

CAS Training day  
AN INTRODUCTION TO ARRANGING AND DESCRIBING  
YOUR ARCHIVE COLLECTIONS

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This one day training day was organised by Sarah Stanton and the 21 attendees came from a variety of diocesan and religious institutions and lay societies. The uniqueness of each archive made it a challenge to provide definite standards, but throughout the day various options were highlighted from which we could choose the most relevant. Everyone went away feeling they had gained a better understanding of archival theory and best practice as well as being encouraged by seeing that they were not alone in facing vast amounts of backlogs and difficulties. Sarah also reassured us that all archives, however well staffed and financed, are striving to an ideal and that the main thing was to do our best to attain these standards. Throughout the day there were opportunities to raise questions and for people to share solutions and suggestions.

Sarah had structured the day into five main sessions. The first session covered archival theory and raised four key points why good archival arrangement and description is important. The next session explained further how archives are to be structured in a hierarchical system and we were introduced to the ISAD (G) cataloguing standards. After having covered the theoretical side of archives, the third session moved on to discuss putting these theories into practice when tackling a backlog. The session divided the description process into two stages – a more general research level of the whole collection and then a more detailed consideration of the archives. The session encouraged us to decide on priorities and not to rush as “if it’s worth doing, it’s worth doing well”. We also received practical guidance as to how to go about arranging archives.

The lunch served was delicious and the break time provided us with the chance to share our individual situations and needs and to exchange ideas with one another.

After lunch, the fourth session covered a variety of finding aids and we were given a list of essential elements that need to be included in an effective catalogue. During this session we were made aware of the importance of securing the archives and also raised the issue of our legal obligations. The final session explored the way computers and the internet can be used to assist in making archives more accessible. A key focus of this session was the various databases that can be used. It was helpful to be given the pros and cons of various systems as this took into consideration the variety of archival needs and resources represented. To conclude the day, Sarah briefly discussed reference numbers, packaging and storage issues and rules and conventions for us to consider implementing in archives. This last issue made us aware of the importance of maintaining consistency. There also was time to ask any final questions.

For each session we collected very useful handouts for us to peruse at a later point as there was a lot to take in during the day. It must be said that Sarah did a wonderful job of summing up and making clear a vast amount of dense information; and provided us with an enjoyable day and much food for thought.