

Using Archives

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Definition of archives

Noun

A collection of documents, records or narrative providing information about a person, place, institution, or group of people.

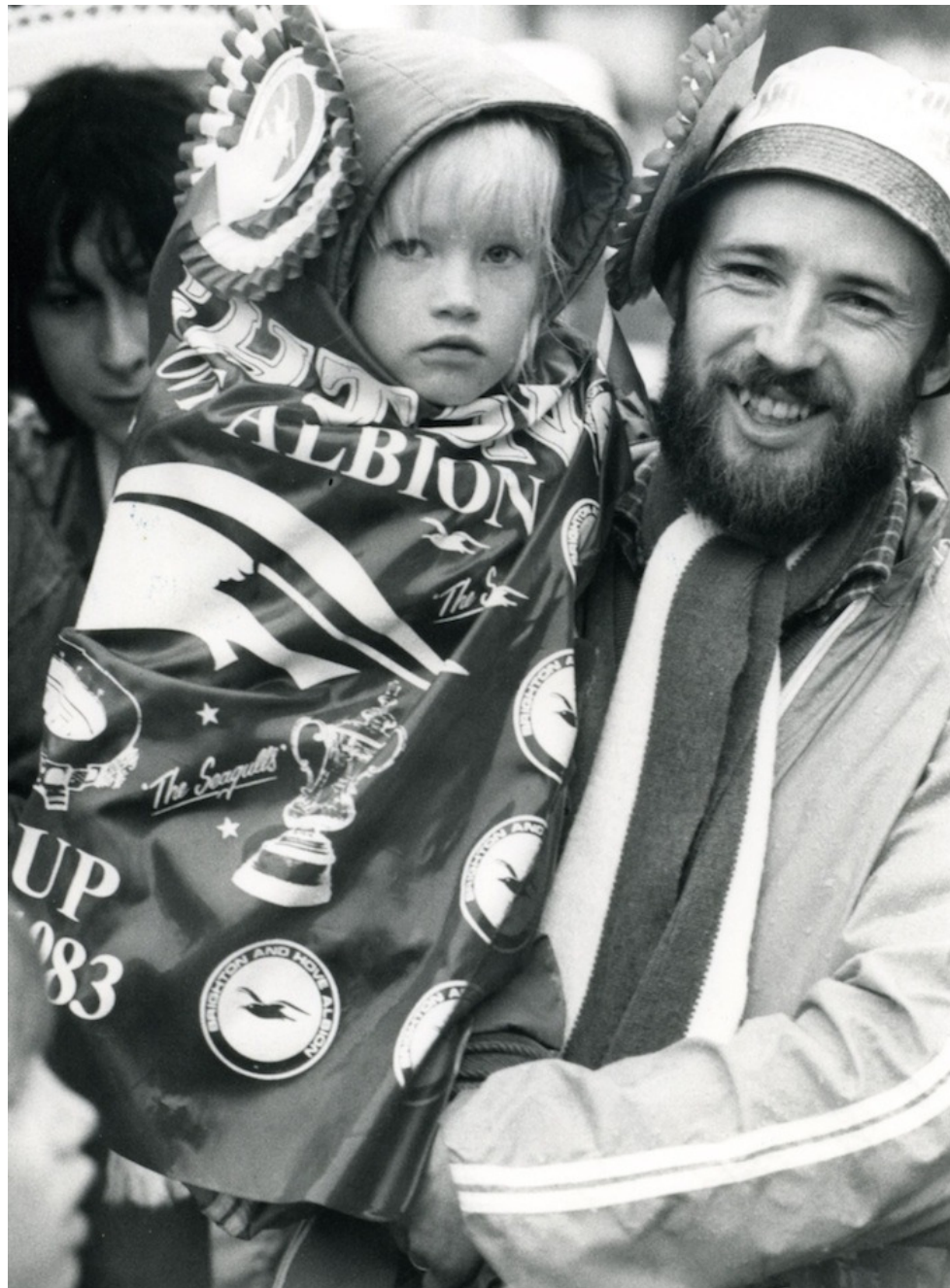
Verb

to place group or store (something) in such a collection

Archives are everywhere: what
archives do you create in your
everyday life?

Have you inherited any
archives?

What archives have you used?



One record – many possibilities

- What immediate ‘affect’ does the record have on the group? What is the emotional response? What associations and connections do they make to the record? Is there resonance? Reminiscence?
- What can be discovered by uncovering the record’s context? Go back to newspaper? Read associated records about the event? All sorts of avenues for social history of the club, its ground, its highs and lows?
- Who are the people in the photograph? Can they be traced? Do they have a story to tell? Basis for oral history.
- Do other people own photos like this? ‘Me and BHAFC’ set up a community photo archive?
- Responding to the groups response to the record.....

Encouraging individual and collective sense making

The ultimate purpose of examining documents is to arrive at an understanding of the meaning and significance of what the document contains

Understanding content, however, is a complicated act and requires the performative creation of meaning in relation to material records: an active, ongoing process of interpretation and subjective analysis.

(taken from article in Archival Science by Duff et al, 2002)

Two possible approaches to sense making:

- To concentrate on the subjective meaning of the record for the individual using it.
‘Death of the author, birth of the reader...’
(Barthes)
- To seek to understand creative intention – explore the record in context
‘Archival provenance....’

Good example of exploring subjective meaning

<http://blog.wellcomelibrary.org/2013/01/guest-post-mindpop/>

<http://mindpop.net>.



Understanding context as a key to sense making

- Who created the record or source that I am using?
- What is the relationship between the creator and others represented?
- When was it created?
- Where was it created?
- Why was it created? Who was the intended audience? What was its intended purpose?
- Who decided to keep the record? Make it public? What was their agenda in doing so?
- What other records is it related to? What is the relationship between this part to the rest of the collection?



CO 1069-242-3

By The National Archives UK ★ Favorite

Asking contextual questions can
completely alter the sense making
process

Sense making and creativity

Using records as a creative springboard.....

Finding archives

Institutions holding archives that you could use:

- Local studies libraries
- Borough archives
- Organisational/Institutional archives
- University Special Collections <http://www.aim25.ac.uk>
<http://archiveshub.ac.uk>
- Museum Archives (e.g. V&A, Tate, Science Museum etc)
- Other specialist repositories e.g. Wellcome Library

Help with finding institutions that hold archives:

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/nra/default.asp>

Summary

- Archives are everywhere we are all involved in creating them as part of everyday life
- All records can open a door to exploration and discovery – doesn't need to be arduous – just one record will do sometimes!
- Using archives involves a process of sense making. You can take a variety of approaches to this. Focus on the subjective or seek to reveal and explore context of creation.
- Engaging with archives and the process of sense making can lead to a raft of creative activities.