

Guidance on preserving the archives of Scottish Women's Institutes



Introduction

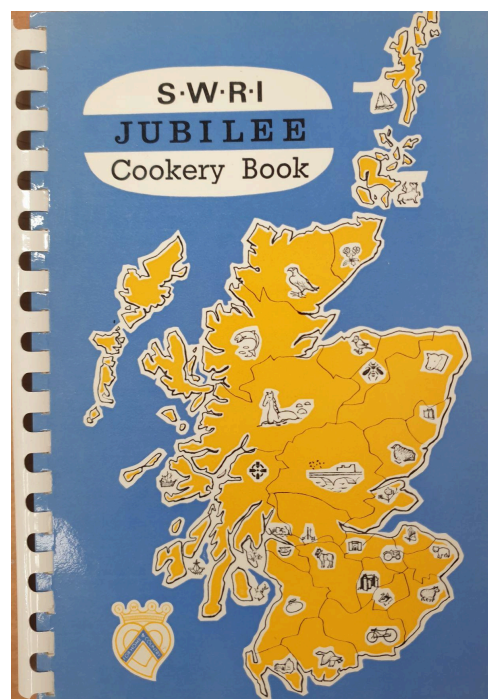
"...it was said that the SWRI was the greatest social development in rural Scotland for 100 years." (Report, Central Council 1963-1966. Archive ref. SWI/1/1/1/1/9)

The heritage of the Scottish Women's Institutes represents a significant aspect of Scottish society. It chronicles the transformative journey of women's rural life from 1917 onwards, highlighting their activities, challenges, and resilience. The collection also showcases the pivotal role of women in governance at local, regional, and national levels.

Furthermore, the collection illustrates the educational activities that have empowered women over the decades, enabling them to participate in society and seek personal growth and empowerment.

Work is underway to further our understanding of the records held within the SWI Head Office archive by cataloguing them in accordance with international archive standards. This will help to improve our knowledge of what records exist, whilst also increasing their accessibility. However, this work does not address the many records that have been created by SWI Institutes and Federations across the country over the last century, that are now being stored in members' spare bedrooms, attics, living rooms, and garages.

An Institute and/or Federation's history and activities can be understood from its historical records and memorabilia, so it is vitally important that each Institute manages their records accordingly so they aren't lost or accidentally disposed of.



This guidance explains what type of records you might find in your Institute, and what to do if caring for these records becomes a concern or issue. It will also provide future options for their preservation.

Why do we manage archives?

Exposure to an organisation's memory can show today's members that your predecessors have already weathered uncertainties, technological and organisational change, growth and recession. Whatever your organisation, whatever your sector, your archives capture today's experience, knowledge and know-how for tomorrow's teams and members.



Many of the records held by Institutes form what is known as a 'community archive' where the subject-matter of the collection is a community of people, and in this case, the records reflect the women of the SWI community in a specific geographical location.

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Why are the historical records of the SWI important?

With over 100 years of history, the journey of the SWI and its members showcases the lives of women and the challenges they have faced. We learn from the past through records and information, which allows the SWI to present to future generations, and draw inspiration and guidance from the experiences of Scottish women. The records of the SWI exemplify the organisational resilience of the organisation across the decades, overcoming challenges such as wars, the digital revolution, and the recent pandemic, and can demonstrate how women have adapted and supported one another. These themes are of huge interest to the academic community, and particularly social historians.

The SWI is now embarking on a significant heritage project which includes cataloguing the archive of Head Office, developing an oral history project, and seeking a long-term home for the SWI's historical collection. As part of this, it is also important that we gather a further understanding of SWI records being held within Institutes, Federations and other archive services, to help fill gaps in the SWI's story.

Institutes play an essential role in the survival of their own archives. If records are not managed carefully, or deposited with a local archive service, they can be at risk from:

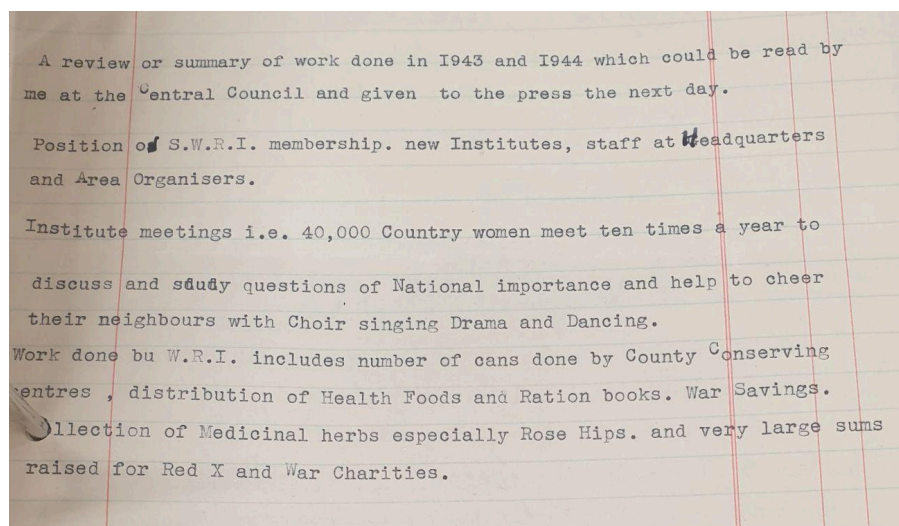
- destruction (accidental or purposeful)
- poor physical storage (leading to damp, mould, and pests)
- loss and splitting of records, which leads to loss of context
- failure to manage any personal data contained within records

Advantages of archives for institutes and its members:

- Institutes can use archive material for marketing purposes, such as on social media
- Provide documentary evidence for incorporation into website and timelines
- Provide inspiration for future activities, conferences, and events
- Increases pride for members into a club's heritage
- Opportunities for sharing unique stories from a club's past

What should we do if we have historical records relating to SWI activities?

Historical records are best held in environmentally stable and secure conditions to reduce physical deterioration, and to prevent loss or damage. Improving packaging and storage is one method of achieving this. For example, reboxing records using acid-free archive boxes, and ensuring items are stored off the ground, and away from any water sources helps to improve preservation conditions.



An Institute may wish to continue to manage their records locally, and retain ownership and responsibility with members. If that is the case, then the Surveying Officer recommends registering the archive in the directory of archives managed by the Community Archives and

Heritage Group. A list of records should also be sent to the Surveying Officer as part of the larger mapping exercise taking place in 2024.

<https://www.communityarchives.org.uk/content/contribute-to-the-site/add-archive-directory>

Alternatively, professional archive facilities can also be provided by your local-authority archive service. Should an Institute no longer be able to store their historical records appropriately, advice on depositing the records can be provided by your local-authority archive team. The UK National Archive's 'Find an Archive' search facility includes archive services across Scotland, including several examples of SWRI records already deposited with local archive services:

<https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/find-an-archive>

- Fort William branch,
<https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/N13698599>
- Rousay branch,
<https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/N13921447>
- Argyll Federation,
<https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/N13643774>

We want to donate our records to our local archive service - what next?

In the first instance, and time allows, prepare a list summarising the records that you have in your care. Secondly, notify your local-authority archive service. They will help you review any records you might have and provide assistance for their transfer, and will be able to tailor advice accordingly from any list you can provide. A list can be simple but should provide clear information on the different types of records, and their location eg. number-up boxes. For example, the following key information should be included:

Description of record	Dates	Extent	Location
<i>Minute books</i>	<i>1932-1967</i>	<i>5 volumes</i>	<i>Box 1</i>
<i>Recipe book</i>	<i>1985</i>	<i>1 booklet</i>	<i>Box 1</i>
<i>Box of photographs</i>	<i>c.1990s</i>	<i>4 bundles</i>	<i>Box 2</i>

Finally, the records list should also be sent to the Surveying Officer as part of a larger mapping exercise to understand where records of the SWRI are located.

If you have a significant amount of records and would like an archive survey or guidance on any records that you hold in the first instance, please contact the Business Archives Surveying Officer for Scotland by email: surveyingofficer@glasgow.ac.uk

Further resources:

Community Archives & Heritage Group (CAHG)

CAHG promotes the work of community archives across the UK & Ireland. Community archives are records that remain in the community, rather than cared for by the local authority archive service, or held privately). Their resources include guidance on digitising, cataloguing, displaying collections online, and caring for objects.

<https://www.communityarchives.org.uk/>

Scottish Council on Archives (SCA)

The SCA provides leadership for the archives and records management sector in Scotland. They host events for the archives community, and deliver advice and research.

<https://www.scottisharchives.org.uk/>

Archives and Records Association

The Archives and Records Association is the leading professional body for the UK and Ireland's record-keeping sector. This includes archives, records management and conservation.

<https://www.archives.org.uk/>

See record-keeping guidance produced by Rachel Wade on the different types of records to look out for in your Institutes and Federations.