. So more and more of the physical representation of life as it had been, had been lived was going to disappear. So the recording of it and so was very important (*Isle of Dogs*)



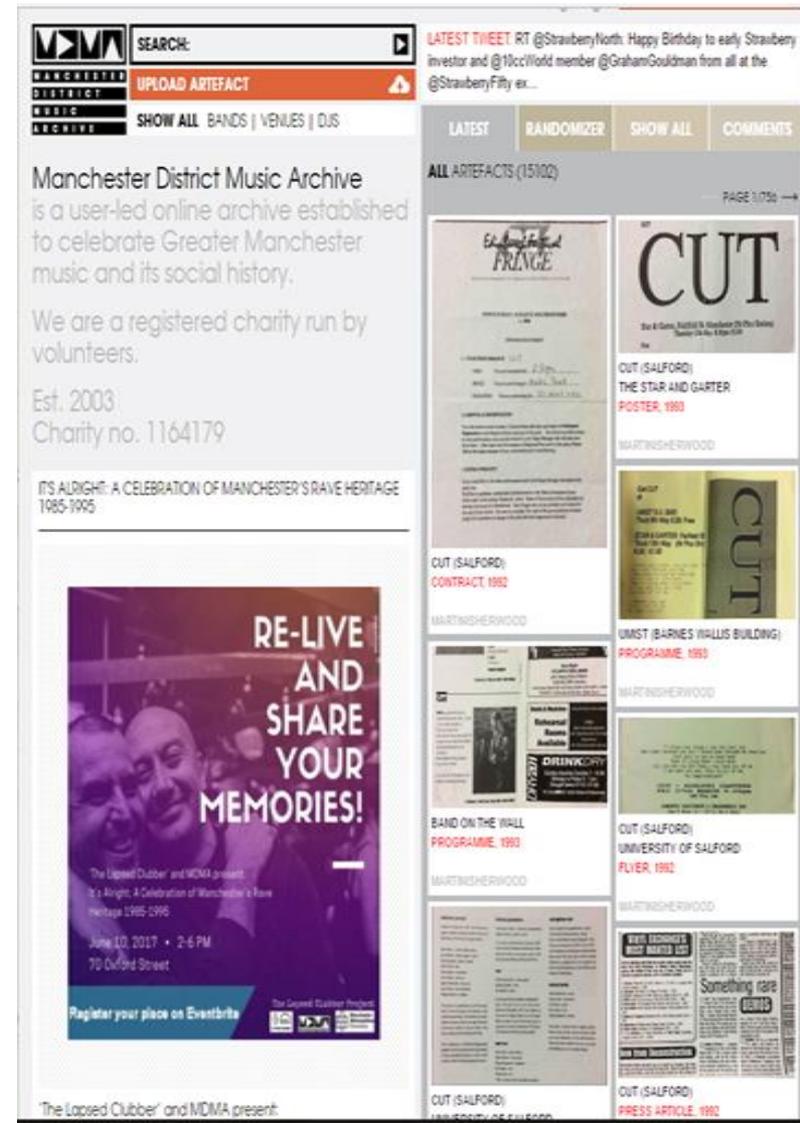
Collecting & valuing ephemera & the intangible

‘the handbills, flyers, posters, programmes for a wide range of events, including political meetings, art exhibitions, concerts, plays, community meetings about education, welfare and politics....**may be not only the only surviving record of transient organisations but the only way of understanding whole movements and trends**’

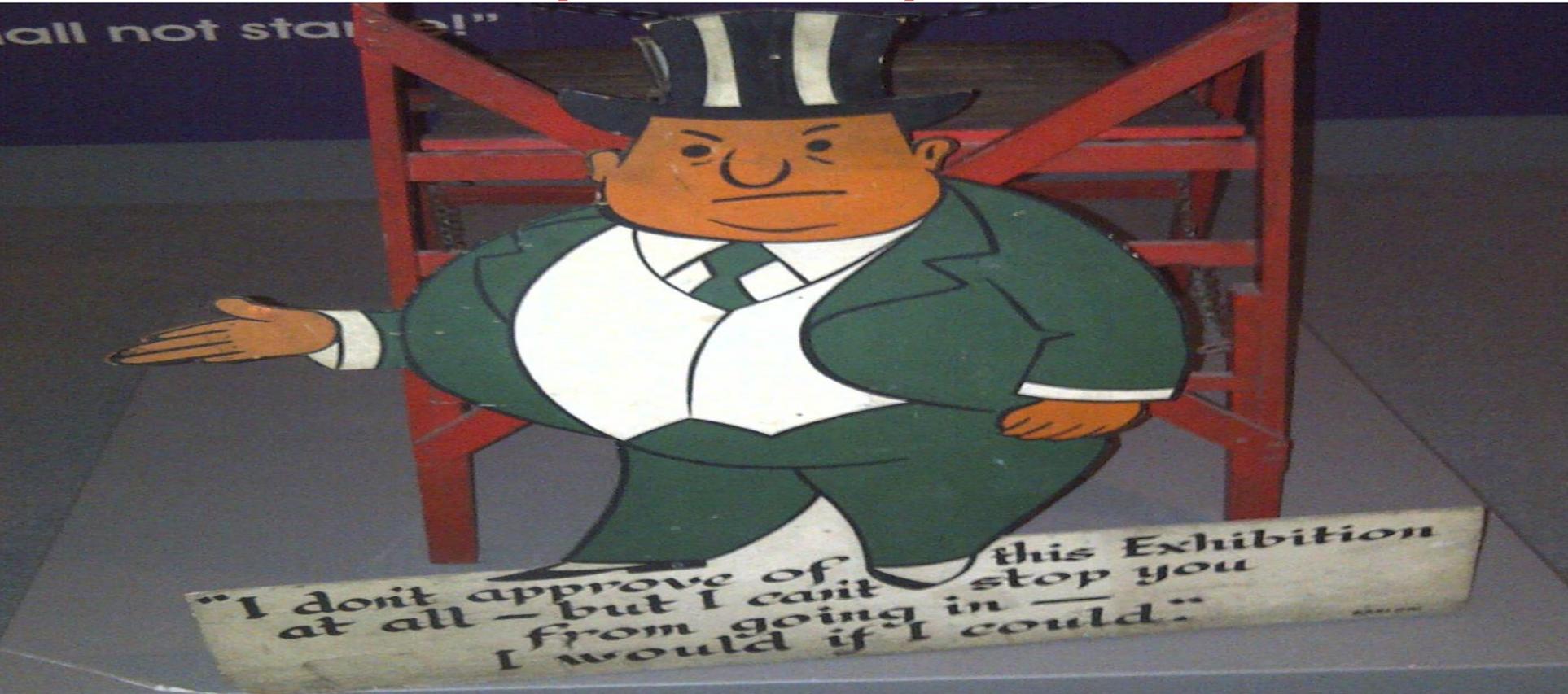
(Mike Phillips in Len Garrison’s obituary, 2003)

‘Histories are transmitted in many struggles through such informal collections. **They are also transmitted through stories, songs and poems particularly in contexts where oral transmission of knowledge values and visions is more significant than written versions**’

(Choudry, 2016)



Resistance – creative and innovative use of the past in the present



“pistols pointed at the entrails of capitalism, the intellectual sources from which the workers would draw the means to build a better world”

Challenging “symbolic annihilation” by inspiring self-confidence and positive identifications through history

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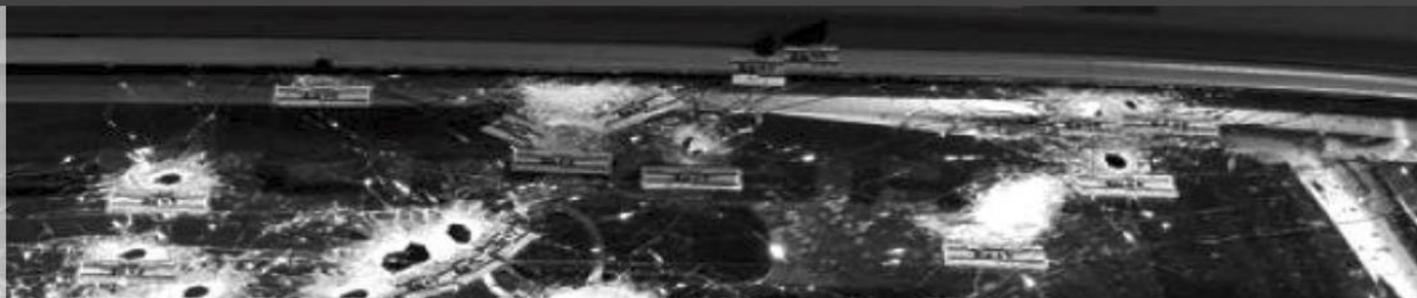
قستنا بالعربي

QISETNA: TALKING SYRIA

A NON-POLITICAL PLATFORM FOR SYRIANS AND THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE A CLOSE CONNECTION WITH THE COUNTRY TO SHARE THEIR STORIES



Participatory archives working towards social justice - collecting evidence



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Principles

To facilitate a safe and anti-oppressive space that welcomes all Cleveland community members, the Archive embodies and promotes the following principles:

- **Participation:** the Archive involves local community members in the decision making process about what materials are collected, how materials are described, and who has access. Moreover, the Archive empowers Cleveland community members to maintain the custody and direction of the Archive over time.
- **Perspective:** the Archive is strengthened through the inclusion of records in varied formats and perspective, and the Archive is weakened through metanarratives that simply replace one form of dominant narrative with a new dominant narrative.
- **Power:** Through the analysis of institutional power, the Archive identifies and unpacks systems of oppression while also analyzing the narratives that help to legitimize and hold these institutions in place.

These principles were informed by the [anti-oppression principles](#) compiled by the Center for Story-Based Strategy and the body of practice in community archives as researched and described by Michelle Caswell in her article, "[Toward a Survivor-Centered Approach to Human Rights Archives: Lessons from Community-Based Archives.](#)" *Archival Science* 14: 3-4 (2014): 307-322.

<http://www.archivingpoliceviolence.org/principles>

See it, film (record / archive) it, change it

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Tools and Methods

Open Source Tools and Methods for Open Source Investigations

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See it.

The Syrian Archive strives for transparency in its tools, findings, and methodologies, as well as in making sure that verified content is publicly available and accessible for journalists, human rights defenders, and lawyers for reporting, advocacy and accountability purposes.

One of the ways this is done is through releasing all software developed publicly in free and open-source formats. This is done both to ensure trust is built and maintained between the Syrian Archive and its partners and collaborators, as well as to allow software to be reused and customised by other groups outside of this project. Technical integration with existing open-

Technology

Open Source Tools and Methods for Open Source Investigations

Mon Nov 27 2017

Research Methodology

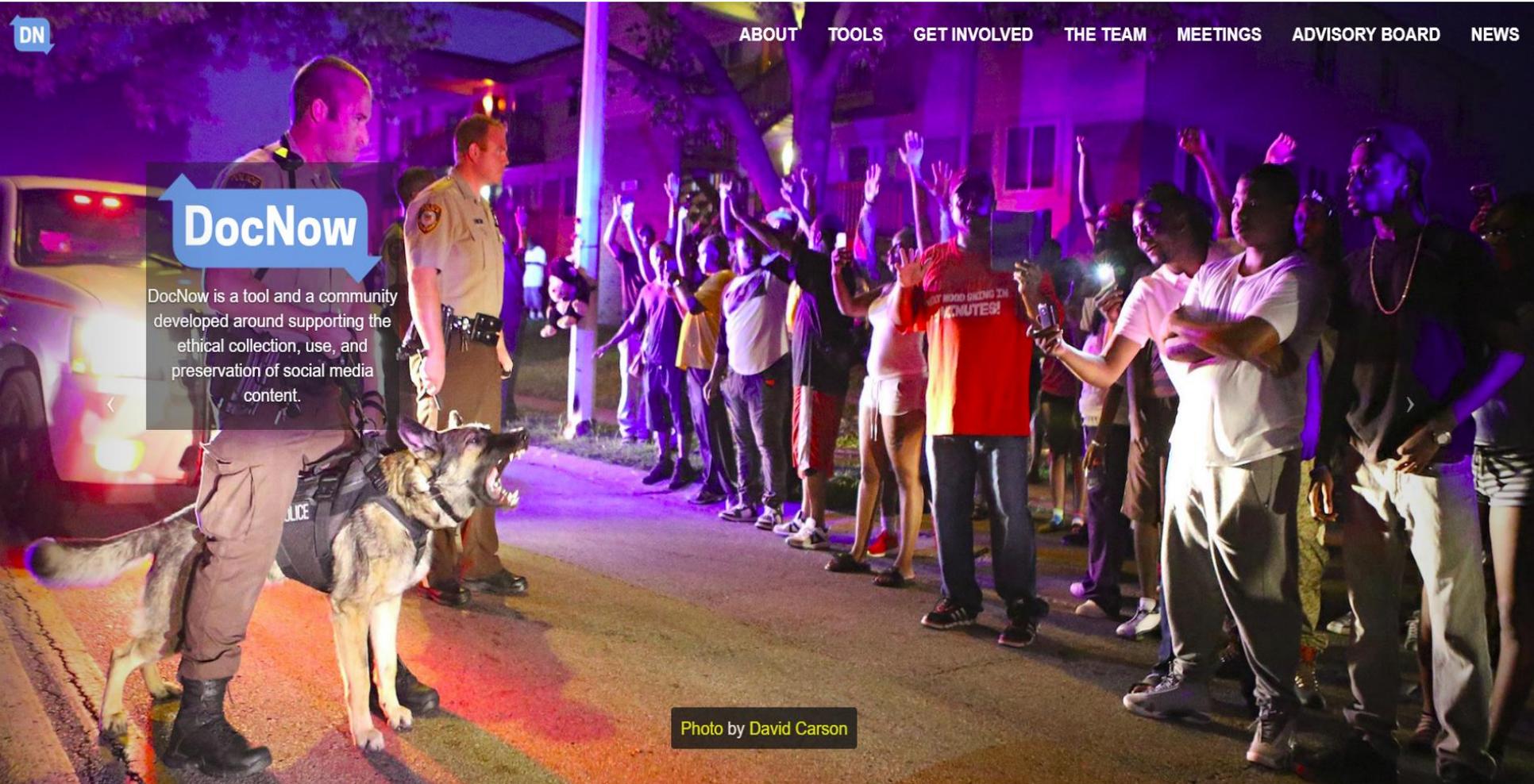
Open Source Tools and Methods for Open Source Investigations - Digital Evidence Workflow

Mon Nov 27 2017



WITNESS makes it possible for anyone, anywhere to use video and technology to protect and defend human rights.

Ethical collection and documentation of contemporary experiences via social media



Documenting the Now <https://www.docnow.io/>

Aspiration & dreams: ‘The archive is also a place of dreams’ (Steedman 1998)

... the archive is a place for dreams and revelation, a place of longing where the world can turn on the discovery of an insignificant fragment: a place for creating and re-working memory... the activity of individuals in everyday life who seek to preserve documents, photographs, diaries and recordings to develop their own archives as memory devices. In short, the archive may become a project or an aspiration, a site for the production of anticipated memories by intentional ‘post-national imagined communities’ (Appadurai, 2003). The ‘diasporic archive’ or the ‘migrant archive’ can be seen as an attempt by migrant groups to engage in imaginative and creative work to form new collective memories, which are distinct from the official memories of the host and former home societies. **Such an archive is seen as an active aspiration, a tool for reworking desires and memories, part of a project for sustaining cultural identities**

(Mike Featherstone, ‘Archive’ Theory, Culture and Society 2006: 594)

Another world is possible – community-based archives as places to think, plan and do

“We consider May Day Rooms and its holdings to be an **active social resource more than a repository**; a place where amidst the austerity-drive threats to education and spaces of dissent, **the future can be produced more than the past contemplated**; a communal space for the incubation of cross-currents and informal, unlicensed knowledges more than a ring-fenced scholar’s retreat.”



Dig Where You Stand today – a powerful metaphor

TALES OF THE OAK

INVERCLYDE FOLKLORE, GRAPHIC NOVELS, STORYTELLING AND HERITAGE

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Thursday, 8 January 2015

Dig Where You Stand...

ACHI BABA GALLIPOLI 1915

Read it free online

Subscribe Now - It's free!

Subscribe in a reader

Magic Torch Comics

A hard time we had of it... sleeping in snatches, with the voices singing in our ears saying that this was all folly. But 2014 is behind us now...this is the all new, all action 2015. Totally different.

dig where you stand - introduction

DIG where you stand
FREE Digital Storytelling Course

21 October–25 November 2014
Tuesdays 10am–1pm
The Redmond Community Centre,
Kilgish Avenue, London N4 2HF
Manor House

Dig where you stand is a free course for people who want to share their own stories or start to record their family or community's history. All levels of experience welcome.

Learn to use digital sound recording, audio editing, photography, oral history interviewing, archival research and blogs.

Any Hackney resident over 19 years old can attend. Funded by Hackney Learning Trust.

Places are limited, and advance booking is essential.
To book please contact on the Record at:
info@on-the-record.org.uk | 07583 656 338
on-the-record.org.uk

H Hackney Learning Trust Manor House Development

Although there has only been one past, each human who has lived in the past experienced it in their own way. Similarly, each human who looks at the past from their viewpoint in the present sees it in their own way. We may cross paths and share moments in the past with others, but never occupy their space or see life through their eyes.

The often archaeological (and history) has concentrated on elites. It has looked either at distant times or distant places, or places that are spectacular or special and at rulers and leaders. Yet most humans have not been members of elites and have lived in ordinary surroundings. Nevertheless their lives, however unremarkable they might seem to us, were of course vastly important to them, and each individual contributed something to what we experience as the present.

I have been captivated by the concept of "Dig Where You Stand," an idea developed by Sven Lindqvist. He focused on the archaeology of work and ordinary workers rather than the bosses. Most of us spend the majority of our lives working, yet the archaeology of our work is rarely studied and often does not survive. When it is studied it is usually looked at by academics. The direct experience of those who actually carried out the work was often recorded or even recognized. "Historians" record the activities of management and financiers, and archaeologists record stone and iron and brick, but not often the realities of the workers.

Lindqvist believed that: "The experts might each be experts in his or her own field but when they are talking about your job, you are the expert. That gives you a measure of self-confidence and a basis for confidence and professional researchers to meet on equal footing" (Lindqvist 1980). He also stated that "history is dangerous."

In a later chapter in Thompson's book *The Transformation of Europe* (1962) that discusses "Dig Where You Stand" Lindqvist wrote that "No area of history has been more distorted by one-sided treatment than the history of business" (Lindqvist 1982, p.20). "History, history could and should be written from a fresh point of view," by workers investigating their own past.

Dig Where You Stand

find your own folklore first

WEDNESDAY, 8 FEBRUARY 2012

Dig where you what?

I was born and brought up in the small fishing town of Arbroath in Angus, on the east coast of Scotland, and I grew up listening to and learning local songs. For several years I've had it on my mind to develop an idea called **Dig Where You Stand** in relation to Scots song, (and the wider traditional arts of music, dance, storytelling). In particular I'm interested in collected archive material as marks in time of the culture of local communities. Interaction with archives has formed a large part of my studies and professional life, whether as an ethnology student, archive catalogue, or a performing traditional singer.

A version of a song in an archive is just one time-stamped marker of its journey; archives are but temporary lodgings for traditions which have a life of their own both before and after the fieldworker takes oral or visual snapshots of them. But thankfully they had the good sense to do so, as we were never really taught that local songs were valid cultural expressions worth hanging onto. Because they weren't often written in books, perhaps we just presumed somebody would remember to remember them, amidst the clamour of the 20th century.

But **Dig Where You Stand?** Well, I've long held the belief that traditional singers have a responsibility to research and revive their local songs and traditions, which I have attempted to do for my own home region over the years. Before we get too bogged down and dusty about this, archives are all well and good - but my main interest is in getting people to sing their own songs again.

That said, there is some theory behind my thinking. A few years ago, my great Dublin friend, singer and labour historian, **Francis Devine**, brought the work of the Swedish activist and writer **Sven Lindqvist** to my attention as we were discussing the idea of seeking out your local songs. It fitted like the proverbial glove.

Dig Where You Stand is part of the translated title of Lindqvist's 1978 book, "Gräv där du står: Hur man utforskar ett jobb" (Dig Where You Stand: How to Research a Job). It revolutionised the way people in workplaces viewed their occupations, as it was, to quote Lindqvist's website,

designed to explain to workers how they could set about researching the history of the firms they worked for. By exploring the archaeology of the workplace, he hoped that workers would be better able to confront the difficulties of the present day.

The website of the **National Labor College** in the USA gives more insight into Lindqvist's thinking:

His theory was: "The experts might each be experts in his or her own field but when they are talking about your job, you are the expert. That gives you a measure of self-confidence and a basis for confidence and professional researchers to meet on equal footing." [...] Until workers understand where they stand...and how to use the resources/tools available to dig with (local library, county museum/archives, local/state labour history society), they will be forever in the background of the "official" version of events...[E]very worker in every country has the power and potential to create a new image for labor, one that puts workers and their work in the foreground."

[Sven Lindqvist, "Dig Where You Stand," *Meddelande från Arbetsutvärderings Arkiv Och Bibliotek* (Stockholm: Vol. 16, September 1980), pp. 42-47].

Still Digging Where We Stand

By Sarah Dhanraj, on 13 March 2013

Apologies for the prolonged blogpage silence. Things have been busy here at Dig Where You Stand. In a good way!

We have been awarded further funding by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and are working to support the following groups with their HLF All Our Stories projects:

- ALDATERA – the Living Archaeology of the Place
- Walsley Archaeological Society
- Friends of Windmill Gardens – Mill Memories
- The Paddington Arts – "Cultural Heritage of North Paddington"
- East Finchley Community Trust – Martin School – our school, our story
- Grove Park Community Group – Grove Park heritage and literary trail
- Jewish Cultural Centre – JEWISH EAST END
- Hoxton Hall – Shoreditch Storybank
- Mental Fight Club – the Spirit of Southbank
- Narrative Eye – Black People in Tudor England
- IFOKO Theatre – Homage to Canning Town African Ancestors
- The Cinema Museum, Community Curators – local cinema heritage
- Beaury Heritage Trust, Under your feet! – exploring the Hidden Landscape at Hill Place
- Jacksons Lams, A Borough United
- Coen Street Centre Trust – Heritage signs and sounds
- Catch 22 – Stones of Becontree

Filed under: Uncategorized
No Comments

He had a great time and we'd like to thank Alderman and all the teachers and pupils at the school.

Claim your history with Dublin Dock Workers Preservation Society!

The Docklands have a rich cultural history which is in danger of being forgotten in more modern times, as Declan Byrne from the DDWPS points out: "From the 1930s to the 1980s Dublin Port, 'the docks' provided the heartbeat to the dockland communities. If you were to do the calculations, there were thousands of people dependent on work in the docks and in the dock-related industries, and the overwhelming majority of these were drawn from the dockland communities. As mechanisation began, starting with the introduction of forklifts (replacing the buggies) and followed by containerisation, the numbers employed started to steadily drop. This was followed by the demise of the labour-intensive dockland industries. It is no coincidence that this later period saw the social deterioration of some of the dockland communities."



DIG WHERE YOU STAND

"Tradition is the passing on of fire, not the worship of ashes."
Gustav Mahler

EDITED BY

Steve Byrne

Steve is a singer, ethnologist, arts worker and advocate for Scottish Traditional Arts, who has worked for Edinburgh Council, Tobair an Duais/ Kist o' Riches, and Scots Music Group.

Chair of the Traditional Music Forum and Secretary of the Hamish Henderson Archive Trust, he is a graduate of the School of Scottish Studies.

Born in Arbroath, Angus, he now lives in Edinburgh. The views expressed here are entirely his own.

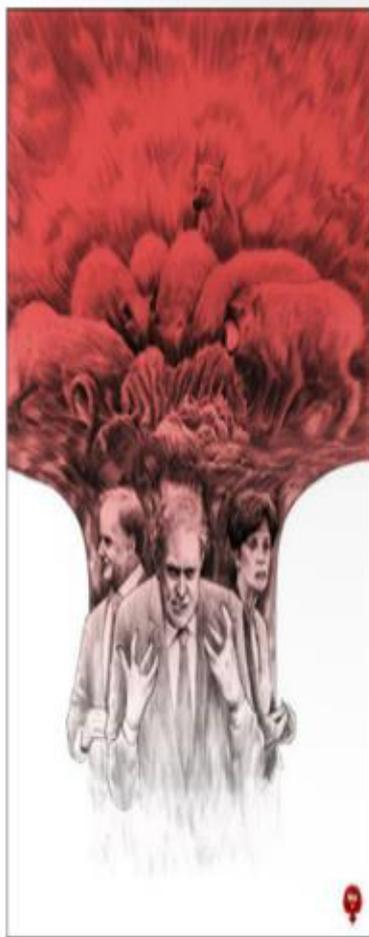
View my complete profile

PLACES TO DIG

- Tobair an Duais/ Kist o' Riches
- Alan Lomax Archive / Association for Cultural Equity
- North East Folklore Archive
- Irish Traditional Music Archive

PAGES

A script for the fashioning of a new world?



OUT OF THE MOUTHS OF "CASSEROLES"
textes qui bougent au rythme du carré rouge
 a special open-wi issue of wt: journal of mobile media,
 part II • 19 June 2012

Dig Where You March: Scratching the Surface of a Student Struggle with Archived Imagery

David Widginton, Concordia University, Media Studies

More than four months have passed since the first votes were cast in general assemblies across Quebec, initiating the current student strike against tuition increases. Since its onset, the unlimited general strike has emerged as a pillar of an international student movement resistant to the neoliberal austerity measures and the privatization of public commons synonymous with extreme capitalism.

HISTORY FROM BELOW

BERLIN SUBVERSIV
 DE ANNIERDE STADTWA

LA COMM

- about topics
- network social media
- writing video clips
- categories additional links

TUISMO TACTICO

Cycles of History

BIKE HISTORY TOURS

Yes! You Be the Prof!

History is the new punk

The International History From Below network is a diverse community of historians, historical activists, public historians, history geographers, public archaeologists, etc. It was founded (2012) in Barcelona to reflect a growing worldwide movement of historical activism and public interest in radical history, and to build an alternative, non-academic resource for the production and transmission of oppositional forms of history. It radical history becomes increasingly visible, more and more visible – from squares and bookshelves to cartoons and bookshelves – on making the transition to historical, mapping and digital, new technology and digital culture to build new and supporting narratives.

History from below is essentially the study of the non-elite, the exploited classes in a social order, the forgotten voices of the anonymous men and women against the official histories, and thus a critique of dominant and elite versions of the past. However, rather than the passive 'citizen' we have the active 'citizen' which denotes that history is being made by those people rather than merely being done to them. Making it their history of self-organization and resistance in the face of oppression, displacement and poverty.

History is sought to be a collaborative enterprise, one in which the researcher, the activist, the teacher, the student, the 'bi-political' intellectual and the local citizen: the local history activists and the individual sociologist, should be regarded as equally engaged. – Robert Denard

History from below began in the 1980s as an academic initiative in North America. European universities, institutions from which the majority were excluded. However, the exclusivity of the academy was challenged in the 1970s by the struggle for history teaching movement in England, and the City where you stand movement in Sweden, which both challenged a conventional history practice and production of knowledge and resistant 'own history'. The History Workshop was gathering of academics, trade unions and community historians were described by two participants as being 'the best history without the dust'.

First years when the internet delivered power of internet resources, new technology and social media provided both numerous opportunities to research and the dissemination of historical information in many diverse forms. International collaboration made possible by the new technology is helping to re-invent practices for the study of history from below forward, adding new diversity, play and creativity in order to resist and reimagine a conventional historical discipline. Developing new tools and techniques for sharing knowledge and communally radical history in new and accessible ways to a wider audience – including books, video and local

ARCHIVE INTERFERENCE

#UM15

MANUAL WORKERS COLLECTIVE

FRIDAY PRICES

Preserving community-owned content – “critically endangered digital collections” (DPC)

Community Archives and Community Generated Content

Digital content generated by community interest groups with great enthusiasm but dependent on project funding and limited or no prospect for long term support after creation, and no funding to deposit in digital archive.

<p>Action:</p> <p>Action and Assessment is now Urgent (Action within 12 months in presence of aggravating conditions)</p> <p>Assessment Completed:</p> <p>November 2017</p>	<p>Examples:</p> <p>Data of marginalized or sub-culture groups; one-off projects in art, heritage, environment or community development; content from small or volunteer societies where preservation is not a core functions; digital and digitized oral history; AV content at Glasgow Women's Library; recordings of BME Oral history;</p>	<p>Aggravating conditions:</p> <p>dependence on obsolete or proprietary formats or processes; single copies; conflation of bit preservation with logical preservation; ill-devised funding programmes; lack of skills; single points of failure; lack of clear stewardship or sense of ownership dependency on portable media; inadequate provision or over-dependency with social media, webhost or service provider</p>
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Practically Extinct: in the presence of Aggravating Conditions.

Endangered: where good practice can be demonstrated.

Questions / thoughts?

Thank you!

Dr Andrew Flinn

@andyucl

a.flinn@ucl.ac.uk