

The Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain

# ARCH/TECTURES ARCHIVES

*Annual Symposium 2020*

The 2020 SAHGB Annual Symposium, organised in partnership with the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) and the Architectural Association (AA), will take place at the AA on 22-23 May 2020. We invite responses to the following Call for Participation.

## CALL FOR PARTICIPATION

This Symposium will explore the connections between architecture (encompassing the built environment broadly conceived) and archives (encompassing collections and repositories broadly conceived). On one level the processes of archiving and collecting are part of the fashioning of the image of the architect, from Soane's Museum to the Smithsons' meticulous control over their self-presentation. But collections - drawings, models, photographs, manuscripts - are more fundamental to architectural history and architectural practice. The Institute of British Architects, formed in 1834, had as one of its earliest ambitions, the establishment of a library and museum with 'books, pamphlets, manuscripts, prints, drawings, models, casts of "antique" classical details and specimens of building materials.' ('A Concise History of the RIBA', in Angela Mace, *The Royal Institute of British Architects: A Guide to Its Archive and History* (London, 1986)). These were the records and tools of knowledge and learning, one of the basic predicates of the privilege of professional status. In the age of BIM and Post Occupancy Evaluation can archives continue to serve as immediately relevant repositories of knowledge? Should architectural archives solely serve the history of design?

Architectural history as an academic discipline and as a practice (in heritage, curating etc) also relies heavily on archives and records as much as buildings, themselves often pseudo-archival objects under the rubrics of heritage and preservation. These can define and delimit the narratives and methodologies that architectural historians employ.

Archives and the process of archiving form a primary interface between architectural history and architectural practice. This interface, however, has been little explored by either discipline, despite growing interest in and theorization of the archive in contemporary art and the wider discipline of history, let alone in archival studies itself. Practical questions, such as the implications of born-digital records have predominated in recent discussion; these are urgent and important questions, but there is also a need to bring together the practical with the theoretical and epistemological, as well as to bring to bear historical perspectives on these issues.

There is also a pressing need to reframe the practice of both architecture and architectural history to reflect the experience of minorities and marginalised groups. Archive collections can both help and inhibit queer, post-colonial, disability studies or gendered readings of space and the built environment, as well as such readings of architectural collections themselves. Looking critically at who is, and who is not, represented within archival collections and archiving practice is an important initial step in this process. Furthermore, should the *architectural* archive continue to predominate in histories of the built environment? Can greater critical engagement with the practice of archiving open up possibilities for different, more interconnected histories (e.g. the growing interest in histories of energy and infrastructure in relation to the built environment)?



RIBA   
Architecture.com

The symposium will investigate and explore the current position and status of archives and the practice of archiving in relation to the fields of architectural history, criticism and practice through these and other thematic discussions. Submissions covering innovative practice in the collecting, cataloguing and interpretation of architectural archive collections (including historical examples) as well as papers exploring the relationship between the archive and the epistemological practices of both architects and architectural historians are welcomed. Papers are encouraged in, but by no means limited to, the following areas and on the following questions:

- What constitutes an architectural archive? What alternative models and practices exist? What disciplinary and methodological avenues are opened up by technological change? Does the traditional model of archival appraisal, preservation and description, predicated on the idea of permanent retention of records for a future body of historians, still have relevance in an increasingly imperilled world?
- Who is represented in archival collections and who is not? How do we read lacunae? How can the interrogation of architectural archives help us better contextualise or problematize the histories of collecting institutions?
- Does the architect dominate in collections? What other built environment histories are present in archives? Is the presence of the architect mediated differently in local authority collections as opposed to specialist architectural collections?
- What is the architectural archive's relevance to architectural practice and what should architects be doing with their practice archive material? How are contemporary architectural students and practitioners engaging with archives?
- How does the theory and practice of archiving influence the practice of architectural historians? How does the agency of the collector, or the agency of the collection itself, shape architectural histories?
- The very term 'archive' derives from public records; beyond these, what other infrastructures of information require preserving beyond buildings and their conventional historical representations? What use can be, or indeed will be, made of BIM and POE data, for example?

## PRACTICAL INFORMATION

We welcome perspectives on all periods and places. We also welcome submissions of varying types to encourage academics, practitioners and professionals of all disciplines and backgrounds to participate, e.g.:

- Papers for Presentation  
*20-minute papers, tackling substantial historical perspectives or theoretical themes*
- Provocation Papers for Circulation  
*Short papers (1500-2000 words in length) or statements on archiving practice and its current and future challenges/opportunities*
- Poster Presentations  
*A1 posters highlighting particular collections or case-studies of archival practice/research*
- Small Exhibition Stands  
*For archives and collections wishing to indicate resources, support or opportunities for architectural historical study*

Respondents should indicate what type of paper or submission they are proposing; we are happy to consult with prospective participants on the most appropriate format for their submission. The deadline for submission of proposals is 6pm, **28 February 2020**. Submissions should take the form of an abstract of **maximum 250 words** in length, submitted as a MS Word document to [symposium@sahgb.org.uk](mailto:symposium@sahgb.org.uk).

Proposals will be selected by: Ed Bottoms and Lexi Frost (AA Archive); Amy Finn, Ewan Harrson and India Whiteley (RIBA Collections); Neal Shasore and Ann-Marie Akehurst (SAHGB). Successful participants will be notified by **6 March 2020**.

