Community archives and digital sustainability

Challenges and Opportunities)

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**Abstract – A short poster presentation on the issues facing smaller community organisations and volunteer-led groups related to digitisation, digital preservation, and digital sustainability.**

**Keywords – Community, Archives, Digitisation, Digital Preservation**

**Conference Topics – Community**

# Introduction

Audrey Wilson, Partnerships and Engagement Manager, Scottish Council on Archives (SCA) and Sean Rippington, Digital Archives and Copyright Manager, University of St Andrews, will summarise some of the challenges facing community groups dealing with digitisation and digital preservation issues.

# themes

## The poster presentation will set out some of the issues covered in the Developing Your Digital Skills: Digitisation Webinar Series coordinated by SCA and the Community Archives and Heritage Group Scotland network in 2021. The Developing Your Digital Skills series was created as a result of a survey which SCA sent out to community groups in early 2021. The presentation will also be informed by feedback and conversations which have emerged from SCA’s ongoing work of supporting community groups, including voluntary heritage organisations, who maintain or would like to maintain a small archives.

## We know that community archives are often run by volunteers in all parts of Scotland, from urban towns and cities to remote parts of Scotland. Before the pandemic, many people found it too costly and time-consuming to travel to training events. Covid19 made everyone, young and old, appreciate the importance of communicating on a digital platform and how it leads to more opportunities and the ability to engage with the world. The webinar series allowed everyone from anywhere to take part and learn how to Develop their Digital Skills, able to ask questions of the presenter and post messages in the chat room. With just over 800 people registering for the webinars, it was a huge success.

# main issues

## The main challenges facing community groups, including voluntary heritage organisations in terms of maintaining a digital archives, include:

* Lack of expertise/knowledge
* Unfamiliarity with terms such as digital preservation
* Sustainability of digital archive material on social media sites such as Facebook|
* Ageing demographic
* Vulnerability of data on personal computers and hard drives

# digital preservation issues

The digital archives of community groups are listed on the Digital Preservation Coalition ‘Bit List’ as ‘Critically Endangered’.

The Bit List mentions: poor documentation; lack of replication; lack of continuity funding; lack of residual mechanism; dependence on small number of volunteers, lack of preservation mandate; lack of preservation thinking at the outset; conflation of backup with preservation; conflation of access and preservation; inaccessible to web archiving; dependence on social media providers; distrust of ‘official’ agencies as some of the key factors behind the extreme vulnerability of digital community archives.

The Bit List also states that “Typically born digital material is more at risk - community groups may not know about the risk of loss. Many are unaware of digital preservation terminology. It is the ad-hoc nature of these groups and projects which is of great concern.”

This poster event will set out the key issues and invite contributions from digital preservation professionals to explore ways of helping community groups with their digital requirements.

REFERENCES

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