



GUIDELINES for AA in Great Britain

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ARCHIVES

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Alcoholics Anonymous Guidelines are compiled from the shared experience of AA members in various service areas. They also reflect guidance given through the Twelve Traditions and the General Service Conference. In keeping with our tradition of autonomy, except in matters affecting other groups or AA as a whole, most decisions are made by the group conscience of the members involved. The purpose of these Guidelines is to assist in reaching an informed group conscience.

PURPOSE

Like any other AA service, the primary purpose of those involved in archival work is to carry the message of Alcoholics Anonymous. Archives service work is more than mere custodial activity; it is the means by which we collect, preserve and share the rich and meaningful heritage of our Fellowship. It is by the collection and sharing of these important historical elements that our collective gratitude for Alcoholics Anonymous is deepened.

AA members have responsibility to gather and take good care of the Fellowship's historical documents and memorabilia. Correspondence, records, photographs, newspaper and magazine articles from the past need to be collected, preserved and made available for the guidance and research of AA members and others (researchers, historians and scholars from various disciplines) – for now and for the generations to come.

POLICY STATEMENT

In 1995 the General Service Board adopted a policy statement, subsequently ratified by Conference, which reads:

“Where any civilisation, or society declines, one condition is present, they forgot where they came from.”

These words represent one good reason why the General Service Board (and Conference) re-affirms its commitment and support for archival activity as a vital and integral part of the healthy life and growth of the Fellowship in this country. Just as each of us feels that it is essential to recall and appreciate where we came from, and how we got here, so it is with the Fellowship as a whole. The General Service Board recognises the urgent need for accurate records to be rescued, retained, collated and used in a manner which will serve to dispel some myths which swirl distortingly around our past, thus allowing us to obtain a truer perspective and reveal to us our real heritage, so that our future may be ensured. Archive activity may be regarded in the same light as the myriad (but minimal) support and services which we provide, in order that we may fulfil our primary purpose to the best of our ability. This is a responsibility and a debt, no less, which we owe to ourselves and to others; it is as richly endowed with the simple spiritual principles of humility, sacrifice and prudence as the rest of our work. It is also an act of practical simplicity and efficient business practice. Sound and prudent performance cannot be achieved on a basis of chaotic business records or the absence of a data base. Planned and co-ordinated records are an essential tool to efficient administration and the basis of any history to come.

This combination of practical and spiritual simplicity can now be cemented by the

continuity and commitment of its trusted servants, the flexibility of its form and the support of the General Service Board.

The Archives of Alcoholics Anonymous are the repository of personal collections, manuscripts, publications, photographs and memorabilia related to the origin and the development of the AA Fellowship.

Consistent with AA's primary purpose of maintaining our sobriety and helping other alcoholics achieve recovery, the Archives of Alcoholics Anonymous will:

- Receive, classify and index all relevant material, such as administrative files and records, correspondence, and literary and artefactual works considered to have historical import to Alcoholics Anonymous.
- Hold and preserve such material.
- Provide access as determined by the Fellowship Archivist in consultation with the Trustees' Archives Sub-Committee, to members of Alcoholics Anonymous and to those of the public who may have a valid need to review such material; access to be provided only during business hours and with a mindful view toward the anonymity of our members.

GETTING STARTED

One of the best ways to get started in archival service work is to obtain a copy of the Archives Service literature available from GSO. This Literature contains helpful information gathered from shared experience over many years.

THE ROLE OF THE ARCHIVES SUB-COMMITTEE

The Archives Sub-Committee was set up in 1991 by the General Service Board. It recommends policy, projects, budgets and

procedures to the General Service Board. It advises the Fellowship on the storage, conservation and preservation of archival material deposited in trust.

Members of the Sub-Committee are appointed by the General Service Board as required. The Fellowship Archivist and the Board Trustee are integral members of this committee.

One of the most important functions of the Archives Sub-Committee is to develop and maintain a network of interest within the Fellowship at all levels. Conference has recommended the appointment of Archivists within our service structure.

THE ROLE OF THE ARCHIVIST

Archivists are:

- a) an informal network of enthusiasts who share the same aim of preserving the Fellowship's past and ensuring that fact prevails over fiction or myth. This network exists outside the formal service structure of the Fellowship but runs parallel to it.

Archivists are not:

- a) officers in the Fellowship's structural sense, rather willing enthusiasts with a life-long desire to work in the name of, and be accountable to, their Region or Intergroup.
- b) voting members of their respective assemblies and, as such, are simply observers with no voting rights.
- c) subject to the principles of rotation, since continuity at all levels has been shown, through experience, to be a vital aspect of archival work.

The Archivist is the person responsible for the collection, its documents and artefactual

items. He or she takes care of, and maintains, the physical integrity of the collection and is instrumental in its further development. The Archivist is also responsible for ensuring the protection of the anonymity of its members and the confidentiality of the AA records.

The function of the Archivist can be considered therefore to be two fold: primarily, a custodial responsibility for assuring the physical integrity of the collection and its availability to persons with a valid reason for study; and also the parallel and critical role of data gatherer. It is in this latter capacity that service can be rendered to Bill W's urging that archives are needed "so that myth doesn't prevail over fact." In a real sense then, AA Archivists are "keepers of the past."

THE ROLE OF THE NETWORK

The function of the informal network of Archivists is to further or facilitate the identification, recording and securing of archival material, as well as stimulating interest in archival activity by carrying the message of "Don't throw me away, I belong to AA."

Experience shows that this can be furthered by promoting workshops based on such archival topics as:

- Anonymity
- Ownership of Materials
- Storage and Accessibility
- Classification
- Cataloguing
- Conservation
- Confidentiality
- Questions to ask Old Timers.

FINANCING THE ARCHIVES

By necessity storage of archival material in any system GB may operate has to be implemented on a decentralised basis. GSO

has not the space to store all the archival material in the Fellowship, and Regions and Intergroups cannot afford to hire storage facilities that they can easily access in order to work on their collections. If an Archivist or an individual member is able to store material in their home it should be kept as close as possible to the optimum storage conditions. If this poses a problem, please contact your Regional or Fellowship Archivist. An Intergroup or Regional Archivist cannot be expected to store vast amounts of archival material, nor should this factor be a barrier to taking up the post. The important fact here is that talks take place with the Fellowship Archivist as to what arrangements can be made if storage is required.

DEVELOPING A COLLECTION

Books, pamphlets, world directories, local meeting lists, GSO bulletins, Conference reports, international Convention booklets, newsletters, Regional and Intergroup minutes, written histories, photographs and audio tapes all serve as the foundation of a collection. The Archivist might also arrange to audio-tape local old-timers, thus adding historical oral histories to the collection. Local AA historical material, such as letters, bulletins and photographs, need to be sought out and gathered regularly from old-timers, past delegates, various committee members and so on. It is important to note that whenever a donation is made to the archives, it should be recorded and should indicate clearly that the material has been presented to the archives (rather than the Archivist) to avoid any misunderstanding later on regarding ownership of the gift. An example of this would be the signing of our standard form on Copyright for an audio tape.

The Archivist can contact other archivists through the Network. In addition they can participate in and publicise local history gathering efforts, can make presentations and offer table displays at AA events.

ARCHIVAL PROCEDURES

As soon as an item is received in the archives it should be added to the inventory list. Next, the conservation and preservation needs of the collection should be evaluated and followed up on. As a general rule any action on an original document or item that is not reversible, should never be performed. For example, sellotape or lamination ought never be used.

Removal of tape, repair, deacidification and encapsulation are some of the steps necessary to protect the integrity of a document. Sometimes it may be necessary to seek outside professional help through GSO to help ensure the integrity of an item. Once prepared an archival item should then be categorically classified, entered into a retrieval system either manual or computerised, in order to provide readily accessed information to researchers.

CONTROL OVER AND ACCESS TO MATERIAL

The degree of access to archival material is divided into four areas. The main criteria on which the classification largely depends are dependent upon the nature and sensitivity of the material, or the wishes of the donor. Permission to access any material should be made in writing via the General Secretary.

The classifications are:

a) GENERAL

Open to public access.
Photocopying may be allowed.

b) SUPERVISED ACCESS

Permission required from the Archives Sub-Committee.
Under controlled conditions material may be withdrawn in certain circumstances, for a limited period.
Limited photocopying may be permitted.

c) FOR RESEARCH ONLY

Permission required from GSB.
Full rationale for the research is required in writing. Removal of originals from the Archives Collection at GSO is not permitted.

d) CONFIDENTIAL

Access only by agreement of GSB.
Photocopying not permitted.

RESEARCH IN THE ARCHIVES

Researchers working in the archives ought to be informed that they will be expected to adhere strictly to our anonymity Traditions – only first names and last initials of AA members may be used by them. It is recommended that there be no photocopying of private correspondence. This recommendation whilst designed to assure anonymity protection also helps maintain the physical integrity of archival documents. In addition to the preservation of the anonymity of the author of the correspondence, the writer's private opinions and observations, some of which might be highly controversial, must be treated with extreme delicacy. It should be remembered that members share these documents with a trust and expectation that their remarks will be held in confidence. No one has an intrinsic right to view another's private correspondence at will; it is essential that the Archivist's chief concern of assuring the spiritual wholeness of the collection be understood and supported.

REFERENCES

For more detailed discussion of archival matters please read the Archives Service literature available from GSO and liaise with your Intergroup and Regional archivist.