



People With Archives:

A survey of HIV/AIDS records in the UK

Welcome to the 3rd issue of the newsletter for the 'Documenting the HIV/AIDS epidemic: a survey of HIV/AIDS archives in United Kingdom' project. The project has made steady progress this year and it has been very encouraging to see the response so far in people participating in the project. In this issue, I'll report on my recent site visit to Stoke-on-Trent, give an update on my survey of private HIV collections and share some news of upcoming outreach events. We'll also hear from Sally Bevan, a senior archivist at the London Metropolitan Archives, talking about some of the HIV/AIDS archives held in their collection. Written by Chris Olver, Project Archivist.

On the Road

Over the last few years, there has been increasing attention to how HIV/AIDS affected local communities, whether it is through the creation of public AIDS memorials, such as in [Birmingham](#) or [Brighton](#), or to exhibitions to tell the local history of the epidemic, as in [Liverpool](#) and [Leicester](#). This trend in capturing the regional histories of HIV/AIDS are not yet fully represented in UK archives. As part of this project, I have particularly focused on finding archives of under-represented regions, groups, and subjects.

So, when I was approached by Maurice Greenham about his archives at a [National HIV Story Trust](#) (NHST) event in February I was delighted. I had spent the previous year cataloguing the NHST archive at the London Metropolitan Archive and was aware of Maurice from his interview for the charity and his remarkable life (or lives) in education, theatre, HIV/AIDS and LGBTQ+ activism (you can find more about his life, from this [short film](#)). We arranged an online meeting soon afterwards and he told me more about his archives. Of particular interest was his long association with Staffordshire Buddies (now Staffordshire Sexual Health Charity) which he was involved with from its formation in 1993. He had not only kept an extensive personal archive of his involvement in the charity but had also kept records of other local and national charities that he was involved with including MUSICAIDS, a charity he operated to raise funds for local HIV services.



Newspaper article on Maurice Greenham in the Stoke Sentinel, 17 November 2012.

We agreed early on that it would be good to visit and fully survey his collection. In the meantime, Maurice mentioned the project to two of his friends who also had archival records associated with Staffordshire Buddies. They also readily agreed to be involved in the project and soon I was preparing for my first professional (and personal) visit to Stoke-on-Trent. I travelled up to Stoke from Chichester on a balmy October morning and was greeted by Maurice at his home. He was a very welcoming and gracious host. His charming home was full of musical instruments, photos and memorabilia from his life in theatre and it was very hard not to segue from my task at hand as he told me absorbing anecdotes about his life, but time was short and I had two rooms of records to survey.

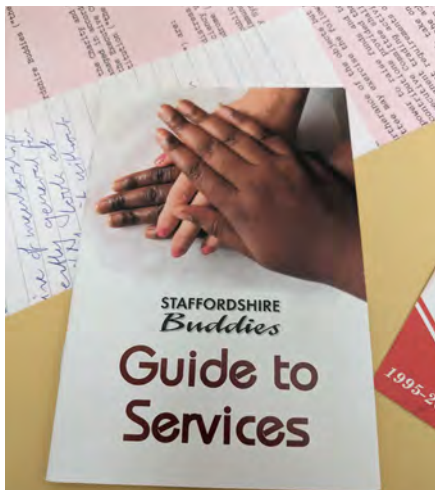


Images of HIV/AIDS material surveyed during my visit to Maurice Greenham's home.

His personal archives were of great interest as they were a combination of his own personal papers, relating to his own HIV diagnosis and maintaining his own health and his long-term involvement in HIV organisations supporting and advocating for people living with HIV. This included a great deal of organisational records relating to Staffordshire Buddies, but also other organisations like [HIVitality](#), which provides retreats for long-term survivors. There was also an interesting collection of talks and articles that Maurice had written about living with HIV and ageing with HIV.

During my visit, I also met Andrew Colclough. A former Director of the Staffordshire Buddies, he was a fount of knowledge about the charity and his extensive career in HIV services both in the UK and in Africa.

It was interesting to hear from him how the Staffordshire Buddies continued to adapt depending on the needs of its service users, initially starting a buddying and befriending service for people living with HIV, before rapidly expanding in the mid-1990s with the creation of a drop-in centre and engaging in outreach and prevention work for men who have sex with men in South Staffordshire. By the late 1990s, the charity was seeing a change within their client base with more female clients and refugees or asylum seekers. The charity developed new services to help provide support for families and legal and housing advice. In more recent times the charity has developed a broader remit to provide support to people with other sexual wellbeing issues.

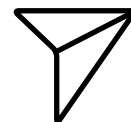


Staffordshire Buddies: Guide to Service booklet, 1990s.

On my final day, I visited Paul Smith, Lead Counsellor at the Staffordshire Sexual Health Charity (formerly Staffordshire Buddies). This visit was particularly useful as it was possible to survey their largely digital holdings. I was able to identify many record series on their server which were of historical value and had continuity with the records held by both Maurice and Andrew. It was also valuable to understand more about some of the sensitivities and legal issues surrounding current records in an operating HIV charity, and to provide assurances that archive repositories have the legal knowledge and expertise to keep these records secure and where necessary closed from public inspection for an appropriate period to protect living individuals.

My trip to Stoke was an extremely positive experience and it was personally fulfilling and interesting to meet Maurice, Andrew and Paul and talk to them about their archives. Hopefully, by including the collections in the survey this will potentially contribute to the long-term preservation of these records and increase awareness of the history of HIV/AIDS in the Midlands.

Survey of private HIV collections



The last few months have been fruitful in locating private collections both of individuals and organisations. Often finding collections has occurred in spurts, as with my Stoke site visit, with one person connecting me with others with similar collections.

Direct messaging has proved to be the best method of finding collections. In August, I emailed 41 HIV organisations about the survey. These charities were found through websites such as AIDS Map and the Charity Commission and were selected either because they were national organisations or regional organisations which had been operating for over 20 years. Of these organisations, 14 replied and 6 organisations went on to complete the survey, and 5 of these expressed interest in a site visit. It was also useful to hear about the reasons why some organisations did not want to participate, with several saying they either did not have enough staff or time to participate.

Another successful method has been through connecting with and messaging people through Instagram. The site has been useful not only in promoting the project but also finding people with collections or ties with HIV organisations. It has also been a means of keeping informed about current news in the HIV sector and being more aware of everyday lives of people living with HIV in the country.

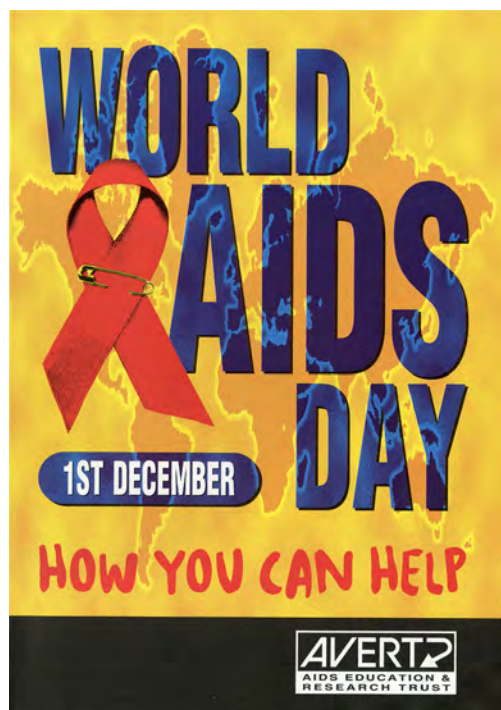
Outreach and events

Open Day at West Sussex Record Office, Saturday 25 November 2023

On Saturday 25 November, West Sussex Record Office is hosting an open day to celebrate the 50th birthday of our friends' group, the West Sussex Archives Society. The day will include various tours, displays and project updates, including from the National Survey of HIV/AIDS. If you are interested in learning more about the project and seeing some of the HIV archives in our collection, then please join us. Admission is free and we are open from 10am–3.30pm. For more information about the day and how to find us, please visit our website [here](#).

Researching history of HIV/AIDS online

During my survey work I have been pleasantly surprised by the number of online archive resources about the history of HIV/AIDS in the UK. These range from digitised documents, films, oral history interviews, and images produced by archive services, to independent web-sources created by individuals and community groups. I have written a series of blogs about some of these online resources which are available on the [project page](#).



UK AIDS Quilt on display for World AIDS Day

The UK AIDS Memorial Quilt will be on display in London on Sunday 3rd December. The display to commemorate World AIDS Day will be held at Positive East, at 159 Mile End, E1 4AQ. The event is free for all to attend and will be running from 10am to 4pm.

Sections of the quilt will also be on display that weekend in other parts of the country with panels being shown in [Brighton](#) and [Manchester](#), whilst in Birmingham there is still time to see the '[Cover Up Quilts](#)' exhibition at the Library of Birmingham. The exhibition displays contemporary quilt panels inspired by the Names Project AIDS memorial.

AVERT World AIDS Day leaflet, c.1997

HIV/AIDS archive in the spotlight

Sally Bevan is a senior archivist working at the London Metropolitan Archive. In this interview, she talks about some of the HIV/AIDS archives held in their collection.

o Can you tell me about your archive?

[London Metropolitan Archives](#) (LMA) is a local government archive service based in Farringdon, London. It is part of the City of London Corporation and holds records from 1066 to the present day. The archive holds over 110 kilometres of records and holds material from the London and greater London area.

o **Can you tell me about some of the HIV/AIDS collections at the LMA?**

The [National HIV Story Trust](#) is probably the largest HIV/AIDS collection that we hold. The collection contains 100 filmed interviews with people living with HIV, their families, partners and carers. The collection also includes collected material from interviewees, including photographs, ephemera and memorabilia.

National HIV Story Trust interviews being viewed at the London Metropolitan Archive



It was catalogued as part of a Wellcome Trust funded project, '[Positive history: preserving the archives of HIV/AIDS: care and testimony](#)', that ran from 2021-2023. The project also catalogued existing LMA HIV/AIDS collections, including the archives of the Mildmay Mission Hospital and Positively UK archives.

There is also HIV/AIDS material in collections relating to LGBTQ+ history, such as the [Ruckus! Federation Limited](#) archives, which includes records around safe sex public health campaigns for gay black men, but also more generally around health, with various leaflets, flyers etc.

There is also a lot more spread across other LMA collections, such as our London hospital records and those relating to the Greater London Council (GLC) to name just a few.

o **Considering there are very few archive collections relating to gay black men's experience with HIV, was this part of the reason for acquiring the collection?**

Probably not at the time, it was more like Topher [Campbell] and Ajamu, the founders of Ruckus!, approaching us about their archives and saying we have this collection, you don't have anything like this, and it needs a home.



Archive material such as that produced by the gay men's health charity, Big Up, can be found in the Ruckus! collection. Image taken from *a guide to safer sex and health for Black men who have sex with men* booklet, c.1995-1999. Image courtesy of [HIV Graphic Communication](#).

Topher and Ajamu had worked with us and been involved with the annual LGBT history conferences since 2005. So I think along with that, the fact that we hold significant African-Caribbean collections such as the Huntly archives and that we were also starting to acquire more LGBTQ collections and promote these archives to the wider public was the reason they felt LMA was the place for their archive.

Quite often we are approached by individuals looking for homes for their collections and quite often it is those community collections which then do fill those gaps. It has evolved since then and think we are more proactive in finding the gaps in the collection, what are the organisations out there and what should we be looking at.

Certainly, it has been prompted by organisations like the [National HIV Story Trust](#) (NHST), where a collection comes in and the interest it generates bring people forward with similar archives or connections with organisations in the sector.

◦ **Were you expecting further donations of HIV/AIDS collections during the Positive History project?**

Not initially, but it had happened before with other community oral history projects, like [Speak Out London](#) Project, where the project has been an impetus for other people to deposit materials. So is always a really lovely thing when it happens.

Particularly in the case of the [Frankie O'Reilly collection](#), which is just...brilliant! It is such a personal and emotional collection, intimately documenting his life, from moving to London as a teenager from Derry in the 1970s with his two childhood friends, working as a drag performer at the Black Cap in Camden, and later caring and nursing friends and lovers who died of HIV-related illnesses.

It is important to remember how it is such a big deal for people to hand over things which are that personal and to have a good relationship with the depositor and their trust. Certainly, it helped to work with Paul Coleman, founder of the NHST, on acquiring the collection, as he was a reassuring presence for Frankie, having interviewed him for the NHST and donated archives to the LMA.

◦ **Can you say more about some of the challenges encountered in working with HIV/AIDS collections?**

The main challenge was how to make quite often very personal archives publicly available. So, with Frankie O'Reilly, he was very happy for his photographs to be made available for everyone to see, but as archivists we were aware that other people in the photographs, such as those taken at Christmas parties or say, a christening, might not want their photograph available to see in an archive. Archivists are slightly more risk averse, oddly sometimes more than our depositors, we must balance a duty of care for people represented in the collection, and that of the depositor's wishes, which sometimes can be a little difficult with depositors who have provided their collections and you can't make it all available.

◦ **Do you have a favourite item or collection relating to HIV/AIDS in the LMA?**

I think as a collection, it would have to be Ruckus! Archives. It really is an amazing collection as a whole and can be really explicit and doesn't hold back. It is also interesting as it contains the collected archives of Rukus! and both the personal archives of the creators of the archive, making it an interesting hybrid collection.

It is also great because they both continue to visit and work with the collection. Whether it is film work, exhibition or panel discussion.

◦ Are there any other highlights from the Positive History Project that stand out to you?

The one which stands out was hosting and supporting a series of workshop for the Positively Past Positively Present project, which was a collaboration between Positively UK and The Royal Central School of Speech & Drama (<https://positivelyuk.org/positively-past-positively-present/>).



Assortment of printed ephemera from the Positively UK collection

The project involved current and former clients of Positively UK and each workshop was a creative response to the archives of Positively UK. Some of them were trained artists but others had no formal training, and they did all sorts of creative things, like t-shirt making, creative writing and painting – I have to stress that no archives were anywhere near any paint in those sessions!

But they really had a great time and was so nice to do this work in an archive space.

For more information about the project

If you are interested in finding out more about the project, then please do feel free to contact me. I am particularly keen to hear from people who may know of or are aware of possible private HIV/AIDS archives. I can be contacted on christopher.olver@westsussex.gov.uk or by telephone on 03302226284. You can also read more about the project on the WSRO blog which can be found here: <https://westsussexrecordofficeblog.com/documenting-the-hiv-aids-epidemic/>

