



People With Archives:

A survey of HIV/AIDS records in the UK

Welcome to the 4th issue of the newsletter for the 'Documenting the HIV/AIDS epidemic: a survey of HIV/AIDS archives in United Kingdom' project. The start of the 2nd year of the project has been busy with multiple site visits to see private collections across the UK. In this issue, I'll give an update about the project so far and explain what happens during a survey site visit, along with sharing some of the interesting things I have discovered during my recent trips. We will also hear from Martin Weaver, curator of AIDS Archives channel on YouTube. Written by Chris Olver, Project Archivist.

Survey of HIV/AIDS archives open until October 2024

There is still time to participate in the survey of HIV/AIDS archives in the UK. By joining in the survey, you can help us determine what records exist outside of current UK archive repositories and inform the archive sector as to the stories and material they should be collecting.

The project also aims to help those who do hold archives by providing them with any professional advice they may like to have about their collection. This might be ways to store and preserve paper-based collections, or digitisation options for photographic material or finding a long-term home for a collection by connecting them with an archive repository.

For any person or organisation still interested in taking part please feel free to contact me for more information.

Visiting private archives across the UK

The project continues to find more HIV/AIDS archives across the United Kingdom. Since the project started in January 2023, 27 organisations and individuals have shared information about their archive collections. These have ranged from relatively small holdings of printed leaflets and memorabilia to large organisational archives, containing an entire room of material. The bulk of the collections reported have been in London and the Southeast of England. Most archive collections have been held by individual record holders, with some organisations typically reporting they have deposited their archives already or do not hold any or have only kept a few fragments of material.

Of those 27 people who have responded so far, I have visited 11 separate collections held across the UK and conducted a more detailed examination of their archives.

Site visits explained

A large part of my current work has been embarking on site visits to see private collections of archives. Site visits are important as they allow for the detailed surveying of archival material and to assess the condition of the collection on site and identify any issues which might impact the long-term health of the collection. They are also important as they are an opportunity to meet the record creators and found out why they have kept an archive and why the collection is meaningful.



Diagram for the workflow for site visits.

Each site visit takes time to prepare as dates and availability need to be arranged, a risk assessment undertaken, and travel and accommodation booked. The criteria for which collection will require a site visit is dependent on various factors from size of collection, proximity, and potential risk to the collection. Archives can be at risk for a variety of reasons from environmental factors, such as water damage, pest infestation or mould, or because the organisation or individual can no longer keep the archives long-term. This can be for a variety of reasons, for example, cost of external storage or moving to a smaller building.

A typical site visit consists of meeting with the owner or person in charge of the archive collection to discuss the collections and then undertaking a thorough survey of the collection. The detailed survey is either conducted with the owner of the papers or, depending on amount of material, by myself independently.

The survey at a basic level provides a list of the contents of the collection and where everything is located. Surveying allows archivists to gather information about the context in which the records were created, to note down any potential legal or sensitivity issues, and to document the general physical condition of the collections and identify any potential preservation issues or conservation treatment requirements.

After completing the survey, I typically ask some additional questions about the collection and answer any questions the owner might have about managing the archives or, if they are looking to deposit the collection, which institutions might be interested in the records. Each collection owner receives a short survey report with recommendations a few weeks after the visit. This is designed so it can help provide important collection information to archive services who might be interested in taking in the collection at a future date.

Some of the interesting things I have found on site visits so far...

– There is always a new type of ephemera to be found. Having worked on several collections of HIV/AIDS ephemera in my career I thought I had seen most of it, but no. Whether it is HIV awareness ChapSticks from the Body Shop from 1990s, a safer sex flipbook or an aluminium foil takeaway container, containing a neatly folded anniversary t-shirt for the food delivery HIV charity, Food Chain, there is always something unexpected.



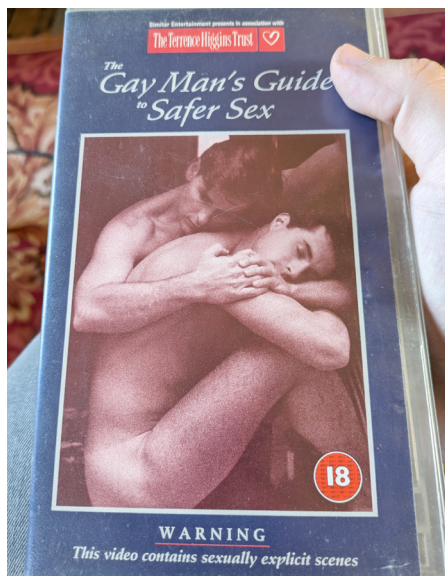
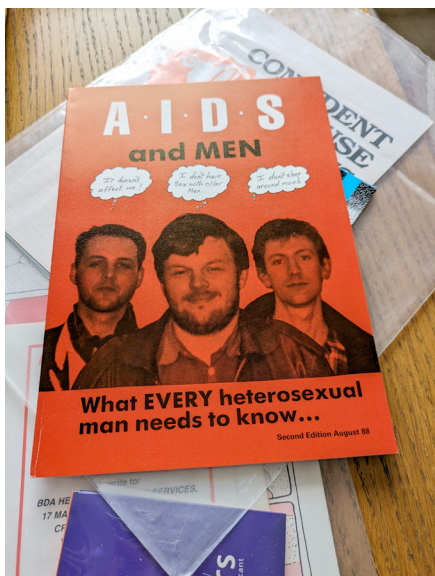
Image of the Body Shop *Speak out on AIDS* HIV awareness ChapStick, 1990s, taken at site visit in February 2024.



Photograph of a Zip Disk, taken at site visit in February 2024.

– Archive material comes in all shapes and sizes. The variety of material can be fascinating from the very small (badges, pins and stickers) to very large (posters, polyester foam fingers and handstitched quilt panels). Perhaps the most challenging from a preservation point view are the old digital storage formats such as floppy discs, CD-Roms and zip drives, as the hardware to open them is not widely available and the digital files within may also be no longer accessible.

– Learning more about response to UK HIV/AIDS crisis. While it is generally well-known that national HIV/AIDS public health campaigns tended to avoid talking explicitly about sex and safer sex methods, it has been interesting how other HIV awareness campaigns by charities and local government could be far more frank about sex. I have seen multiple examples of safer sex advice specifically targeted to different groups during the AIDS crisis including gay men, lesbians, tourists, women and heterosexual men.



A safer sex leaflet for heterosexual men, and a VHS cassette from Terrence Higgins Trust entitled *The Gay Men's Guide to Safer Sex*. Taken at site visits in February 2024.

News in brief:

Public Archive survey update

Despite primarily focusing on private HIV/AIDS collections, I am still finding more HIV collections currently held in UK archive repositories. These include several collections such as the papers of LGBTQ+ activists, [Nigel Young and Jonathan Blake \(YBA\)](#) at Bishopsgate Institute; early HIV/AIDS material from St Stephen's Hospital, London at the London Metropolitan Archive; the [Mark Ashton collection](#) at the Labour History and Archive Study Centre, Manchester, and other collections from across UK including Glasgow, Bradford and South Shields.

Online talk about HIV/AIDS oral history collections in the UK

To mark last year's World AIDS Day, I was invited to present a short talk on HIV/AIDS oral histories in the UK for the Oral History Society LGBTQ+ Special Interest Group. You can now watch the talk online [here](#) alongside two excellent presentations from Mark Etheridge about the LGBTQ+ at St Fagans National Museum of History and Paul Coleman, National HIV Story Trust, about the the role woman played in AIDS crisis.

Living Museum of Emotional Archives

A series of workshops based around Latin American lived experience of HIV are taking place in London in April and May. The workshops aim to tell the stories of the Latin American community as they relate to living with and surviving HIV, through their objects and testimonies.

If you know anyone who might be interested in attending the workshops, please contact livingmuseumhiv@gmail.com or follow the project on Instagram (<https://www.instagram.com/e.archives.hiv>).



The flyer is a red and orange graphic with the text "OPENCALL!" at the top. Below it is the title "LIVING MUSEUM OF EMOTIONAL ARCHIVES". The main text reads: "The project aims to tell the stories of the Latin American community as they relate to living with and surviving HIV, through their objects and testimonies." There are two circular callouts: one for "we are looking for latin participants:" with criteria like "Who lives with HIV in the UK (with or without a visa)" and "Provide support to people living with HIV, whether as activists, family members, or partners, who wish to share their experiences."; the other for "We will lead a workshop on 18-19-25-26 April and 2-3 May (6pm to 8.30pm) to create together this proposal for a Living Museum." At the bottom, it says "Registrations and queries to: livingmuseumhiv@gmail.com". Logos for "40 YEARS OF LATIN AMERICAN HOUSE", "METRO Embrace Difference", and "Funded by: Goldsmiths UNIVERSITY OF LONDON" are at the bottom.

Flyer for *Living Musuem of Emotional Archives*, shared with me by organiser, Diego Ignacio Agurto Beroiza.

The history and legacy of HIV in Greater Manchester

The Manchester based HIV charity, George House Trust, have been awarded a [National Lottery Heritage](#) grant to catalogue and preserve the archive of George House Trust, using the archive to share the heritage and engage people in its history and the story of HIV in the north, marking the Trust's 40th anniversary.

HIV/AIDS archive in the spotlight



Banner for YouTube channel, *AIDS Archive*. Copyright, Martin Weaver.

Martin Weaver is a London based psychotherapist; he was one of the first volunteers to join Terrence Higgins Trust (THT) in 1983 and became one of the first paid employees of the charity in 1985. In this interview, he talks about his HIV/AIDS archive and creating his YouTube channel, [AIDS Archive](#).

◦ What's the origin of your collection?

When I first started at THT, I was busy doing the work and just getting things moving. But when I took on the role of being the press officer in 1985, I thought, we must start monitoring our work and so I began recording TV programmes. I thought it was important that we kept a record, and we could then go back and say how did this work, why didn't that work? But once I started doing it, then I just did it and kept on doing it.

When I left the THT to work in the NHS the tapes went into storage, and I added a few more until I left the NHS in 1997. There they would still be, hidden and almost forgotten had not Russell T Davies or someone else brought AIDS back to the public's attention.

◦ How would you describe your collection?

It's documentary really as it's mostly letters, reports and other communications. Some of it is personal to me when I worked for the NHS, and all event driven I suppose. There was no clear plan for the future so it's items that I thought I should hold onto for some vague future event!

◦ Your YouTube channel, *AIDS Archive*, began in January 2021. What made you set up the channel?

I heard that Channel 4 was developing a new drama based on the lives of gay men in the AIDS crisis during the 1980s which was originally titled 'The Boys' [it was later retitled 'It's a Sin']. I was motivated to digitise the recorded VHS programmes and upload them onto YouTube, to provide a balance to whatever the drama would present. It was the imminent broadcasting of the drama that spurred me into real action. I wanted to get the programmes out there before the drama was transmitted as a way of setting the scene and, if necessary, balancing whatever the drama presented.

I wanted to create a video that set the context for them all. I used a programme called 'Camtasia' to divide up the original three hour video cassettes into each individual programme and then to create the clips and edit all the bits together for my introduction video.

There are 72 videos in all which is far more than I ever thought I had. They sort of continued to mount up as I did the edits. At this time, April 2024, there are just over 700 subscribers, and my introduction video has been viewed almost 3,000 times.

◦ How did you find the representation of HIV/AIDS in 'It's a Sin'?

For all its faults 'It's A Sin' was great at making one story personal and so affecting many, many people. The real discussion shouldn't be with 'It's A Sin' but why is it that this is the ONLY drama to deal with the AIDS crisis and its effects on gay men in the UK?

I could recognise all the story lines as ones that I had heard about or been actively involved in during my time at THT and beyond. In fact much more happened and I understand that Mr Davies had two or three more episodes written that didn't get filmed so maybe some of the issues would have been covered in those 'missing' episodes.

◦ What has been the reception to the channel?

It has been mostly positive, with 80% of the comments being positive, the negative comments are usually homophobic, abusive or HIV deniers and are a real pain. As it's my channel I get to decide who has a voice, because the channel isn't a democracy I do delete such comments as I am fed up with them.

◦ Do you have any particular memorable videos that are on the channel?



Context

HIV/AIDS [🔗](#)

CDC
HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) is a virus that attacks the body's immune system. If HIV is not treated, it can lead to AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome).
For information purposes only. Consult your local medical authority for advice. [Learn more](#)

1985 11 13 TVS Problem Page (edited) - An afternoon programme on the AIDS panic.

Martin Weaver
708 subscribers

👍 21 | 🗨️ | ➦ Share | ⬇️ Download | 🎞️ Clip | ➦ Save | ⋮

1.2K views · 3 years ago · LONDON

The very first interview that I did and they interviewed me at some length. The interviewer was Phillip Hodson (@philliphodson). Many studios also had problems when I or other gay men, regardless of

Screenshot of Martin Weaver being interviewed on *Problem Page* taken from *AIDS Archive*.

I think that [Problem Page](#), broadcast in 1985, is memorable for me as it was my first television interview and some of the studio staff threatened to walk out if I was allowed in the studio. At the time I was HIV (then called HTLV III) positive, curiously since then I've had a few tests that come up negative. This also happened again the following year on Border Television during a recording of [Border Live](#). However in both those cases and after much negotiation and education the programmes went ahead with my participation. In fact with the Border Live programme, they sent a car to meet me at the railway station to take me to the studio. I was told later that it was the staff member who complained most loudly that I shouldn't be allowed into the studio and said that there would be a total walk out if I did participate, who drove the car that picked me up! In both of those recordings there are personal stories on both sides to go with it.

◦ **What were some of the main challenges that you found in putting the channel together?**

It wasn't really putting the recordings online but the donkey work of digitising the videos. I had to buy another videotape recorder, then get the software working, let them run through all the three-hour tapes before editing them into their individual programmes.

Another problem that I had was finding out all the dates of the transmissions but soon found some of them on websites like [BBC Genome](#) and [The Television & Radio Database](#).

◦ **Do you have any future plans for sort of the collection?**

I've written to the Bishopsgate Institute to see if they are interested in the collection and I'm waiting to hear back from them. If they do not want it then perhaps I will try the Queer Museum or another place.



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/>