

Looking after your WI archives

Archives are the historical records of a WI, and they should be kept carefully and catalogued so that people know what is in the archive – these are records for people to look at and read.

They are essential because they not only document the history of your WI; they show its place in the broader history of the federation and the part it has played in your local community.

1. What to put in your archives

An item becomes an archive when it is no longer in current use. Many day-to-day documents can be discarded when they are no longer used but examples of what you should keep include:

- Record Books of your meetings
- Committee Minute books
- Annual Reports
- Annual Accounts
- Scrap books
- Photographs
- WI Banners
- WI Tablecloths (if they are decorated)
- Trophies/certificates won in competitions
- Special letters

Please note that it is crucial that these items are dated with the correct year!

2. Keeping your archives safe & in good condition

Store in an even temperature room

- Keep in a dust-free environment
- Keep them away from the light
- Remove any metal such as pins or paperclips (they rust unless made of brass)
- Do not store in plastic bags or folders
- Wrap in acid-free paper
- Store in acid-free boxes
- Keep photographs in 'Melinex' sleeves
- Roll banners and cloths

Label photographs on the back, either in soft pencil or on a label. Indicate the event, date, and the names of the people in the picture. Do not keep them in plastic folders, but buy special acid-free envelopes from photographic suppliers or use archive-quality albums. This is better than using glue which can stain the photographs after some time.

Roll banners or tablecloths. Use a carpet roll or a piece of drainpipe as a 'core', cover this with wadding and then wrap in acid-free tissue. Roll the banner or cloth around this with any embroidery towards the outside. Wrap in acid-free tissue and tie with tape. Keep in a fabric bag with a drawstring; attach a label to the outside.

Make sure that everything is labelled as the property of your WI and give the address of the federation office. This is especially important for any boxes stored in a private house. You want to avoid losing your archives in case a property is cleared or when moving house.

Keep a list of what items are in your archive, and where they are kept.

3. Where to store your physical archives

The best place to store your archives for long- term protection is in your local County Record Office or museum. This ensures your archives are kept in ideal conditions and will be looked after by professionals. This is strongly recommended by the NFWI, most federations and many WIs have already deposited their archives in this way. The NFWI has deposited its records in the archive store at The Women's Library at LSE.

Contact your Local Record Office to find out more, their archivist will advise you. When you deposit your records, you will get a receipt. It is strongly recommended that you allow open access, otherwise, for the next 30 years, anyone (even your own members) will have to get written permission from the secretary of your WI if they wish to consult them.

You will be able to access your archives in the Record Office Reading room at any time and will be able to borrow them if you wish to display them for a particular occasion.

Your County Record Office may not be able to accept fabrics. If you have an old banner, tablecloth or wall hanging you may find a local museum that would be interested in taking it. Make sure that you have registered it with the NFWI/National Needlework Archive project: <https://www.nationalneedleworkarchive.org.uk/>

Contact your federation and tell them what you are doing. They wish to be kept informed about where WI records are held. This will be important if, for example, they are writing a history of the federation.

If, sadly, your WI has to suspend the WI Advisor concerned will take your record and minute books and any other important

archive material to the federation office, and in due course, they will be deposited in the County Record Office by the Federation.

4. Where to store your electronic archives

Many charities now scan in their archives to a computer and store these electronically. The benefits of this include:

- Data protection friendly as each document can be reviewed and redacted where necessary when scanning
- Improves accessibility as documents can be found easily and quickly
- Reduces costs as the space and supplies for physical archives is not needed
- Secure storage and protects documents indefinitely

If your WI has its own computer, the electronic archives should be saved on there and back-ups made. If your WI does not have its own computer various cloud-based backup and archiving solutions exist, although these are likely to have an annual cost.

Regardless of where your information is stored it is a good idea to keep backups, for example on an encrypted external hard drive.

There are companies who will help charities with archive scanning.

5. Why worry about archives?

WI records can provide an important contribution to social history, particularly providing information about women's lives in the twentieth century. People researching local history need to have access to local WI records and if your records are not available you miss out on being part of history as it is written.

6. Data protection

Archiving in the public interest [is protected in schedule 2, part 6, paragraph 28 of the Data Protection Act](#). However, this is subject to the use of appropriate safeguards to ensure there are no negative impacts of keeping the data on any living individuals. Those who are responsible for personal data must ensure that it is kept securely.

For physical archives:

- Keep archives in a locked cabinet and ensure no archives are left anywhere else.
- Ensure that only those who need to access personal data can do so.
- Keep a register of withdrawals and returns.
- If personal data is no longer needed for the archive, make sure it is destroyed, e.g. by shredding.

For digital archives:

- Ensure all documents and the devices that can access them are protected with a strong password.
- Documents should be clearly named to reduce the risk of the wrong one being accidentally shared with someone.
- Ensure that only those who need to access personal data can do so.
- Ensure data is backed up and stored securely off-site.
- If personal data is no longer needed for the archive, make sure it is deleted from all possible places a copy could be kept e.g. from hard drives, the recycling bin or emailed copies.

Archived data should respect the principle of data minimisation. WIs and federations should ensure they are archiving the minimum amount of personal data possible to meet their aims.

It is important to remember that the GDPR exemption applies to archiving in the public interest, so you must consider this when deciding what to archive. For a WI, public interests might include archiving to demonstrate charitable accountability, campaigning work, their place in the local community etc.

It should be noted that unlike personal data kept for ongoing use, personal data stored in archives are not expected to be kept up-to-date.

Personal data held for archiving purposes in the public interest can be held indefinitely, however you should still consider anonymisation or pseudonymisation when possible.

Please see the NFWI Data Protection Policy for more information.

7. Useful resources

- National Archives: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/a2a>
- BBC Archive: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/archive/>
- National Archives Guide to Archiving Personal Data: <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/information-management/guide-to-archiving-personal-data.pdf>

8. Contact information

Thank you to the former NFWI Hon Archivist Anne Stamper who kindly prepared the original guidance document on archiving. This has since been updated by the NFWI Membership and Engagement Team.

If you would like to contact us about this document, please email membership@nfw.org.uk. You can also call 0207 371 9300

or write to us at NFWI, Membership and Engagement Team, 104 New Kings Road, London, SW6 4LY.

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