PROTECTING DISPERSED COLLECTIONS: A FRAMEWORK FOR MANAGING THE AT-RISK HERITAGE ASSETS OF CATHOLIC RELIGIOUS INSTITUTES

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Acknowledgements

Note on Terminology

Although more commonly referred to as 'religious orders' and 'religious congregations', 'religious institutes' is the more appropriate term to encompass all forms of religious life, whether contemplative, apostolic etc, and so 'religious institute' will be used throughout this report. It should not be confused with those individual institutes that incorporate the word 'Institute' into their name, for example, the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

1. Executive Summary

The aim of this project was to gather information on the archive management practices for all religious institutes of England and Wales and to propose viable solutions for their long-term preservation, ensuring their continuity beyond the lifespan of each institute.

As a result of the decline in vocations, many religious institutes are disbanding with the resulting existential threat to their significant archive collections. These collections are not only important to the religious institutes themselves, allowing their charism and identity to remain in perpetuity, but are also invaluable to historians of education, medicine, migration and exile, and other topics now considered secular.

Solutions that have been attempted in the UK have been limited in scope, although there are examples of centralised repositories in Europe, the United States and Canada specialising in storing the archives of religious institutes. Of particular importance in this context are the Heritage Centre for Monastic Life in St. Agatha, Nijmegen, and the KADOC Documentation and Research Centre on Religion, Culture and Society in Leuven, whose repositories were visited as part of this project. There have also been attempts in the UK, Ireland and elsewhere to collect information on collection management practices in the form of surveys and inspections.

Building upon this research, a survey was sent to all religious institutes in England and Wales to collect information on their collection management practices and future plans for the storage of their archive. As a result of this survey, the main findings and recommendations include: the need to convene a 'Repository Working Group' involving representatives from religious institutes, Catholic stakeholders, and archives associations to discuss the feasibility of establishing repositories, including commissioning a comprehensive feasibility study and cost analysis to determine viability; collaboration with international groups facing similar challenges; raising awareness about archive preservation amongst religious institutes; encouraging basic listings of collections; providing archival training opportunities, and advocating for funding and access to archives.

The report also stresses that religious institutes are not alone in facing the challenges of at-risk and dispersed records. Indeed, the recommendations of this report will be relevant to many institutions and organisations storing archives and so have broader implications for the archives sector as a whole.

2. Context

2.1 The purpose of this project is to gather information on the archive management procedures for all religious institutes of England and Wales and to suggest possible solutions for their long-term preservation that will last beyond the life of the institute itself. A case study focusing on the archives of religious institutes will demonstrate the challenge of at-risk records more generally. This is not a challenge that is exclusive to Catholic institutes and has long been recognised by the wider heritage sector. It is hoped, therefore, that the recommendations of this report could be adapted by other organisations caring for at-risk archives.

2.2 The Catholic Church in England and Wales has contracted both institutionally and numerically in recent years, with religious institutes experiencing a concurrent and rapid decline in membership numbers.[1] As existing members age, these institutes are 'reaching completion' (disbanding), sometimes rapidly, with the resulting existential threat to their significant archive collections. With little existing guidance, an *ad hoc* situation has developed which has, on occasion, resulted in archival and cultural heritage items being transferred to institutions wholly unsuited to their care or, in the worst-case scenario, sold, lost, or even deliberately destroyed.

2.3 A failure to preserve the long-term future of heritage collections represents a catastrophic loss to the legacy and memory of any community and this is notably the case with the records of minority Catholic religious institutes. For such communities, their archives represent far more than simply a corporate record of their activities. They are vital to ensuring that their charism and identity continue in perpetuity, long after the institute itself has physically disbanded.[2]

2.4 Religious institutes are encouraged by the Catholic Church to recognise the importance of their history and archives. During the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), convened by Pope John XXIII for the purpose of 'updating' (*aggiomamento*) the Church's teaching for the twentieth century, the decree *Perfectae Caritatus* ('Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life') emphasised the need for renewal by religious institutes to be grounded in an understanding of their history.[3] Thus, good archival management became something of an imperative, with many institutes either upskilling

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[1] Certainly, in terms of numbers of practising Catholics, see Stephen Bullivant, *Mass exodus: Catholic disaffiliation in Britain and America since Vatican II*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).
[2] Christopher Allison, 'Catholic collections and the future of American Catholic History', *American Catholic Studies Newsletter*, 50:1 (Spring 2023), pp. 10-19.
[3] The Holy See, *Decree on the adaptation and renewal of religious life* Pefectae Caritas *proclaimed by His Holiness Pope Paul VI on October 28, 1965* Perfectae caritatis (vatican.va) [last accessed 31 March 2023].

members or appointing qualified archivists to aid them in their task of carrying out their own research in the writing and publishing of biographies of their founders/foundresses or publishing key historical documents.[4]

2.5 From a wider research point of view, many archives of religious institutes contain information that is crucial to our understanding of varied and sometimes surprising aspects of national and international history. These collections reveal the key role that members of institutes played in movements now considered secular, whether through the development of health care and education, attitudes towards exile and migration, and international campaigns against human trafficking and modern slavery.[5] As Barbara Walsh, noted in the introduction to her book on the social history of female religious institutes:

> Through convent archives we can also study the history of society generally. We can uncover, amongst other things, the history of health, welfare and educational institutions of all types. We can also, to some extent, examine the lives of individuals who came into contact with religious communities whether as children or adults, as users of services, or providers of money and funding, or as representatives of higher authorities. The material stored in convent archives holds the history not only of religious congregations but also of the wider society.[6]

To lose these stories would be to leave us with a seriously compromised and incomplete record in terms of historical understanding.

2.6 Any solutions proposed will need to consider the differing and often complex requirements of individual orders. Although there may be superficial similarities in the histories of religious institutes, they are not monolithic. They reflect a range of different approaches to religious life, with each institute's story representing a unique record of their activities.[7]

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[4] Susan O'Brien, 'Religious life for women', eds V. Allan McClelland and Michael Hodgetts, *From without the Flaminian Gate: 150 years of Roman Catholicism in England and Wales 1850-2000*, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1999), p. 112.

[5] For an extensive bibliography of academic publications focusing on the histories of female religious institutes, see the History of Women Religious of Britain and Ireland bibliography webpage Bibliography – History of Women Religious of Britain and Ireland. For a good general introduction on the importance of the history of female religious, see Susan O'Brien, 'A survey of research and writing about Roman Catholic women's congregations in Great Britain and Ireland (1800-1950)', eds. Jans de Maeyer, Sofie Leplae & Joachim Schmiedl, *Religious institutes in Western Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries: historiography, research and legal position* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2004), pp. 91-115. For a general introduction to the history of male religious in England and Wales, Aidan Bellinger, 'Religious life for men', eds V. Allan McClelland and Michael Hodgetts, From without the Flaminian Gate, pp. 142-166.

[6] Barbara Walsh, *Roman Catholic nuns in England and Wales 1800-1937: A social history* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2002).

[7] Apostolic orders, for example, tend to work within the community as teachers, doctors, counsellors etc., while contemplative orders are focused on prayer and cloistered orders remain within their convent or monastery and do not directly engage with the external world.

3. Comparable Initiatives

3.1 The wider archive and library sectors have long recognised the challenge of dispersed at-risk collections, particularly in relation to the archives of specific groups, communities, and localities.[8] Societies have been formed offering tailored advice for specific types of records/repositories (such as the Business Archives Council, the Group for Literary and Manuscript Archives, or the Charity and Voluntary Sector Archives Group)[9]. More practical action is also evident in the form of the British Library's 'Endangered Archives Programme', which digitises archives from across the world that 'are in danger of destruction, neglect or physical deterioration'[10], and the recently launched National Archives Risk and Resilience Fund, providing grants for 'saving records at immediate risk' and building "the long-term resilience of archive services'.[11] The higher education library sector has also developed ambitious plans for printed collections, with the establishment of the UK Research Reserve to ensure preservation of the UK's print journals. There are discussions towards a plan for greater collaboration in sharing resources to retain print monographs. The recently published OCLC report ('Total Cost of Stewardship') also provides a useful financial modelling framework for this project.[12]

3.2 Perhaps understandably, given the significant planning, financial and operational challenges, there are very few successful centralised repositories catering for at-risk archives in the UK. Community-based archive repositories, such as the East London Mosque Archives[13] and the Black Cultural Archives[14] are perhaps the best examples, albeit on a small scale. However, in many cases, the challenges have been too great to overcome. One of the few credible attempts to establish a centralised repository for all voluntary archives in the late 1990s, for example, was beset

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[8] See, for example, Audrey Linkman, 'The Manchester studies archive retrieval project', *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, 6.7 (1981), pp. 414-422, Andrew Flinn, 'Community Histories, Community Archives: Some Opportunities and Challenges', *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, 28.2 (2007), pp. 151-176; Lisa Collins Shortall, '"A permanent house for local archives": a case study of a community's archives in County Offaly', *Archives and Records*, 37.2 (2011), pp. 143-156; D. Sutton and A. Livingstone (eds), *The Future of Literary Archives: Diasporic and Dispersed Collections at Risk*. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018); Aldair Rodrigues, Mário Medeiros da Silva & Paulo César Ramos, 'Antiracism and black memory in the archives: a project to preserve black organization collections at the University of Campinas (Brazil)', *Archives and Records*, 42.3 (2021), pp. 304-323; Caroline Williams, 'Understanding Collections at Risk', *Archives: The Journal of the British Records Association*, 53.136 (2018), pp. 45-69.

[9] Group for Literary Archives and Manuscripts, Group for Literary Archives & Manuscripts (glam-archives.org.uk) and Business Archives Council - Home [last accessed 31 March 2023].

[10] British Library, 'Endangered Archives Programme' Welcome to the Endangered Archives Programme | Endangered Archives Programme (bl.uk) [last accessed 31 March 2023].

[11] National Archives, Archives Resilience and Records at Risk Funds, About the Archives Resilience and Records at Risk Funds - Archives sector (nationalarchives.gov.uk) [last accessed 31 March 2023].

[12] OCLC Research Report, *Total cost of stewardship: responsible collection building in archives and special collections* (2021) Total Cost of Stewardship: Responsible Collection Building in Archives and Special Collections (oclc.org) [last accessed 31 March 2023].

[13] East London Mosque and London Muslim Centre, 'The East London Mosque Archives', The ELM Archives | East London Mosque [last accessed 31 March 2023].

[14] Black Cultural Archives, Black Cultural Archives [last accessed 31 March 2023].

by problems and was unable to secure funding.[15] In recent years, universities have sought to collect unique and distinctive collections that would otherwise be at risk, such as the University of Kent's acquisition of records relating to UK philanthropy.[16]

3.3 This piecemeal approach has also been mirrored in the field of Catholic heritage in the UK. The Network of Archives and Libraries in the Catholic Church, for example, offers a virtual solution to dispersed Catholic records, through an interoperable online catalogue network hosting the archive catalogues of Catholic institutions who would otherwise not have an online presence.[17] The Catholic Archives Society has also been proactive in providing a network of support and resources for archivists (many unqualified) working in Catholic institutions.[18]

3.4 More successful initiatives and solutions for at-risk Catholic archives have been evident outside of the UK. In the United States and Canada, the Archival Resources for Catholic Collections (ARCC) network has established a Repository Working Group designed to develop guidance and share best practice for collaborations between religious communities and/or academic institutions. This includes tailored resources for establishing collaborative partnerships between religious communities on setting up centralised repositories or working with secular institutes to deposit archives there.[19]

3.5 Partly as a result, a number of successful centralised Catholic repositories have been established, or are in the process of being established, including repositories of institutes who share the same charism, such as the Congregation of the Sisters of St Joseph in Canada whose archives include four separate congregational houses[20]; or cross-institute arrangements such as the Chicago Archive Collaborative which includes the Claretian Missionaries Archives USA-Canadian Province, the Archives of the North American Province of the Cenacle, and the Archives of the Episcopal Diocese of Chicago.[21] Following a major conference in 2018 entitled 'Envisioning the Future of Catholic Religious Archives', Boston College successfully established the Catholic Religious Archives Repository, which

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[15] The papers of this initiative can be found in the London School of Economics and Political Sciences Archives and Special Collections, Voluntary Action History Society – Archives Group, Volunteering England/8/15.

[16] National Archives/RLUK, *Collecting Drivers for Higher Education Institutions with Archives and Unique and Distinctive Collections* (2016) https://cdn.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/archives/collecting-drivers-for-higher-education-institutions.pdf [last accessed 31 March 2023].

[17] Networking Archives and Libraries in the Catholic Church, 'Catholic Heritage' Catholic Heritage > Home (catholic-heritage.net) [last accessed 31 March 2023].

[18] Catholic Archives Society https://catholicarchivesociety.org [last accessed 31 March 2023].

[19] Archival Resources for Catholic Collections, Archival Resources for Catholic Collections (archivalrcc.org) [last accessed 31 March 2023].

[20] Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Canada, 'The Consolidated Archives' The Consolidated Archives – The Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Canada Consolidated Archives (csjarchive.org) [last accessed 31 March 2023].

[21] Dominican Life USA, 'Collaborative Chicago Archives Center' Collaborative Chicago Archives Center – Dominican Life USA (domlife.org) [last accessed 31 March 2023].

included the building of a $60 million bespoke repository to house the archives of religious institutes.[22]

3.6   There are also examples of purpose-built repositories in Europe housing at-risk collections of Catholic heritage. The KADOC Documentation and Research Centre on Religion, Culture and Society at KU Leuven in Belgium[23] and the ENK (Heritage Centre for Dutch Monastic Life) near Nijmegen in the Netherlands both preserve heritage collections (printed material, archives and objects) from a wide range of Catholic organisations including religious communities.[24] The Catholic Documentation Centre in Nijmegen complements the ENK, focusing on collecting the papers of Catholic individuals and civic Catholic organisations.[25]

3.7   In the UK, there have been no similar initiatives on this scale, but a continuous dialogue is taking place with key figures and stakeholders sympathetic towards the development of a national strategy for Catholic heritage. The Catholic Archives Society, in particular, has made concerted efforts, alongside the Patrimony Committee of the Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales, to co-ordinate a more joined-up approach to Catholic collections.

3.8   Over the past decade, such conversations have borne fruit, albeit in a limited way. A number of secular and religious educational institutions, including Durham University, Ushaw College, Liverpool Hope University, Douai Abbey, Downside Abbey, Stanbrook Abbey and the Scottish Catholic Archives have broadened their collection policies to acquire at-risk Catholic collections.[26] This has not been without its challenges, with many of these institutions lacking space, inadequate storage conditions, limited professional expertise, and, perhaps most importantly, the political will to develop a long-term, sustainable solution for at-risk Catholic archives.

3.9   Some religious institutes have donated their archives to Catholic diocesan record offices. For example, the Monastery of the Poor Clares Colettines in Baddesley Clinton have deposited their archives with the Archdiocese of Birmingham.[27] For a religious institute with a firm grounding in the region in

[22] Boston College, 'Boston College establishes archives for Catholic religious orders and congregations in U.S. and Canada' Boston College Establishes Archives for Catholic Religious Orders and Congregations in U.S. and Canada (bc.edu) [last accessed 31 March 2023].

[23] KU Leuven, 'KADOC Documentation and Research Centre on Religion Culture and Society' KADOC Documentation and Research Centre on Religion Culture and Society (kuleuven.be) [last accessed 31 March 2023].

[24] Efgoedcentrum Nederlands Kloosterleven, Heritage Centre Dutch Monastic Life (erfgoedkloosterleven.nl) [last accessed 31 March 2023].

[25] Catholic Documentation Centre Catholic Documentation Centre - Catholic Documentation Centre (ru.nl) [last accessed 31 March 2023].

[26] See, for example, Durham University's Archives and Special Collections policy: Durham University, 'Collections Development Policy (2019) COLLECTIONS-DEVELOPMENT-POLICY-final-draft-2019-03-18.pdf (durham.ac.uk), p. 8 [last accessed 31 March 2023].

[27] Archdiocese of Birmingham, 'The Catholic Archdiocese of Birmingham Archives', The Catholic Archdiocese of Birmingham Archives - Welcome (birminghamarchdiocesanarchives.org.uk) [last accessed 31 March 2023].

which they reside, and who wish to ensure that their archives remain within the confines of a Catholic ecclesiastical organisation, a diocesan record office may offer a possible solution. Many diocesan archives, however, are under-resourced, may not employ an archivist and records are inaccessible and stored in unsatisfactory conditions.[28]

3.10 For religious institutes with a local connection requiring a more professional set up (cared for by qualified archivists, catalogued and made accessible, as well as stored in environmentally controlled strongrooms) then a county record office has proved to be a viable option, for example, the archives of the Vocation Sisters stored in the West Sussex Record Office.[29] Record offices are often selective in what they acquire, however, and are secular bodies, so may not appreciate the value of the archives of religious institutes. They may also not understand the religious context of these collections, which may give rise to difficulties over the imposition of closure periods, for example. Furthermore, austerity and public sector cuts have had a major impact on the ability of local authorities to carry out their services[30], with many record offices now under-resourced as a result.

3.11 This report will therefore evaluate and compare these different initiatives and approaches, applying a methodology of evidence-gathering (interviews, surveys) to help inform recommendations. Although the focus will be on the heritage collections of Catholic religious institutes as a case study, the findings would clearly have wider implications for the library and archive sectors in dealing with dispersed at-risk collections more broadly.

3.12 What is clear even at the outset is that there is no single 'one size fits all' solution to the challenge of planning for the future of religious institutes. Different religious institutes, and by implication any at-risk archive, will require different solutions, depending on their financial, political and cultural needs and circumstances.

4. Surveys of Religious Archives

4.1 One necessary pre-requisite to dealing with the challenge of at-risk archives of religious institutes is to gather information on their collections management practices. Over the past 20 years, there have been several survey projects in the UK, Ireland, and the USA to try to capture this information. The following is an analysis of the major projects.

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[28] See, for example, John Boland-Lee, 'Nottingham Diocesan Archives – Gathering Dust', *Catholic Archives Society Autumn 2022 Newsletter*, 48 (Catholic Archives Society, 2023), pp. 2-3.
[29] West Sussex Record Office, Papers of the Vocation Sisters: http://185.121.204.173/SearchOnline/Record.aspx?src=CalmView.Catalog&id=Vocation+Ms&pos=1 [last accessed 31 March 2023].
[30] National Audit Office, *The impact of funding reductions on local authorities*, Local Government report by the Comptroller and Auditor General (2014) Impact of funding reductions on local authorities (nao.org.uk).

4.2 A survey by Esmay Elizabeth Smith, undertaken on behalf of the Conference of Religious of Ireland in 2003, entitled 'CORI Survey of Archives', and mainly focused on the preservation of the archives of Irish religious institutes. It included 40 physical inspections/interviews with various congregations. It found that most institutes were putting a lot of effort into preservation, although there were variations across different institutes and a clear need for better advice, particularly as most archives were underfunded. Recommendations included the establishment of a CORI Archives Task Force, policy document and better training for archivists, lobbying government for more funding, encouraging development of heritage rooms/centres, and facilitating discussion on the establishment of a central religious archives repository. The report has been published privately.[31]

4.3 One of the largest surveys undertaken on religious archives across all denominations in the UK was commissioned by the UK Religious Archives Group (with external funding from other bodies), entitled 'Religious Archives Survey' and published in 2010. It was the first comprehensive survey of all religious archives (of all faiths) in the UK, designed to:

> establish an outline of the holdings and the extent of the challenges faced by religious archives across all faiths especially those bodies looking after their own historical records who have not surrendered this task to collecting institutions providing care and public access in line with professional standards.

The survey was sent out to 2,700 religious and secular organisations, with a 22% response rate from the Roman Catholic organisations, particularly religious institutes who considered their archives to be of vital importance. Recommendations were focused around different areas, including the need for a better strategic approach, greater funding, greater advocacy and cross-sectoral collaboration, and better guidance. A further report on progress was also produced in 2015 and the results were added to the Discovery catalogue of the National Archives. The organisers of this project did not seek the endorsement of the Conference of Religious so it is hoped that my survey will complement the 2010 survey by providing a better response rate that is more focused on the future of Catholic religious archives.[32]

4.4 A survey by Mary Grace Costa, entitled 'What do we do with the archives? The Future of Religious Archives'. This was a survey focused on future options for Catholic religious institutes in Canada and the United States. The

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[31] Smith, Esmay Elizabeth, *CORI Survey of Archives: Report of the survey of the archives of religious congregations carried out on behalf of the Conference of Religious of Ireland*, published for private circulation (May 2003).

[32] National Archives, Archives and Records Association and the Religious Archives Group, *Religious Archives Survey 2010: a survey of the archives of religious bodies within the United Kingdom and of related personal papers* (2010) Religious Archives Survey November 2010 (nationalarchives.gov.uk) [last accessed 31 March 2023].

report of its findings was published in 2020 and included four main options: a consolidated institutional archive; public repository; diocesan archives; or a collaborative venture such as a regional archives centre, and for each option the report sets out the challenges and benefits, with case study examples.[33]

4.5   A survey by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA), sent to every major superior of women's religious institutes (522 in total) in the United States, with a 40% response rate. Each superior was also asked to send a second survey to the archivist in their congregation, who could answer more detailed and specialist information on the archive. The results of the survey were analysed and published in a special report in 2022. The results were broadly similar to Mary Grace Costa's survey, although the CARA survey included open-ended, qualitative opinions from the institutes that were quoted in the report.[34] Both this and the Costa survey are perhaps the most directly relevant to my own research and has been integral to the development of my own approach.

4.6   A survey by Dr Elizabeth Mullins, lecturer in Archives and Records Management in the School of History in University College, Dublin, and also a qualified archivist, entitled 'Survey of Religious Archives in Ireland' and carried out in 2022. This was an online survey designed to capture data about the extent to which religious records are being archived, who is doing this work and their perceptions of it. It covers religious archives of all different faiths and is not aimed exclusively at Catholic religious institutes. As well as collecting data, there is also the subjective approach of trying to find out about perceptions and feelings of individual archivists towards their role and the support they receive from their leadership. There is a question on the future of the respondent's archives, but this is not the main focus of the survey. The report has not yet been published.

4.7   A concurrent survey is also being planned by the Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales, under the auspices of the Catholic Patrimony Committee, that will include physical inspections of diocesan archives and consideration on their future storage.[35]

4.8   The future of the archives of religious institutes is not exclusively a Catholic issue and there are parallel information-gathering initiatives taking place with

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[33] Mary Grace Kosta, *What do we do with the archives? The Future of Religious Archives*, Archival Resources for Catholic Collections (2020), What-do-we-do-FINAL-MK-2.pdf (archivalrcc.org) [last accessed 31 March 2023].
[34] Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, *Special Report: Religious Sisters Archives* (2022) Spring2023ReligiousArchives.pdf (squarespace.com) [last accessed 31 March 2023].
[35] Currently in the planning stages so no further details have been made available yet. It is important to note that religious institutes do not fall under the jurisdiction of the Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales so cannot be included in this survey.

Anglican religious institutes. Dr Scholastica Jacob and Nicholas Buxton of St Antony's Priory in Durham have commissioned a 'Survey of Anglican Religious Orders', with a view to building a case for establishing a research centre (Herbert Kelly Institute for Anglican Religious Life). The survey has collected information mostly on archival management (holdings, storage, access) as well as future considerations, although its purpose is not to establish a centralised repository. The results of the survey have not yet been published.[36]

4.9   This project will build on and learn from these survey projects. It will be the first comprehensive survey in England and Wales to focus exclusively on religious institutes, their current collection management issues, and what plans (if any) they have for their future storage. Crucially, it will be the first Catholic archives survey to have the endorsement of the Catholic Church, in particular the umbrella organisation for Catholic religious institutes in England and Wales, the Conference of Religious. Furthermore, the religious and political climate has changed substantially within the last ten years, so there is a clear need for an updated survey to reflect these changes.

5. Options for Religious Institutes

The following are the possible options available to the religious institutes for the long-term storage of their archives. Advantages and disadvantages are listed objectively for each option and their relative number should not be read as an indication of preference – certain advantages/disadvantages will undoubtedly outweigh others for different religious institutes. This information was also provided to religious institutes to help respondents complete Question 17 of the survey (see Section 7).

In a shared repository with other religious organisations in England and Wales

Advantages

- There are already model examples in other countries, see The Heritage Centre for Dutch Monastic Life (Heritage Centre Dutch Monastic Life (erfgoedkloosterleven.nl)).
- Access and collections management requirements for each archive collection can be tailored towards individual institutes.
- Resources could be pooled with other religious institutes towards a defined common goal.
- Depending on financial resource, the archives of each branch would be secure for the long-term, even after the institute has disbanded.

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[36] St Antony's Priory, 'The Herbert Kelly Institute for Anglican Religious Life' The Institute - St Antony's Priory (stantonyspriory.org) [last accessed 31 March 2023].

- Could enable comparative research to be undertaken more easily across different institutes' archives.

Disadvantages

- The archives will no longer be as easily accessible to the institute.
- Pooling resources with other institutes would require a significant outlay, particularly as funding a permanent endowment would be necessary.
- At the moment, such a repository does not yet exist in the UK, so would require a great deal of planning to implement.

In a shared repository with congregations who share the same charism/rule

Advantages

- Congregations from different institutes can work together to establish a repository that is tailored towards the needs of their charism/rule, for example. the Benedictines, Augustines etc.
- Resources from different congregations with the same charism/rule can be pooled together towards a common goal.
- This would enable comparative research to be undertaken more easily across different institutes who share the same charism/rule.

Disadvantages

- The archives will no longer be as easily accessible to all the branches involved.
- Pooling resources with other institutes would still require a significant outlay, particularly as funding a permanent endowment would be necessary.
- A concentration on the resources of a few religious institutes who share the same charism or rule will mean that each institute would need to contribute significantly more than the previous option.
- At the moment, such a repository does not yet exist, so would require a great deal of planning to establish.
- If a particular branch disbands, and so is unable to contribute towards the cost, then this could threaten the existence of the centralised repository.

In a centralised repository in another country

Advantages
- Ensures that all worldwide branches of the institute's records are kept together in a single place.
- Likely to be more secure in the medium-term, particularly if the institute is financially stable.

- It may be more cost-effective for the English/Welsh branches because the burden would be placed on the international motherhouse etc to accommodate the archives.

Disadvantages

- May be inaccessible to the English/Welsh branches and researchers so local/national history context and importance may be lost.
- Would require significant organisation to transport, in terms of logistics and paperwork (i.e. an export licence would be required).
- Would only be applicable to institutes with a worldwide presence.
- No guarantee that the central mother house etc would be in existence in the long-term.

With a local Catholic diocesan record office

Advantages

- Ensures that the collection would remain within a Catholic institution.
- Archives would remain in the locality so would not be divorced from their local context.
- Diocesan archives do not usually ask for payment to store archives.

Disadvantages

- Diocesan archive repositories may not accept archives of religious institutes as they are managed independently from the diocese.
- Some diocesan archive repositories are not fit for purpose, with archives stored in inappropriate and poor storage environments.
- Some dioceses do not employ a qualified archivist to manage their archive collections.
- Collections are more likely to remain uncatalogued and the lack of a catalogue and/or reading room would render the collection inaccessible.
- Some institutes even within the same rule, such as the Ursulines, are partly under the authority of a diocesan bishop so this may result in collections being split.

With a secular institution (university or local authority record office)

Advantages

- The local record office option would ensure that the archives remained in the locality so potentially more accessible to the institute and would not be divorced from their local context.

- Universities and record offices employ professional archivists and conservators so this would ensure that the archives are professionally managed and stored in environmentally controlled conditions.
- Archives would be accessible to researchers, either in a reading room or on an online catalogue.
- There would be an awareness of professional standards amongst staff relating to privacy and restrictions to certain records.

Disadvantages

- Record offices and universities may be unwilling to take these collections unless a case could be made for their research/local significance.
- There is an emphasis on making collections accessible at record offices and universities which may not be acceptable for some religious institutes.
- Concurrently, many record offices/universities may view cataloguing these collections as low priority and so collections may be inaccessible for a long period of time.
- Some record offices/universities may charge a fee for storage and management costs.
- There may be issues of space, particularly with larger archives.
- Would require negotiating a deed of transfer to determine legal ownership (whether a gift or a deposit). These institutions generally prefer gifts rather than deposits.
- There would be a need to educate the archives staff about the institute's rule, charism, and history, as well as the context of religious archives more generally.

Taking no action

Advantages

- Would require no operational or financial planning.

Disadvantages

- If archives are stored in poor conditions, then items would continue to deteriorate.
- For those institutes who are not able to provide access to their archives, their collections would remain invisible and inaccessible.
- Once the institute reaches completion than there is a very real likelihood of the collection being destroyed.

6. Project Methodology

6.1 An ethics application was submitted to Durham University's Theology and Religion Ethics Committee, specifically in preparation for the survey to be sent out to religious institutes. Although this survey would be deemed low risk, dealing primarily with the opinions of the archivist in the context of institutional policy, rather than personal feelings, there would be issues on the storage of data for the archive and the need to ensure confidentiality. The application for the project was approved on 12 September 2022.

6.2 The survey itself was designed using Microsoft Forms to gather information on current archival practice in religious institutes, as well as their plans for future long-term storage options of their archives. The survey was open from 3 February-10 March 2023 and was endorsed by the Conference of Religious in England and Wales, an umbrella organisation managing most (albeit not all) of the institutes in England and Wales.[37] Email addresses for each institute were mostly taken from the 2022 edition of the *Catholic Directory for England and Wales*, if these were available. For a small number of institutes (12), it had not been possible to identify a contact email address so they were not included in the survey.

6.3 The survey was sent out on the 3 February 2023 to 222 email addresses, with an attached survey information sheet (see appendix) and an options paper (based on section 6). Of these, 30 email addresses were 'bouncebacks' (i.e. not recognised as legitimate email addresses) and, even after further investigation, it has not been possible to identify the correct addresses. There may also have been some duplication in contacting more than one local branch of a particular institute whose archive may be held centrally. Reminder emails were sent out on Friday 17th February and Friday 3rd March (one week before the deadline).

6.4 Instructions were included in the email requesting that the survey be answered by the individual(s) in charge of looking after the archive, with the proviso that certain answers may require input from the leadership team. It was also stressed that, although the survey was voluntary, respondents should try to answer every question to the best of their ability, even if this could only be an estimate in some cases.

6.5 The survey explored:
   o Contextual information about the institute.
   o The nature and extent of the records held.

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[37] Unfortunately, due to staff illness, this survey was not emailed out by the Conference of Religious as originally intended.

- o The level of professional training of the archivist responsible for the archive.
- o The suitability of the archive storage rooms.
- o The extent of cataloguing undertaken.
- o Researcher access.
- o Future plans and preferred options.

6.6   As well as the survey, this project also included information gathering research trips to two centralised repositories of religious institutes:

- Erfgoedcentrum Nederlands Kloosterleven (the Heritage Centre for Dutch Monastic Life), near Nijmegen in the Netherlands.
- KADOC, the Interfaculty Documentation and Research Centre on Religion, Culture and Society at the Catholic University of Leuven in Belgium.

6.7   These trips were undertaken to better understand how such institutions are financed and governed, and how they manage collections under their care. This involved conversations with relevant members of staff and observation on how the centres operated. These trips helped me to:

- Assess the viability of each model and its applicability in a UK context.
- Formulate relevant questions for the survey.
- Make useful contacts who could be approached again for advice and guidance.

6.8   Virtual and face-to-face conversations were also undertaken with relevant individuals to assist in planning the project, including:

- Dr Tim Powell: involved with the implementation of the Religious Archives Support Plan (in response to the 2010 Religious Archives Survey) to learn about his role and the challenges he faced.
- Dr Elizabeth Mullins: project lead on 'Survey of Religious Archives in Ireland' to learn from her experiences in planning the survey.
- Paul Beard: UCL PhD student researching charity and voluntary sector archives to learn about previous initiatives and attempts to establish centralised repositories in these sectors.
- Nalini Nathan: General Secretary of the Conference of Religious, to seek the endorsement of this umbrella organisation and plan how best to advertise the survey.
- Dr Scholastica Jacob: project lead in establishing a research centre (Herbert Kelly Institute for Anglican Religious Life) in Durham based on

the archives of Anglican religious orders to hear about this venture and discuss collaborative projects.

- Sr Virginia Downey: member of the ARCC network to learn about centralised repository models in the United States.
- Sophie Andreae: Vice-Chair of the Patrimony Committee of the Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales to relay information and discuss potential collaborative projects.
- Professor Paul Murray, Director of the Centre for Catholic Studies, Durham University, to discuss the possibility of future fundraising for a centralised repository.

7. Survey Findings

Of the 190 emails that were assumed to be successfully received, 79 religious institutes replied. This represents a response rate of 41.5%. All respondents were happy for their data to be used for the purposes of this report, although four wished for their data to be destroyed once the report was published.

The findings are analysed below:

The leadership (e.g. Generalate, Mother House etc.) of most institutes is based overseas (58%) rather than in the UK (42%). The higher proportion of respondents from overseas perhaps reflects the worldwide nature of many of the surviving institutes, with decisions made by the mother house or generalate and then adopted by a local branch/house in England/Wales. The wording of the question may also have resulted in a misunderstanding, with some institutes interpreting their overall leadership to be in Rome, even if their UK houses acted autonomously and so were entitled to keep their own archives in this country.

Category of Institute
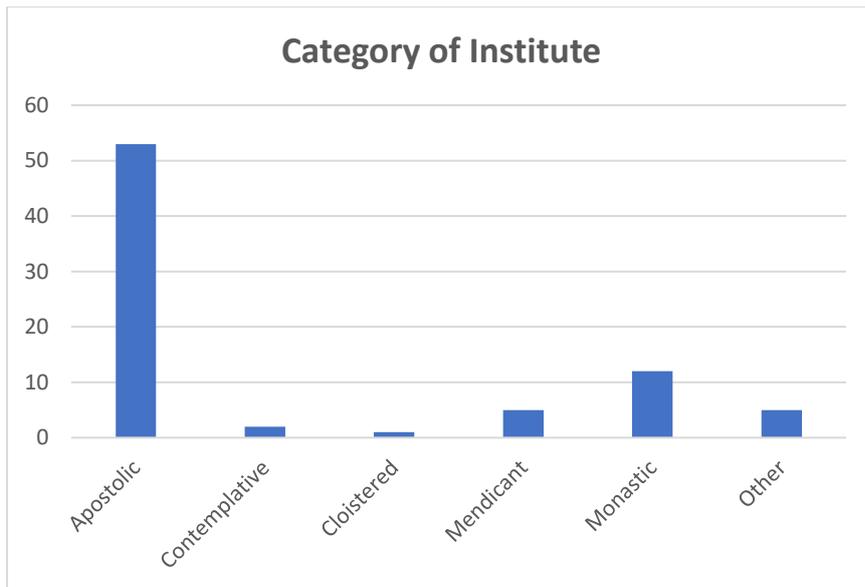
Most institutes identified themselves as apostolic (68%). Apostolic orders generally work amongst the outside community, often as teachers, nurses, missionaries etc. This outward-facing role is reflected in the descriptions of their charism. For example: 'We are women striving to make Christ present amongst the people of our time, searching for new and inclusive ways of being community, and continuing to explore how liturgy and prayer can speak powerfully of God in today's world'.[38]

72% were respondents of women religious institutes.[39]

Do you have an archive?
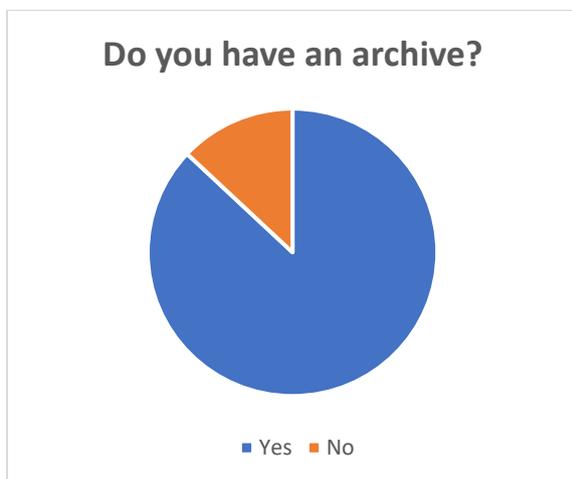
Most institutes (87%) were able to recognise that they held material which could be described as an 'archive', defined in this question as 'papers or other records created by your predecessors that have been kept beyond their internal administrative use'.

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[38] This quote is taken directly from one institute who responded to the survey.
[39] This was not a question asked in the survey but it is possible to deduce from the names of the institutes as to whether they are female or male.

This included those institutes whose main archive was transferred overseas but held a small archive within the local house.

A follow up free-text question was asked about the amount of material held by religious institutes in their archive. For ease, respondents were asked to count the number of shelves holding archive, an imprecise measure that makes comparisons difficult, but it reveals that the size of each archive varied significantly, from a few boxes to several hundred linear metres.
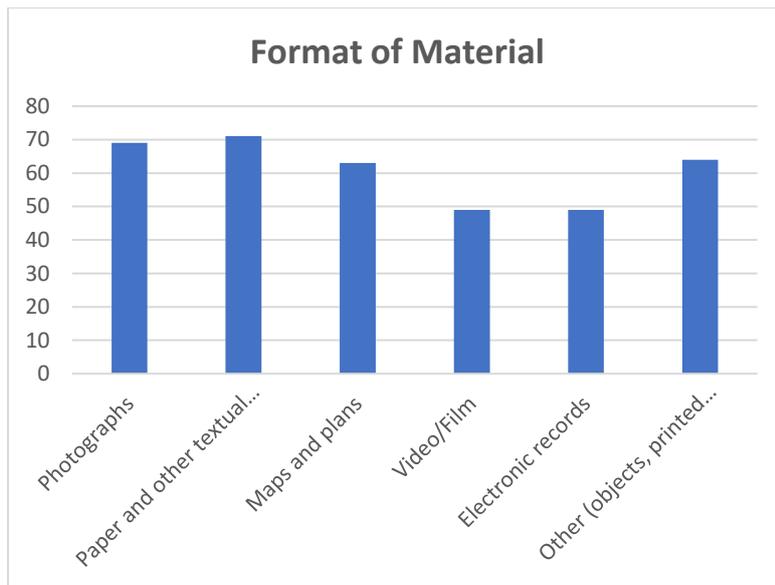
Format of Material

Most institutes store a variety of material in different formats, mainly paper and other textual records (99%), photographs (96%), and maps and plans (87%). Video/film (67%) and electronic/born-digital records (68%) are less common but still significant, in the latter case perhaps reflecting a growing understanding of the archival nature of this type of record. There were also a large number of institutes (81%) who held non-archival material, such as objects and printed books. This is not surprising, given the central importance of objects such as vestments, chalices, crucifixes etc in their religious life. Most institutes also have libraries to educate and deepen the faith of their members.
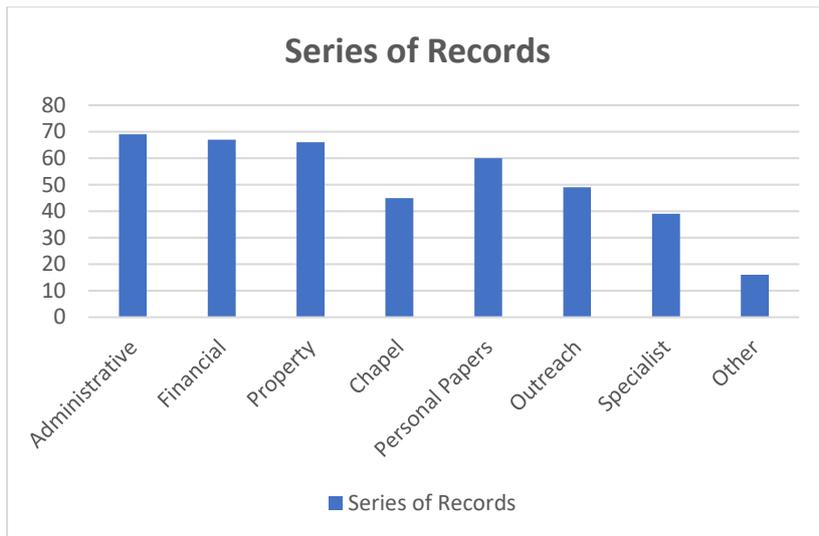
Series of Records

Similarly, most institutes hold a variety of different series of records. The core records of any religious institute, administrative (97%), financial (94%), property (93%) and personal papers of individual religious (85%) perhaps understandably represent the greater proportion. Less common, although still significant, are those institutes whose work includes outreach to communities (69%) and more specialised activities, such as nursing, teaching etc (55%).

Archivist Reponsible
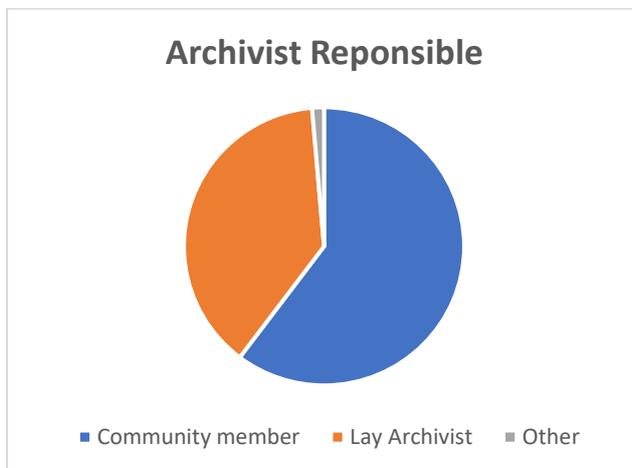
Most archivists working in a religious institute are members (60%), with a significant minority employing lay archivists (38%). The latter demonstrates that many institutes recognise the importance of their archive enough to allow a lay archivist access to manage their collections.[40]

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[40] The total number of respondents who selected the 'Other' category was initially 16, but most of their explanations fall within one of the two main categories, so I have added these to the statistics where appropriate.

Archivist Training

Most archivists have had some form of training in archives or a related discipline (51%), with a high proportion having formal training of some sort, although a significant minority (37%) classed themselves as having had no training at all.[41]

Storage Rooms (Flooding/Fire)

- Protected against flood and fire
- Protected against either flood or fire
- Rooms are not protected
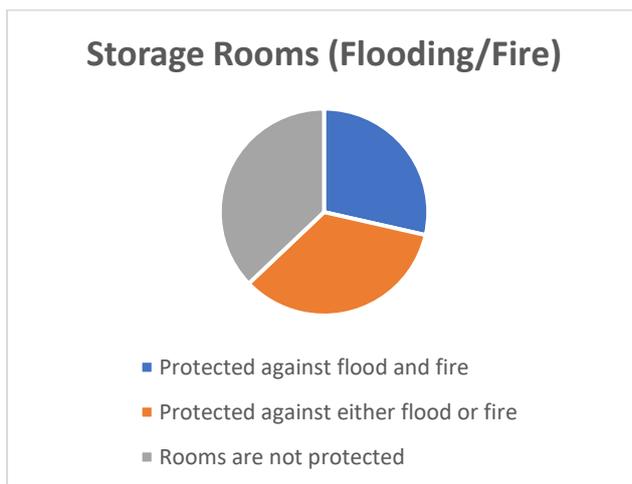
The majority of institutes responded that their archive rooms had at least some protection against either fire or flooding (63%), with 29% having protection against both. However, a significant minority (38%) had no archive rooms with protection against either fire or flooding.

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[41] The total number of respondents who selected the 'Other' category was initially 14, but most of their explanations fall within one of the main categories, so I have added these to the statistics where appropriate. For those respondents who stated that they were working towards an archive qualification, I have included their responses in the first category.

Storage Rooms (Security)

Secure   Not secure
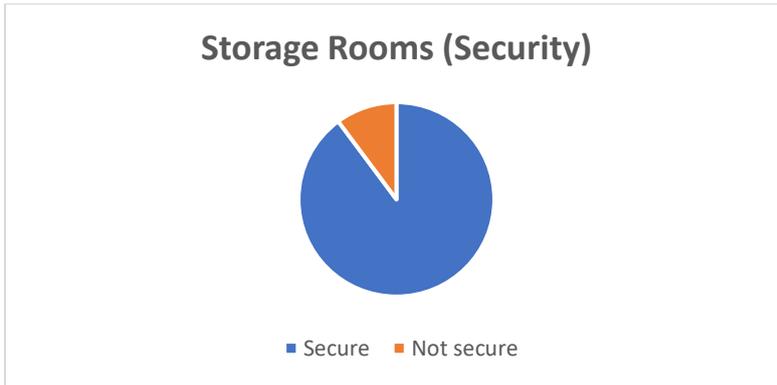
More reassuringly, 90% of institutes had secure archive storage rooms that at the very least had a lockable door.

Storage Rooms (Environmental Control)

Monitored   Controlled   Neither monitored nor controlled
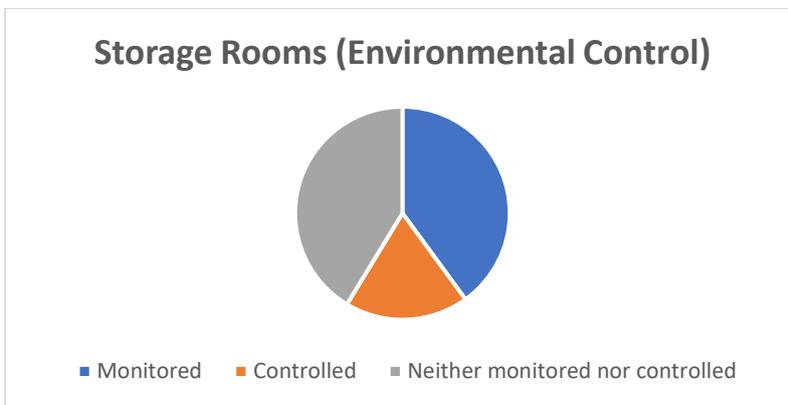
Most institutes responded that temperature and relative humidity levels their archive rooms were either monitored or controlled (59%), although a significant minority (41%) had rooms which were neither monitored nor controlled.

Percentage of Material Catalogued

0 - 25%   25% - 50%   50% - 75%   75% - 100%
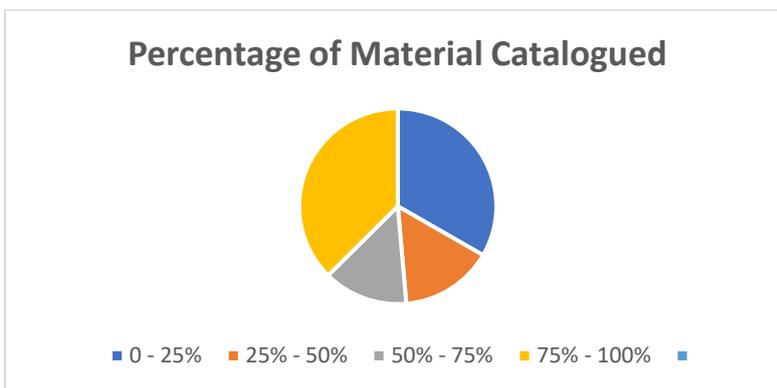
There is wide variation in the availability of catalogues/lists for their archive material amongst religious institutes, with 38% of respondents having mostly or fully catalogued archives and 33% having very little or no listings/catalogues of their material.

Of the 56 respondents who described how their material was catalogued, the majority seemed to be in either word processed lists or excel databases. A few respondents had access to specialised cataloguing software, such as MODES or CALM.

Future Arrangements (1)

- Fully-costed plan
- In progress
- Not sure how to proceed
- Do not envisage closing
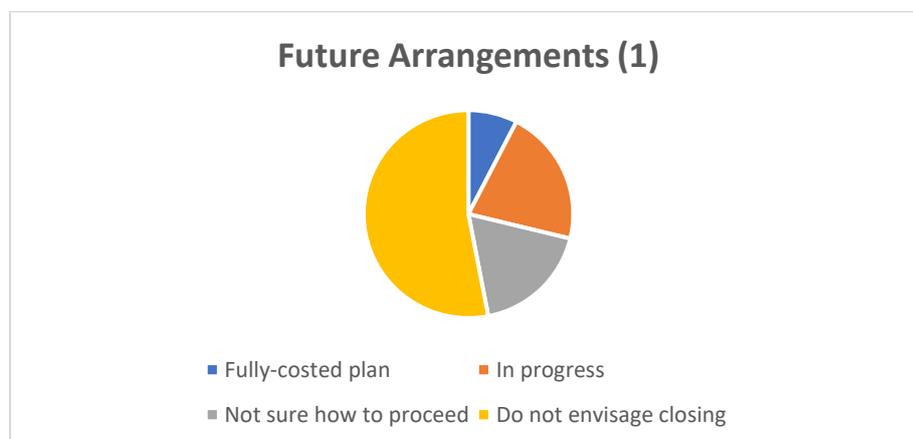
Only 8% of archives have a fully costed plan for their archives in the event of their institution closing, although a further 21% are in the process of drawing up a plan. 18% require further assistance in helping them to draw up a plan. The majority of respondents (53%) don't have a plan because they don't envisage closing in the next 10-20 years but this would suggest that nearly one in two repositories will close.

Future Repository
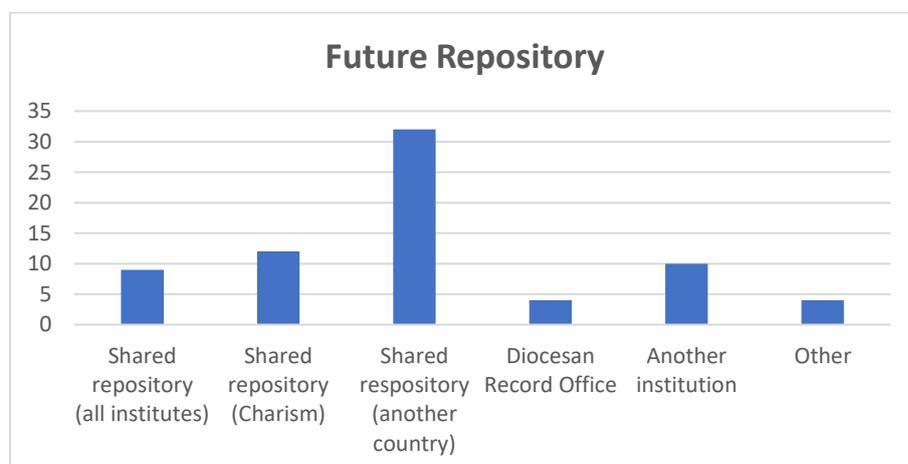
The majority of respondents (44%) would prefer, or currently already send their archives to, a shared repository for their own institute's records overseas. This is not surprising, given that a larger number of institutes whose leadership is overseas answered the survey in contrast to UK institutes. This is followed by those who would prefer either a shared repository with other institutes who share the same charism (16%) or with all institutes (12%). Institutes who chose 'another institution' (7%) had usually already sent their archives to either a university or Douai Abbey. Very few institutes (5%) chose/would choose a diocesan archive.[42]

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[42] The total number of respondents who selected the 'Other' category was initially 21, but most of their explanations fall within one of the five main categories, so I have added these to the statistics where appropriate.
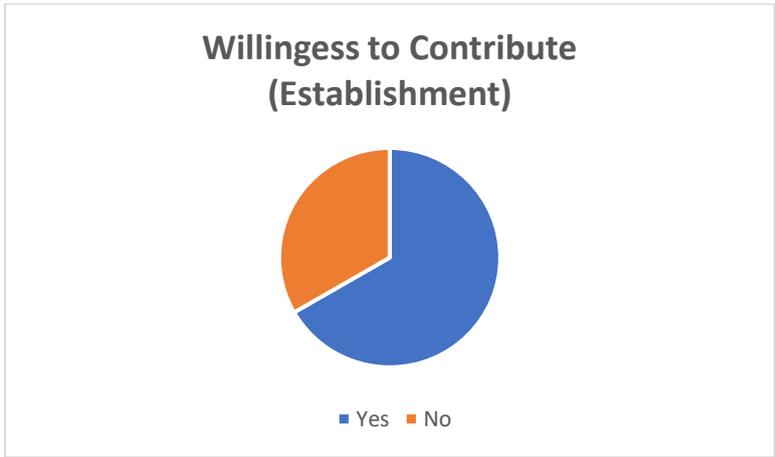
Willingess to Contribute (Establishment)

Yes ■ No

For those who have prefer either a shared repository with other institutes or those who share the same charism, the majority (67%) would be willing and able to contribute financially towards the cost of **establishing** such a repository.

Willingess to Contribute (One-Off Cost)

Yes ■ No ■

For those who have prefer either a shared repository with other institutes or those who share the same charism, the majority (83%) would be willing and able to contribute **a one-off cost** towards managing their archive in such a repository.

Archive Users

Archive Users
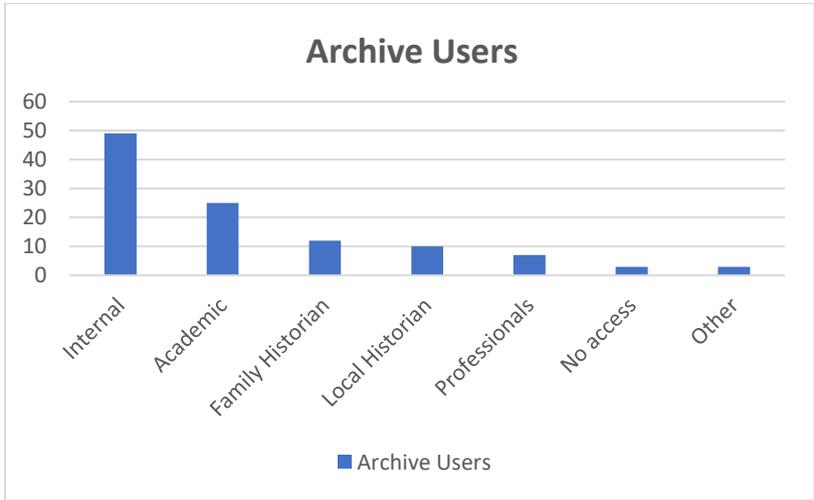
Most visitors to the archive tend to be from the institute itself, followed by academic researchers. Very few researchers are genealogists, local historians or other professionals tend to consult the collections of religious institutes.[43]

Average Number of Annual Visitors
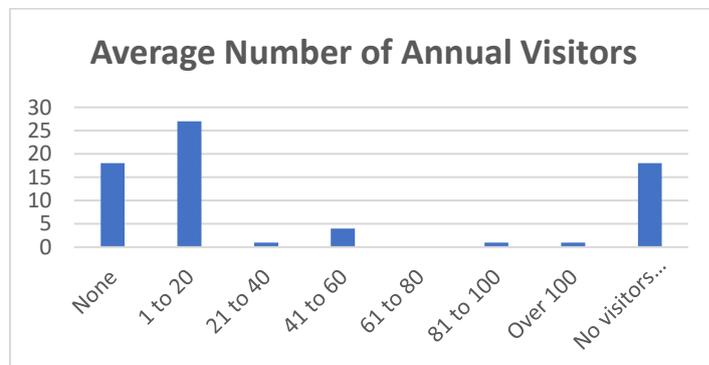
Most institutes either do not allow access or receive no researchers in their archive (51%). Of those that do, 27 institutes receive between 1 and 20 visitors. Four institutes receive between 41 and 60 visitors, while one institute receives 81-100 and another even receives over 100.

8. Case Studies of Centralised Repositories – Potential Models

The following information was collected during visits to two centralised repositories in October 2022. It covers the governance, finance and operations of each repository, as well as practical collection management information for their archives, printed material and objects, which could be used to inform future planning and act as potential models for a centralised repository solution for religious archives in the UK.

1. Erfgoedcentrum Nederlands Kloosterleven, Nijmegen, Netherlands

Background

The Erfgoedcentrum Nederlands Kloosterleven (ENK) - in English the 'Heritage Centre for Dutch Monastic Life' - was established in 2006 in the Crozier monastery of St Agatha, a male religious institute that inhabited the monastery from 1371 to the present day (three Croziers are still living onsite). Since its foundation, the aim of the ENK is to bring together the archives, books and objects of Dutch male and female religious communities (Sisters, Brothers, Fathers) into one central repository. It was set up in response to the recognised difficulty of the ageing population of many

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[43] These results should be treated with caution. A glitch resulted in respondents only being able to select one of the categories, in spite of the direction to 'select all that apply'. Some respondents included a fuller answer in 'Other', so these have been transferred to the relevant category, although it is likely that many of the other respondents simply selected their main user group.

convents and monasteries in the Netherlands, who were facing closure and therefore unable to manage their own heritage.

Much of the preparatory work was carried out by the board members of the Stichting Dienstencentrum Kloosterarchieven Nederland (KAN) in the late 1980s, in particular its chairman, Fraters van Tilburg of the Brothers of Tilburg. Van Tilburg established close relations with contacts from other convents and monasteries to persuade them to donate their heritage collections and to help in contributing towards the financing of the Centre. A paper questionnaire was sent out to all religious institutes in 1986 asking for information on their archives and plans for their storage, supplemented by site visits between 1995 and 2000. The decision to establish the Centre was made in 2003 and, following the renovation of the original buildings and the addition of new strongroom storage areas, was opened three years later.

The original function of the centre was to store, catalogue and provide access to the archives of religious institutes. This was supplemented in 2009 by the addition of online catalogues and the first exhibition in 2013. More than 100 communities have signed up to participate in sending their heritage collections to the ENK and about two-thirds of these participating institutions have now donated their collections to the Centre, including approximately 5km of archive material, 30,000 printed items (including incunabula) and 4,000 objects. The ENK is part of a wider visitor attraction offer that includes tours, a café, chapel, and grounds.

Governance

- The success of the project was heavily influenced by the favourable economic climate associated with the greater availability of finance in the period prior to the Global Financial Crisis of 2007/0. Such an initiative would now be much more difficult to fund.

- The funding of the Centre is overseen by two foundations:

  1. Stichting Sint Aegten Foundation – originally founded in 1998 to manage the heritage (estate, buildings, library and archive) of the Order of the Croziers.

  2. Stichting Erfgoedcentrum Nederlands Kloosterleven – founded in 2002 to manage the heritage of over one hundred religious institutes who participate in the Heritage Centre. The Stichting Steunfonds Erfgoed Nederlands Kloosterleven oversees the financial management of this foundation.

- The Heritage Centre is heavily reliant on funding provided by religious institutes. Each institute pays 2,200 euros per metre. This is a one-off payment, covering storage in the strongrooms, as well as cataloguing and access, although exhibitions are externally funded. Some institutes paid more at the beginning in solidarity with the aims of the project.

- The Centre was able to secure a long-term endowment in 2004, primarily funded by the religious institutes themselves, which was based on an obligation for the ENK to manage the archive for thirty years. It is not clear what will happen after 2035. Although the endowment helps to fund the Centre, this may not even be enough at the present time, given the rising cost of living and inflation. Appeals are regularly sent to Congregations but they are under no obligation to provide any additional funding.

- The staff who manage the Heritage Centre include a director (0.5 FTE), three archivists (two working 0.8 FTE and one archivist working 0.5 FTE); one librarian working 0.2 FTE; and one curator working 0.6 FTE.

- In addition, support is also provided from the staff at Sint Agatha, such as a fundraiser who helps with securing grants for exhibitions.

Acquisitions

- Most of the negotiations with religious institutes happened in the early days of the Centre, with most collections transferred as deposits rather than gifts. The participants initially needed a lot of persuading but are generally accepting once the archive has been transferred.

- All participants complete a standard deposit agreement, although this can be tailored towards the specific needs of each participant. This agreement covers their library/archives and there is a separate agreement for objects.

- When collections arrive in the Centre they are checked for potential conservation threats (e.g. insects, mould), recorded in an accessions database, and then stored in a strong room with other uncatalogued collections.

- Institutes are usually encouraged to provide a basic listing and short historical introduction in advance of sending their collection to the Centre.

- Printed material such as library books, pamphlets etc are only retained if they are significant and do not duplicate what is already at the Centre. Duplicates are either discarded or returned to the institute. No list is made of any discarded books.

- Objects are collected on the basis of their connection with the particular institute's daily life, history, spirituality etc. Large objects are not acquired because of the lack of suitable storage space. The exception is the religious clothing collection, with each participating institute encouraged to donate one example of their habit).

- There is no budget to purchase new archive collections or objects, although relevant new titles are purchased for the library.

<u>Cataloguing</u>

- Because participants pay the same amount, there is no expectation that certain collections are prioritised for cataloguing. Staff at the Centre are given the freedom to decide on cataloguing priorities.

- All collections (archives, objects and books) are catalogued onto a national database, MAIS-Flexis, which is used by the vast majority of repositories in the Netherlands.

- Each archive collection has its own reference code, starting with AR (repositor code), followed by a letter designating the type of religious institute (e.g. P = Pater for Fathers) and then each participant is assigned a number.

- Collection Level Descriptions are compiled as soon as possible so the collection is at least visible to researchers.

- The archive catalogues are arranged with a hierarchical classification system that is tailored towards the organisation of a particular congregation.

- The book collections are divided into the Crozier Library and the ENK library. This division is necessary because the ENK do not own, only manage, the Crozier Library. Books published before 1800 for both libraries (and post-1800 books for the Crozier Library) are stored in a separate strongroom. Most books are catalogued but description is currently inadequate for the early printed books.

- Object catalogue descriptions also include images for every item. References are similar to archive collections, although have the prefix 'VW' to differentiate them from archives and library items. 25% of the objects have not yet been catalogued.

<u>Access</u>

- The reading room is open for consultation of archives and books two days a week (Thursday-Friday) and is supervised by one member of staff. Objects are rarely consulted because the catalogue information with image is usually enough to provide researchers with the information that they need.

- The reading room usually accommodates two or three visitors a day. Of the 500-600 enquiries a year received, about 25% are requests for access to the reading room.

- Access is available by appointment only and additional retrieval on the day is not always possible, particularly if the request relates to a different collection.

- About 80% of researcher requests for access to the collections require authorisation from the participating institute, although some files are closed for GDPR reasons, and others, particularly more historic ones, do not require this authorisation.

- Self-service photography is allowed free of charge (subject to completing a copyright declaration form). Heritage staff can arrange scanning for a charge.

- Digitisation is usually carried out ad hoc by volunteers or from externally-funded projects for larger collections. All films have been digitised.

Storage

- Strongrooms are climate controlled. Monitoring is managed offsite by an external company.

- There are four climate-controlled strongrooms. These encompass:

  o Archives (Sisters)

  o Archives (Brothers/Fathers)

  o Medieval manuscripts and incunabula

  o Books, primarily the Crozier Library (arranged by pre and post 1800).

- Archives are stored vertically in acid free folders and 'Amsterdam' acid-free boxes. Large items are stored flat.

- The shelving is roller-racked and labelled.

- Audio-visual material is stored separately.

- Objects are stored in an attic which is not climate controlled. Small objects are wrapped in acid-free paper in boxes. Large objects are wrapped in cotton and stored lying flat on the shelves, hanging (for paintings) or standing upright (for statues).

- The Crozier object collection is stored in a separate room.

- Basic remedial conservation work, such as cleaning mould, is either carried out by the archivists, librarian or curator onsite, with the assistance of volunteers. For more extensive conservation work or larger projects, external consultants are usually employed.

Outreach

- There are fifteen volunteers carrying out basic archival tasks such as listing and re-packaging. Some volunteers list items directly into the cataloguing system.

- There is a public exhibition space and corridor (open four days a week) that includes archives, books and objects in display cases.

- Because of work demands, the rotation of each exhibition is only once every two years.

2. KADOC Documentation and Research Centre on Religion Culture and Society, Leuven, Belgium

Background

The KADOC Documentation and Research Centre on Religion Culture and Society was founded in 1978 on the site of a former convent of the Friars Minor. Its main objective is to collect archives, printed material and artefacts relating to the field of religion, culture and society since 1750, with a special focus on Catholic heritage. This has included collecting the archives of Catholic organisations (lay societies, trade unions, education institutions, religious institutes etc), as well as the papers of other denominations in Belgium (Protestants, Muslims etc).

The initial purpose of the Centre was to offer trained advice to other institutions. This included members of the Centre giving talks to religious organisations on the importance of their history as well as offering guidance on managing their archive. A survey was commissioned in 2004-05 and sent out to all religious institutes in Belgium, which asked questions on the institute's history, structure and information about their archive. The responses were then made available, subject to agreement of the religious organisations, in ODIS, a public database (ODIS).

Governance

- KADOC is run as an interfaculty within KU Leuven. It is a research as well as a cultural heritage centre.

- Academic specialists manage the centre with the assistance of a team of archivists and librarians, as well as conservation consultants advising on care of collections.

- Unlike the Netherlands, the Centre is able to draw on the Flemish Government for most of its funding. This helps to fund the Centre as a whole and pays for the general operations.

- Funding for the management of archives is given to the Centre by the organisations themselves, many of whom showed solidarity with the project and funded KADOC in its initial planning stages.

- Leaders of religious institutes play an advisory role in the running of the Centre and some are part of a Scientific Committee who act as an advisory board to KADOC.

- There are three separate physical and virtual spaces in KADOC

    - KADOC I – library and reading room and some archives

    - KADOC II – bespoke strongrooms, uncatalogued store, and archive workrooms

    - KADOC III – digital repository for born-digital and digitised records.

The information in this report concerns the management of the religious institutes' collections only.

Acquisition

- Negotiations between the institutes and the Centre is carried out by academic specialists in the history of women religious. There has been a great deal of emphasis placed on making contacts and generating confidence and trust in the Centre.

- An agreement is drawn up (based on a standard template) between KADOC and the institute.

- Agreements are mostly in the form of deposits rather than gifts but KADOC do not accept collections without either a current or future arrangement for providing access.

- Deposit agreements are signed with the University which gives the Institute a sense of stability and trust that their collection will be secure in the long-term.

- Donations are one-off payments based on the institute's ability to pay and the current state of their archive, e.g. a small institute with a well-organised archive will pay less than a large institute whose archives will require a lot of repackaging/cataloguing. These one-off payments fund transfer costs, cataloguing, repackaging, storage, access and 'valorisation' (outreach) activities.

- Further accruals are taken in from each institute, but large accruals might require a further donation agreement to be drawn up.

- Some religious institutes have been unwilling to deposit their collections to KADOC (particularly the contemplative male institutes) either because they feel that monastic identity is tied up with their locality, or they have already made arrangements to transfer their archives abroad. There are only two such collections in KADOC, for example.

- All archives are accepted but any convent libraries are weeded, with duplicates either returned to the institute or donated to another library.

- Museum objects (apart from habits) are transferred to another museum in Leuven.

Cataloguing

- Archives (including audio-visual material) and library books are catalogued onto two separate systems (ScopeArchiv and LIAS respectively). The different formats are connected through cross-references.

- There is no set religious classification system followed for all institutes, although in practice many follow a similar structure.

- Each institute has two separate listings within each catalogue, one for the standard archives and one for audio-visual material.

- Born-digital records are listed and incorporated into the standard catalogues.

- Journals and publications are integrated into the general library catalogue at KADOC.

- Completed catalogues are sent to institutes for corrections and requests for closure of certain files. This helps in the trust-building process.

- Images of digitised/scanned items for reprographics orders are added to the catalogue descriptions where possible.

- There are no specific cataloguing timescales, although catalogues are usually produced 1-2 years after the donation has been received, either by existing resource or the appointment of project archivists.

Access

- There is a designated reading room in KADOC I that is open 9am-5pm Monday-Friday.

- Researchers are required to complete a consultation request to see particular files. This request is then sent to the leader of the institute for authorisation, with an expectation (included in the donation agreement) that the institute will reply within 24-48 hours. Occasionally decisions on access are devolved to the Head of the Library at KADOC.

- If requests are granted for access to digital records, an access copy can be sent to a researcher.

- Conditions of access do not apply to the leaders of religious institutes, who can consult their archive without a consultation request, although other members of the institute will need to complete a request.

- The reading room accommodates 5-6 readers a day. About 30% of all requests to KADOC are to consult collections of religious institutes, of which KADOC has over 100.

- Items are usually retrieved the day before. New requests on the day are normally refused because of the need to obtain authorisation and documents being stored off-site.

- Closure periods are stringent and include all documents created within the last 30 years, 50 years for all sensitive documents relating to the government of the institute, and 100 years for all documents relating to individuals.

- Institutes can (temporarily) reclaim files, for example for exhibitions, jubilees, etc.

Storage

- There is currently 15km of storage space in KADOC I (this is now full) and 32km of storage space in KADOC II, of which 30km is filled.

- KADOC I also includes religious habits and some paintings.

- Spaces are climate controlled and monitored by KU Leuven.

- KADOC II is a bespoke storage off-site building that was opened in 2004. There are three floors of strongrooms in KADOC II and these are monitored by at least one archivist.

- Archivists are skilled in cleaning documents although larger conservation projects require an external consultant.

- The majority of audio-visual records are stored in KADOC II. Many of these have been digitised.

- Documents are stored upright in 'Amsterdam' boxes.

Valorisation (Outreach)

- There is a designated team who plan exhibitions that are normally rotated 3-4 times a year. They also include external exhibitions. Religious institutes seem to be particularly appreciative of these exhibitions, especially those that demonstrate their work and contribution to wider society.

- Academic staff research and publish on the collections.

- Conferences are organised on the subjects relating to the history of religious institutes.

- Some religious institutes (for example, the Society of Jesus) have their own presence on the KADOC website to help to publicise their collections.

9. Conclusions

The findings of this project confirm that there is no 'one size fits all' solution to managing the current and future needs of religious institutes and their archives. Key conclusions therefore reflect the varied and complex nature of this issue:

9.1   A single large-scale centralised repository to house the collections of all/most religious institutes would certainly be one possible option but it would not be without significant challenges. The current models in other countries may not provide the ideal solution. For example, once their endowment ceases in 2035, the funding model of ENK is not sustainable to guarantee preservation and access to the collections of religious institutes in the long-term. KADOC's funding model, tied to a recognised university and research institute, is more sustainable, but without the political will and financial backing from established research institutes such as Durham University's Centre for Catholic Studies, a centralised repository could not be funded. Furthermore, the findings of the project survey reveal that a single large-scale repository housing all religious institutes archives is not necessarily what many religious institutes need. Most institutes send their archives overseas to where their leadership is based, have already donated their archives to another institute for long-term preservation and access, or do not envisage that they will close in the next 10-20 years.

9.2   Nevertheless, findings from the survey also reveal that not only is there a significant minority of religious institutes interested in some form of centralised repository, either with other institutes who share the same charism or a more general repository with all religious institutes, but that the majority of these are willing to either fund its establishment and/or pay a one-off cost to manage their archive in such repositories. This would suggest that the solution lies in smaller-scale centralised repositories, attached to either a particular charism/rule, or 'consolidated' repositories that could include religious institutes, diocesan archives and/or other Catholic organisations. Such repositories would still be challenging to establish and would require individual conversations with different religious institutes and organisations to tailor towards individual needs, but a small-scale repository, serving the needs of fewer institutes, would be more economical to run and sustainable in the long-term. It would also result in greater 'buy in' from individual

institutes, who may feel more invested in a repository with a small group of like-minded institutes.

9.3   The Catholic Church is a global organisation and religious institutes in other countries are dealing with similar challenges of future care of their archives. As this report has shown, various groups and organisations internationally, notably in the Netherlands, Belgium, the United States and Canada, have taken the initiative to try to assist institutes in establishing centralised repositories. Although the context of each country is different, religious institutes are clearly facing the same challenges in managing their archives.

9.4   Findings from the survey also reveal that a significant minority of religious institutes face challenges in the current management of their collections, notably around preservation. It should not be expected that religious institutes invest significantly in environmental controls, and protection from flooding and fire, but there are small-scale practical steps that need not necessarily be costly which all institutes could adopt, including the use of hand-held/wall-mounted measuring devices to monitor temperature and humidity and the use of dehumidifiers and radiators to reduce humidity and increase temperatures.

9.5   A significant minority of religious institutes also do not have any listing or catalogue available for their archive collections. This may be a matter of personal choice based on limited resources but if institutes are not aware of what they have in their archive then there is a greater danger of neglect or destruction. Many institutes do not allow access to their archives but they should at the very least have a basic listing of their collection, if only to ensure that archive items can be located for operational or legal compliance reasons.

9.6   The lack of archives training for members of religious institutes is also a cause for concern. While the findings of the survey reveal that many institutes do take archive training seriously, whether through appointing qualified lay archivists, allowing members to undertake short courses offered by various training providers, or passing on the knowledge of the archive from one member to another, there is still a significant minority of institutes where the archivist has no training at all.

9.7   The Religious Archives Group Survey of 2010 noted in its recommendations that funding bodies need to recognise the importance of religious archives in grant applications. While there has been some progress, it is quite clear that more work needs to be done to convince grant-awarding bodies of the importance of the archives of religious institutes, and the need to dispel

myths and misunderstandings which institutes may have about access to, and engagement with, archive records.

9.8 The survey revealed that, as well as archives, religious institutes also store significant printed and object collections, so a joined-up approach to heritage management more broadly will need to be considered for any future initiatives. Many leaders of religious institutes, for example, will not differentiate between their archive, printed and object collections.

9.9 The findings of this report have implications for the sector as whole that are much wider than challenges faced specifically by Catholic religious institutes. Many private organisations, whether charitable, educational, or commercial, hold archives. As a result of either lack of interest or funds, these archives face the same challenges as those of religious institutes, both in terms of how they are currently being managed and securing their long-term future after the organisation has disbanded.

10. Recommendations and Next Steps

10.1 Convene a 'Repository Working Group' and an advisory committee, whose membership would comprise of representatives from the leadership team of interested religious institutes, other Catholic stakeholders, such as the Catholic Archives Society, the Catholic Patrimony Committee, and the Conference of Religious of England and Wales, and wider sectoral representation from the Archives and Records Association and the National Archives, to discuss the feasibility of establishing repositories.

10.2 Commission a comprehensive feasibility study and cost analysis for establishing these repositories (if funding allows) which would be a crucial first step in determining the viability of this option.

10.3 Continue collaboration and further develop relationships with individuals, groups and networks working on similar initiatives, particularly the Archival Resources for Catholic Collections network and the Herbert Kelly Institute for Anglican Religious Life. This could involve providing mutual support, working together on various projects, sharing best practice and learning lessons.

10.4 Raise awareness of the range of freely available advice on the internet[44] to religious institutes, so that small-scale steps could be achieved for archive preservation.

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[44] The best place to start is probably the freely-available Catholic Archives Society advice leaflet no. 6, 'Conservation and Preservation', cas-advice-leaflet-6-revised.pdf (wordpress.com) [last accessed 5 May 2023]

10.5 Encourage religious institutes to provide basic listings of their collections. Again, this need not be costly with the use of volunteers, basic descriptions and word-processed or even manuscript listings.

10.6 Work with funding bodies to dispel misunderstandings by religious institutes about access requirements and identify realistic and pragmatic projects to fund. A small-scale digitisation project, for example, would provide access to documents without the need for physical onsite presence, an arrangement that cloistered orders in particular may be more willing to accept.

10.7 Collaborate with organisations such as the Conference of Religious to advocate for the importance of archives and provide archival training opportunities for religious institutes.

10.8 Raise awareness of the comparable challenges of managing printed material and objects by sharing the findings of this report with national professional library and museum bodies (CILIP and the Museums Association) to steer the conversation towards wider collaboration across the heritage sector.

10.9 Implement a sector-wide working party, in collaboration with the Archives and Records Association and its relevant sections and groups, to recognise the wider challenge of managing at-risk records more broadly and to develop proposals and guidance for the sector as a whole.

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which covers a wide range of common conservation and preservation issues, as well as pointing to further resources.

AHRC-RLUK Professional Practice Fellowship

Survey of the Archives of Religious Institutes 2023

Introduction

Thank you for considering taking part in this research. Before you decide to participate, you need to understand why this research is being conducted and what it will involve. Please read the following information, and feel free to email me with questions at any time if something you read is not clear. Please take time before you come to your decision.

Who I Am and the Purpose of this Research

My name is Jonathan Bush. I am the Chair of the Catholic Archives Society and have been a Council member of this organisation since 2014. I am also a qualified archivist employed by Durham University Library and Collections. I have a wide range of experience of working with religious archives, including working as an archivist at Ushaw College Library for over 10 years. I have a PhD in Church History from Durham University and a staff member of Durham University's Centre for Catholic Studies.

I have received funding, as part of the Arts and Humanities Research Council/Research Libraries UK professional practice fellowship scheme, to research into the archives of religious institutes in England and Wales and to collect data on their current archive holdings and future plans. This will involve asking questions about the size of an archive, what archive documents there are, how are they stored, and how are they made accessible to researchers (both inside and outside the institute). Being mindful that many institutes are in the process of planning for their completion, I am particularly interested in what long-term plans (if any) religious institutes have for the future of the archival material in their possession. As a result of this survey, I hope to be able to recommend a range of solutions that each institute could adopt depending on their personal circumstances. My research aims to encompass archivists from all male and female Catholic religious institutes (broadly defined).

This survey will allow for data to be gathered about a range of issues that can be included alongside previous literature and publications about the topic. Because there has been so little research in this area from the perspective of the recordkeeper, the

contribution of archivists working in religious institutes will be invaluable. It will also, I hope, allow members of religious institutes to self-reflect and think about their own archive, why it is important to them, and the need to plan for its future.

Who Should Complete This Survey

The survey should be completed by the main individual in charge of the archive at your institute. This may be a lay archivist, or a religious who has been given the task of looking after the archive. This shouldn't exclude you from seeking the opinions of other members of your institute where you feel this would be appropriate, e.g. Questions 17-19 might require input from your Leadership team.

What Taking Part Involves

For this study you will be asked to complete an online survey that contains questions about your institutional archive. You can complete this survey by clicking into the link in the email which this letter accompanies. The survey will contain questions about your archive, including its size, what records are held, how they are stored, whether they are catalogued, and access provision. It will also require you to pick from a range of options for the long-term storage and accessibility of your archive.

These questions are general and are designed to help me get a broad sense of the archives held by all religious institutes. You are not required to any question if you do not wish to do so. By filling in the survey and submitting it you are consenting to the process of using and storing the data which is gathered as it is outlined below. Taking part is entirely voluntary.

Why You Have Been Invited to Take Part

You have been sent this email because you have been identified in the Catholic Directory of England and Wales as a religious institute in England and Wales which may have records and archives. The information you provide will be invaluable to shedding light on how archive records are being managed in these institutions and what will happen to their archives once these institutions reach completion, something that has never been documented to any degree previously. Your answers will create a valuable record of this aspect of the archival profession and help to deal with the wider problem of at-risk records in other religious and non-religious institutions.

Do You Have to Take Part?

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. If you do not wish to take part, do not fill in the survey. Should you give your consent to take part in the survey, you are still not required to answer every question. Only provide the information you feel comfortable giving.

Confidentiality & Data Protection

The purpose of the survey is to collect information on the holdings of each institution and their long-term plans for the future of their archive. I am gathering this data using an online survey. The completed survey will be stored digitally on a secure password protected data server in Durham University which I only have access to. Any working copes of my data generated for analysis will also be stored in a secure password protected data server in Durham University. During the writing of the research, and in conference papers or publications after this, the information you provide will be used anonymously either in the form of a reference or a direct quotation.

Following completion of the research, the data you provide will be transferred to, and stored securely in, Durham University Archives and Special Collections for long-term storage and access. Access to the data in the archive will be subject to the General Data Protection Regulations and will require researchers to complete a Confidentiality Agreement before access is granted. If you do not wish for your data to be stored in this way, then you can opt out on the survey form.

What Will Happen to the Results of the Study?

The information you provide for this study will be published in the form of an anonymised report which will be shared to all religious institutes and to the wider research communities. It may also be used in future publications in specialist and academic journals, book or blog format, as well as academic conference papers on this subject. At no time will you be identified.

Further Information

If you need further information or clarification about anything in the survey or in this information sheet, please contact me at the following email address: Dr Jonathan Bush (jonathan.bush@durham.ac.uk). The survey will be open from Friday 3rd February until Friday 10th March

Thank You

1.   Please state the full title and foundation date of your institute? Please also state the date of establishment in the UK (if different from the foundation date).

2.   Is the leadership of your institute (e.g. Generalate, Mother House etc) located in:

        The UK
        Overseas

3.   Is your institute:

        Apostolic
        Contemplative
        Cloistered
        Mendicant
        Monastic
        Other (please state)

4.   How would you describe the charism of your institute?

5.   Do you have an archive, i.e. papers or other records created by your predecessors that have been kept beyond their immediate administrative use?

        Yes
        No

6.   How large is your archive space(s)?

        Please count the number of shelves/drawers with archives stored on/in them. If you have a separate storage area for papers that will in time be transferred to the archives, please include this within your calculations.

7.   What format of material is held in your archive?
        (Select all that apply)

        Photographs
        Paper and other textual records
        Maps, plans or other architectural records
        Images (video, film etc.)
        Electronic or born digital material (Word documents, PDFs, emails etc), stored on external hard drive, memory sticks etc.
        Other material e.g., artefacts, ecclesiastical objects, printed books, artworks etc

8.   Do the archives include:
        (Select all that apply)

Administrative records (minutes of meetings, planning documents etc)
Financial records
Property records
Chapel records (liturgy, music etc.)
Personal papers of members of the institute
Outreach (work in parishes etc.)
Specialised work (nursing, teaching etc)
Other (please state)

9.   Who is responsible for your archives?

A member of your own community
A lay person working as an archivist in a religious organisation
Other (Please state)

10.   Does he or she have any formal training in archives or records management?

Masters or Higher Diploma in Archives/Records Management
Certificate in Archives/Records Management
Has undertaken a short course or training event without a qualification
A professional qualification in a related discipline, for example, librarianship or museums
Trained by another member of the institute
No training
Other (please state)

11.   Do your archive storage rooms have measures in place to protect against flooding and fire? If your rooms are protected against fire but not flooding (or vice versa) please note this in Q21

Rooms are fully protected against flooding and fire
Rooms are protected against fire but not flooding (or vice versa)
None of the rooms are protected against either flooding or fire

12.   Are your archive storage rooms secure, i.e. at the very least have a lockable door?

Yes
No

13.   Are temperature and relative humidity levels...

Monitored in the storage areas
Controlled in the storage areas (with air conditioning etc)
Neither monitored nor controlled

14.   To what extent is your material 'catalogued' i.e. that there are lists available to allow you to know the content of your collections? (An estimate is enough)

0 - 25 %
25 % - 50 %

50 % - 75 %
75 % - 100 %

15. If your archives are listed, please specify the format in which they are listed (handwritten lists, word processed or other typed lists, cataloguing software, excel spreadsheets etc.)

16. Do you have a long-term plan for the storage of your archive in the event that your institute closes?

We have a fully-costed plan with all arrangements in place
We are in the process of drawing up a plan
We are not sure how to proceed and need assistance
We do not envisage closing in the next 10-20 years

17. **BEFORE ANSWERING THIS QUESTION, PLEASE REFER TO THE OPTIONS SHEET, OUTLINING THE ADVANTAGES/DISADVANTAGES OF EACH APPROACH**

In such a scenario, where would you (ideally) want your archive to be stored?

In a shared repository with all other religious institutes in England and Wales
In a shared repository with congregations who share the same charism/rule
In a shared physical repository for your institute's records in another country (if applicable)
With a diocesan record office
With another institution (e.g. a university, county record office)
Other (please state)

18. If you have chosen options 1 and/or 2 above, would your institute be willing and able to contribute financially towards the cost of **establishing** the repository?

Yes
No

19. If you have chosen options 1 and/or 2 above, would your institute be willing and able to contribute towards a **one-off cost for managing your archive in this repository**? This could include cost of transportation to the repository, cataloguing, preservation including repackaging, storage space, access to researchers in a reading room, and outreach activities (exhibitions, talks, etc to promote your archive to researchers):

Yes
No

20. Who are the main users of material from your archive?
(Select all that apply)

Internal use (I.e. your own religious community)
Academic Researchers
Genealogy / Family Historians
Local Historians
Other professionals (solicitors, journalists etc)
No access
Other (please state)

21. How many visitors per year on average were researching in your archive before Covid (pre-2020). If you don't collect statistics then an estimate would be enough

None
1-20
21-40
41-60
61-80
81-100
Over 100
N/A – we don't allow or have the facility to accommodate access to our archive

22. Please use this space to make any additional comments, either to elaborate further on your answers above or to raise any other points.

23. The data collected from this survey will be used to compile a report, comparing and contrasting the results from different religious institutes to help inform strategies and solutions for dealing with at-risk records of religious institutes and the wider archives sector. All data in the report will be anonymised and you or your institution will not be identified at any point. Do you consent to your data being used in this way?

Yes
No

24. Following completion of the research, the data you provide will be transferred to, and stored securely in, Durham University Archives and Special Collections for long-term storage and restricted access. Access to the data in the archive will be subject to the General Data Protection Regulations and will require researchers to complete a Confidentiality Agreement before access is granted. Do you consent to your data being used in this way?

Yes
No