



SOCIAL STUDIES

THE ROLE OF THE ARCHIVIST

Resource Content

This resource focuses on what an archive is and the role of an archivist. It highlights a career linked to Social Studies.

Experiences and Outcomes

Social Studies – People, past events and societies.

SOC 2-06a - I can discuss why people and events from a particular time in the past were important, placing them within a historical sequence.



FACT SHEET

What is an archive?

An archive is a collection of unique material that provides us with evidence about the past: that is, proof that something happened or that something (or someone) existed.

At Lothian Health Services Archive, we collect documents, images and some objects about healthcare and hospitals in Edinburgh and the Lothians. We collect, keep, and preserve these items, making sure that people can access them.

Our main aim is to preserve memories and stories that cannot be found anywhere else (memories of people and memories of places), and this can take many forms. Without an archive to keep them, materials that hold these memories could be lost because they are no longer in active use.

What does LHSA have?

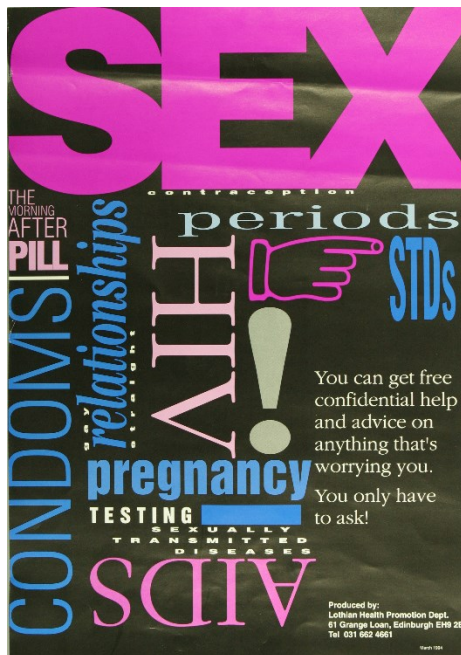
- **Documents** - about hospitals, patients, staff and diseases.
- **Images** - evidence of what places and people looked like; activities that went on.
- **Objects** - items produced for different activities, such as a badge used in a health promotion campaign.
- **Audio-visual** – films, audio (including recordings of personal memories), advertisements or material broadcasted on television.

The role of an archivist is to:

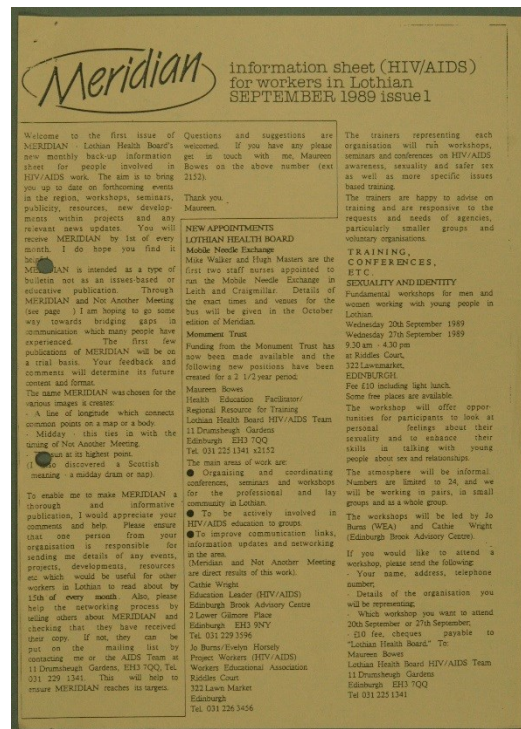
- **Collect materials for the archive** – these can come from hospitals, groups and individuals
- **Keep archive items safe and in the right conditions**– in storerooms that are secure, dry and cool.
- **Make sure that people know what the archive has** - by cataloguing (making lists of and describing the things that we have), letting people see items in the archive, telling people about what we do and answering people's questions about what is in the archive.



RESOURCE IMAGES



SOC5.01



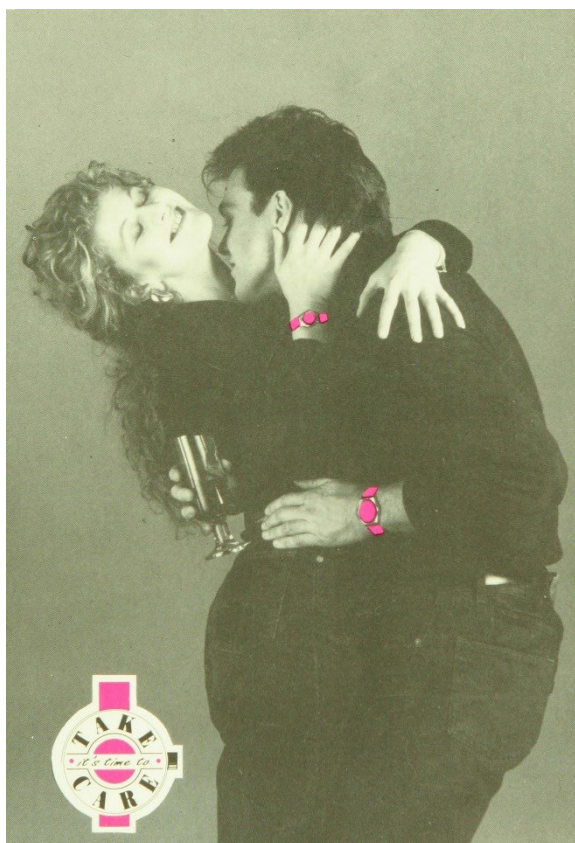
SOC.02



SOC5.03



SOC5.04



SOC5.05



SOC5.06

Use the reference numbers below these images to help you find the corresponding downloadable images on the website



SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. Starter Activity – Class discussion

- a. What is an archive?
- b. Give examples of archives.
- c. What do they store?
- d. How do you access the information in those archives (internet or only in person)? You can find a list of items in the LHSA's HIV and AIDS collections here:

http://www.lhsa.lib.ed.ac.uk/source/HIVAIDS_index.htm

2. Main Project – Be an archivist!

- a. Archives do not have enough room to keep everything – think of how many people live in Edinburgh at the moment (around 500,000) – can we keep a folder about everyone's visits to the hospital year after year?
- b. We have to think about what we want to keep in the archive, and what we want to reject. This called appraisal.
- c. When something is given to us, we ask these questions:
 - i. What does it show or what does it tell us?
 - ii. What is it evidence of?
 - iii. Do we need other things to know what it means?
- iv. Does it fit in with what we collect? You can find the LHSA mission statement here:
http://www.lhsa.lib.ed.ac.uk/about/mission_statement.htm
- v. Why would people be interested in it?
- d. Divide the class into groups. Give them a selection of images (use the images shown above in this resource, or choose some of your own from the image bank or random images from the internet) and ask them to decide whether or not to keep the item in an archive.
- e. Ask students to put the images they want to keep in one pile, and what they want to get rid of in another.



3. Closing – Evaluation

- a. Ask students to explain why they decided to keep certain things and not keep others.

Students may have decided to keep different things. If certain items have been left out by a particular group, how might this affect our interpretation of history?



ANSWERS

There are no right or wrong answers to this exercise: it aims to show how what we remember and think is significant can be changed depending on what you decide to keep or remove from an archive.

However, you may wish to keep SOC5.01, SOC5.03, SOC5.05 and SOC5.06 as they belong to the same 'Take Care' campaign. For more information on this, take a look at resource "SOC2 - The 'Take Care' campaign report. These items also tell you about the different methods that the campaign used to spread awareness – from this the students could talk about where these items could have been used and what other things an archive might have as evidence of this.

You may not want to keep SOC5.02 if you were sure that the archive had a complete copy of the newsletter, as SOC5.02 is only part of a newsletter. Equally, you may not wish to keep SOC5.04, as this shows someone working with the collection, but doesn't necessarily tell you much about what she is doing, who she is or what she does for a living. However, it does tell you a little bit about how the item was treated while it was in the archive.