

INTRODUCTION TO ARCHIVAL PHOTOGRAPHY

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Workshop plan

1. Introductions
2. Planning your visit
3. At the archive: scoping and ordering
4. Photography
5. Storage of images
6. Transcription of images

The workshop will take about 1 hour. A 20 min tour of the DCU follows.

Introduction

1. Archival photography has become an important tool for archival research. It enables you to work with records when you are away from the archive and to share them easily online. The aim of this workshop is to introduce archival photography and to show you how it can be done well while avoiding the pitfalls of blurry and lost images. We will focus on equipment, and practical methods of finding, ordering, and filming documents, as well as processing and saving images. Whether your research focuses on pamphlets, legal transcripts, or numerical lists, effective use of digital photography will allow you to process more sources more efficiently.
2. Planning your visit and take correct ID
 - Assessing the job at home, scoping collections in archive, and pre-order items if you can. Checking archive rules including copyright and service charges.
 - Make sure you take the correct ID to register. You won't get in without this!
 - Think carefully about how much photography is involved. Image numbers should fit your time and funding.

Equipment

- Cameras: it may be best to use a small compact camera. You may have to stand holding the camera for days, so lightweight cameras might can be best. A camera with a tilting screen and a good quality lens is best. Take two batteries and a charger or plug DC adapter to avoid situations where you have to stop work while your only battery recharges.
- Mobile phones work well for OCR photography and for small photography tasks. Phone cameras with apps such as Adobe Scanner are a good if you want to scan documents and use OCR later. Phone cameras can take much better-quality images than standard cameras. A major downside using phones is their very limited battery life and storage capacity. The phone itself is also difficult to hold steady for long periods without a stand or tripod. A long USB charge cable or backup phone battery is one solution, and cloud storage solves internal storage limitations on phones.
- It is a good idea to check image quality as you are going along, and to store files on your laptop. If using a digital camera, transfer cable from camera to laptop is probably the fastest way to

transfer images. Memory cards are OK, but they may slow your work, as you must repeatedly remove cards to check images on the laptop. Small camera memory cards do mean you can travel to the archive without a laptop.

- My ideal equipment list: extendable arm tripod for vertical photography, a digital camera with tilting screen, data cable, a mains plug adaptor, and a remote camera trigger.
3. At the archive 1: archive scoping
 - Find your bearings when you arrive. How does the archive work? Which archivists are knowledgeable about collections relevant to you?
 - Find help from such staff at early stage. This could save weeks of work and may find you crucial sources. Make sure you have some done at least some prior research, as you will get more help if you have a good idea about what you are looking for. Try not to be vague and be extra polite to librarians and archivists – they can be sensitive. You could start with printed guides to collections.
 - Finding and ordering documents. Different advantages of paper and online catalogues.
 4. At the archive 2: ordering
 - Order records chronologically or following your chosen sampling method.
 5. Photography
 - Lighting varies in archive reading rooms as does space for photography. Poor lighting is a problem because of blurred images. Few archives were designed for photography, and flash photography is never allowed, and lamps are often unavailable.
 - Documents types (maps, rolls, volumes, lists, pictures, etc.) vary greatly in form. The older the document the harder it is to handle. Medieval sources are extremely challenging to photo. Weights do not often work well for photography. It is best to use clean hands to hold errant materials down.
 - Some archives provide downward facing camera stands. Your camera will need the tripod screw attachment at bottom to use these. Some archives allow tripods, but these work only at a limited diagonal angle. Perpendicular angle to source is best to avoid depth of field focus problems where parts of documents are blurred.
 - Turn sounds and flash off.
 - Set image quality and size to 1 MB if you want to avoid memory running out and slow transfer and online sharing transfer speeds. If you are filming a painting or a map and want to edit using Photoshop or blow up images, then use maximum file size and quality settings. Large 'RAW' file formats good if you intend to edit the image later using Photoshop etc. For very large documents, it will probably be necessary to film sections and stitch images together later. Finer detail that could be important for research is lost in large images of larger sources.
 - When you are ready to take pictures set camera to automatic options for shutter speed and aperture. It will normally find best settings. IMPORTANT: Check as you go to ensure images you take are as focussed as possible given the low light found in archives. You may need to use the camera monitor or laptop to do this. You do not want to have to go back to reshoot unreadable documents later!
 - OCR is a powerful tool that can be utilised using mobile apps like Adobe PDF Scanner. You can either scan using your phone camera in situ or scan other images later with Adobe. If you are

extracting printed materials, OCR will likely help with their transcription. This is useful if you plan to extract lots of information or data.

6. Storage

- You should backup images in three places: (1) cloud storage (e.g. OneDrive) (2) external drive (3) your computer. Data is easier to lose than you might think.
- When finished shooting transfer and organise your images into files on computer while you remember what you have done using the cable or memory stick. You will find it easier later to recall images if you group collections of images of individual sources or volumes, and mark files with their original archive class mark. Do not mix sources together in your image files, as you will find it difficult to search through later.
- If you are taking a very large number of images some people create a spreadsheet listing the sources photographed with the image file name runs: e.g. Image: IM407-IM511 = source: E122/222/5. Maintaining such a record is very time consuming and is often unnecessary. Simply use the image name the camera assigns to images and define a file name that groups those images into folders on your computer.

7. Transcription

- Decide on your transcription conventions before copying lots of information into spreadsheets or Word. Check sources to make sure you know what information to harvest. It is a pain to have to go back later and add missing information or to find you do not have enough time to collect everything.
- As you transcribe, note image names and numbers (e.g. RAW 1010) for images viewed. This will enable you to return to correct inevitable transcription errors easily.
- Viewing on two computer screens will be infinitely more comfortable and productive when transcribing.
- If you have scanned images you can OCR text and even copy and paste text from images into databases or word documents from the original source.
- A student and teachers' Adobe Acrobat license costs about £15 per month. It will enable you to scan with your phone and combine images into a digitally bound PDF volume and allow you to annotate the PDF. I'd recommend investing in this software as it can save a lot of time and effort especially if you want to copy and paste text. Another useful tool, costing roughly the same, is Adobe Lightroom. This is useful to batch processing of images.