



An introduction to Archives



Archives

AA (GB) Archives Policy Statement

‘Where any civilization, or society, declines one condition is present;
they forget where they came from.’
Carl Sandberg

These words represent one good reason why the GSB and Conference re-affirm their 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 GSB recognises the urgent need for accurate records to be rescued, retained, catalogued, 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.



Archives

Where do we start?

1. Cataloging

2. Storing

3. Repairing

4. Collecting

5. Displaying



1. Cataloging

Creating an inventory

Let's start at the very beginning

The Inventory should show all the items in the Archive and where they are stored. It should also show where the items came from and the category to which they belong

On becoming an Archivist, you may have been handed Archive material and an Inventory of its contents, but you may have to start from scratch.

An inventory, or box-list, is a simple finding aid which provides general information about the contents of a box or container held in an archive collection.

- When you collect material, or a member or Group hands in material for the Archive, list the contents of this particular deposit and give it a name and date of deposit.
- For example:. “Box of papers given by John D 5th February 2014”



Why is an Inventory Important?

An Inventory

- Makes identifying and retrieving archive material more efficient
- Provides opportunity to identify and address any urgent conservation requirements
- Provides opportunity to identify and note issues related to data protection and anonymity
- Keeps track of instances where material goes missing, or is damaged
- An important information resource for the archivist who succeeds you, as well as staff at GSO and the Borthwick
- Provides basis for online catalogue entry if archive material is later incorporated into the AA GB Archive
- Highlights material which can be disposed of, i.e. duplicate or third-party material



Example Inventory

Box number	File/bundle number	Title	Dates	Extent	Scope/Content	Data Protection & Anonymity	Physical Condition
Box 1	Box 1, File 1 (1/1)	Avon North Intergroup minutes	2003 - 2010	2 files	Minutes from Avon North Intergroup meetings. Some paperwork and additional documentation attached.	some records contain full names and addresses of members	Good
Box 1	Box 1, File 2, (1/2)	Avon North Intergroup minutes	2011-2020	3 files	Minutes from Avon North Intergroup meetings. Some paperwork and additional documentation attached.	No issues	Good
Box 2	Box 2, File1, (2/1)	Photographs of Northern National Convention displays	1998	1 file	Photographs of various service displays at Northern National Convention	some AAs pictured in photos	Starting to stick. Need to be repackaged. Handle with care
Box 3	(3/1)	Inscribed Big Book	1953	1 book	1st British edition, first printing of the Big Book. Inscribed by Bill W.	No issues	Damaged book spine. Fragile.



Notes on box-list template

Box Number: Apply a unique identifying number or reference code to the boxes or containers in which the archive material is stored.

File Number: Apply a unique identifying number to the files or bundles of archive material using a soft 2B graphite pencil. Recording archive material at file level rather than describing each individual record or item allows for information to be summarised.

Title: This is a basic title that describes the archive material.

Extent: Provides information on the number or amount of material. Avoid counting individual records or pieces of paper, and stick to how many boxes, files, or objects.

Dates: Include dates of when records or material were created. Avoid marking material as undated, as it should be possible to identify the century at the very least. Here are example date formats: 25 April 2014-30 May 2014, Sep 2013 – Oct 2013, c2013, 21st Century



Notes on box-list template ctd..

Scope/Content: This field provides space to describe the archive material. It should include information about the type of archive material (e.g. correspondence, minutes, photographs) as well as a basic summary of its informational content (e.g. details of correspondents, name and location of intergroup or region). Try to keep this section informative but brief.

Data Protection & Anonymity: Make a note of anything in the archive material which contains personal information about any individuals, or details which may jeopardize the anonymity of AA members. If the material is later deposited at the Borthwick and added to AA GB Archive, an archivist will review the material before providing access. However, all intergroup and region archive officers have a responsibility to adhere to data protection legislation as well as ensuring that the anonymity of members, both living and deceased, is preserved.

Physical condition: If any of your items are fragile or in poor condition you can make a note of it here. This is important when considering storage and conservation solutions. If the material is later deposited with the Borthwick, it means that the conservation team can quickly identify material which requires specialist handling, conservation treatment or packaging.



2. Storing Archive Conservation

Being aware of some basic storage and conservation techniques is valuable for ensuring the long term preservation of the archive material in your care:

- Dust, dirt, mildew, and mould are common causes of damage to archives, so always make sure your storage space is clean and dry. Regularly inspect the archive material in your care to ensure it is clean and free from damp or mildew.
- Archive material is best stored in an environment with a stable temperature, ideally between 16°-19°c. As this might be difficult to achieve at home, a temperature of 19°-21°c would be sufficient
- Natural light can cause permanent fading to records as well as increasing the room temperature. If you have no option but to store material near a window, consider using a blackout blind and make sure everything is boxed.
- If possible, store material on a middle shelf in order to avoid any potential damage from flooding or falling at height
- Certain audio-visual formats, particularly VHS and audio cassette tapes, are vulnerable to deterioration. If you're in possession of unique archive material in these formats, please consider depositing to the GSO so that they can be assessed and passed onto to the conservation team at the Borthwick
- Avoid marking archive material with a pen, or any kind of stamp or sticker. If you need to mark archive material for reference or identification purposes it is recommended that you use a soft 2B graphite pencil



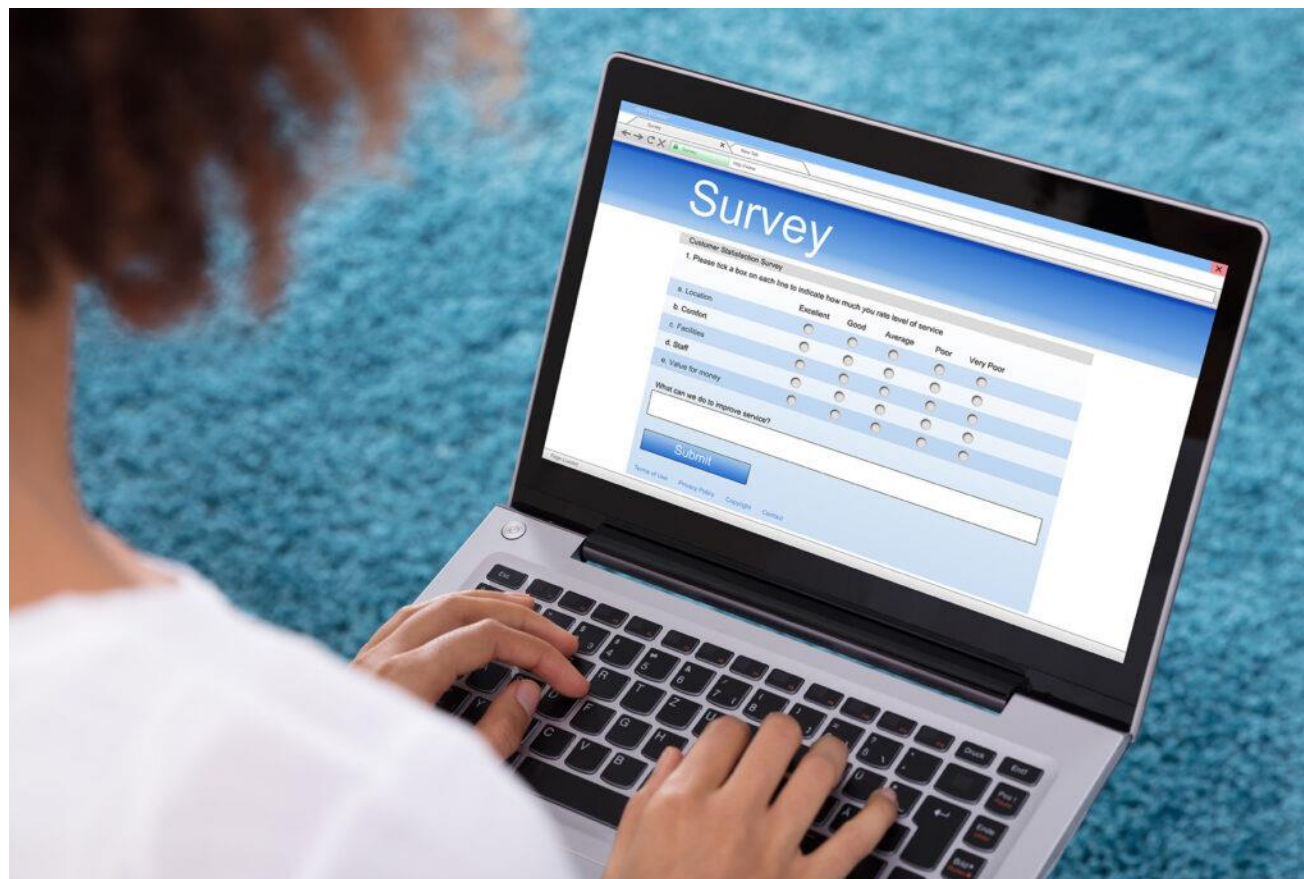
‘Born Digital’ records

Records and documentation created across AA GB’s service structure are increasingly ‘born digital’, i.e. created in digital formats.

This can include any kind of documentation, from minutes to audio recordings.

Like physical archive material, some digital formats are easier to manage and preserve than others. For the purposes of preservation, it can be useful ensuring that born-digital records are kept and deposited in the formats listed on the next slide.

Preferred formats are highlighted, though if you have born digital records in other file formats which you wish to deposit, the Borthwick digital preservation team will be able to migrate the material.



Born Digital Records Preferred formats

Text documents

PDF [.pdf] Preferred format

MS Word Open XML Document (created in MS Office 2007 onwards) [.docx]

ODT: OpenDocument Text Document (created in OpenOffice)

TXT

Images

JPEG or JPEG 2000 Preferred format

TIFF

Audio recordings

MP3 or MP Preferred format

AIFF (PCM) [.aif, .aiff]

WAV (PCM) [.wav]



Data Protection

Any individuals or organisations which create and manage records containing personal data are subject to the UK Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA 2018) or the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). Personal data is defined as information relating to individuals who can be identified or who are identifiable directly from the question; or who can be indirectly identified from that information in combination with other contextual information. Records and documentation which contain personal data are created across the service structure of Alcoholics Anonymous Great Britain, from GSB to group level, and any individuals in possession of such records have a responsibility to comply with GDPR or DPA 2018.

As an archivist, you will inevitably be involved in controlling data related to your respective intergroup and/or region and are therefore considered a data controller under data protection laws. Controlling data covers a range of activities, including collection, organisation, storage, retrieval, consultation, and use. You have a responsibility to ensure that all archive material containing personal data is managed in a secure manner. If you are in possession of records containing personal data which do not serve the functioning of your intergroup and/or region or have relevant archival value, then consider disposing of them in a manner in which the personal data contained within them cannot be retrieved (e.g. shredding paper records, wiping digital ones)



Data Protection ctd...



The best way to ensure that archive material containing personal data is managed in accordance with data protection rules is to ensure that it is deposited with GSO on a regular basis. When the material is transferred, GSO will assume the role of data controller and the responsibility for ensuring all personal data is managed in compliance with the Data Protection Act 2018.

If you transfer records containing personal data to GSO, but decide to keep copies, you will still be considered a data controller. It is only when the personal data is completely out of your possession, and safely in the custody of GSO will the responsibility for data protection compliance be fully transferred.

3. Repairing

Be careful, always remembering; do not do what you cannot undo.

- When a document has been put into an old PolyPocket that has bled, take a photo or photocopy before trying to extract it as sometimes the text gets lost
- Avoid DIY Mending: Never use adhesive tapes, glue sticks, or laminating on valuable items as they damage documents permanently.
- Cleaning: use soft brushes
- If anything irreplaceable is damaged, please do not attempt to repair it, but get in touch with Emma Wilson at GSO emma.wilson@gsogb.org.uk for guidance



4. Collecting

Don't throw me away! I belong to AA

Let people know that you are the archivist, and you are interested in collecting their memorabilia and memories

- Ask Oldtimers for their stories. Record them if possible. A list of questions is attached.
- Ask ALL members of your Group, Intergroup or Region to contribute to help.
- Does anyone have anything that is important to the growth of AA in your area.
- Take a simple Group History form to meetings with an “Archives Pamphlet”.
- Contact GSO Archives to research your Groups. emma.wilson@gsogb.org.uk at GSO York.
- Remind people to make provision in their Will to leave AA items to the Archives
- Don't forget to make provision in your own Will to leave your Archive collection to AA



5. Displaying

The main purpose of an archival display is to raise the awareness of the history of AA, thereby helping to carry the message of recovery to existing members and the general public.

Archival displays have been held at libraries, museums, hotels, church halls, and many other locations. They have been held at many different events, National Conventions, Mini-conventions and as part of public information events, etc.

The basis of an effective display is a working group, and this organising group conscience would be the final arbiter in all decisions relating to a specific archives display.



Archives display hints and tips

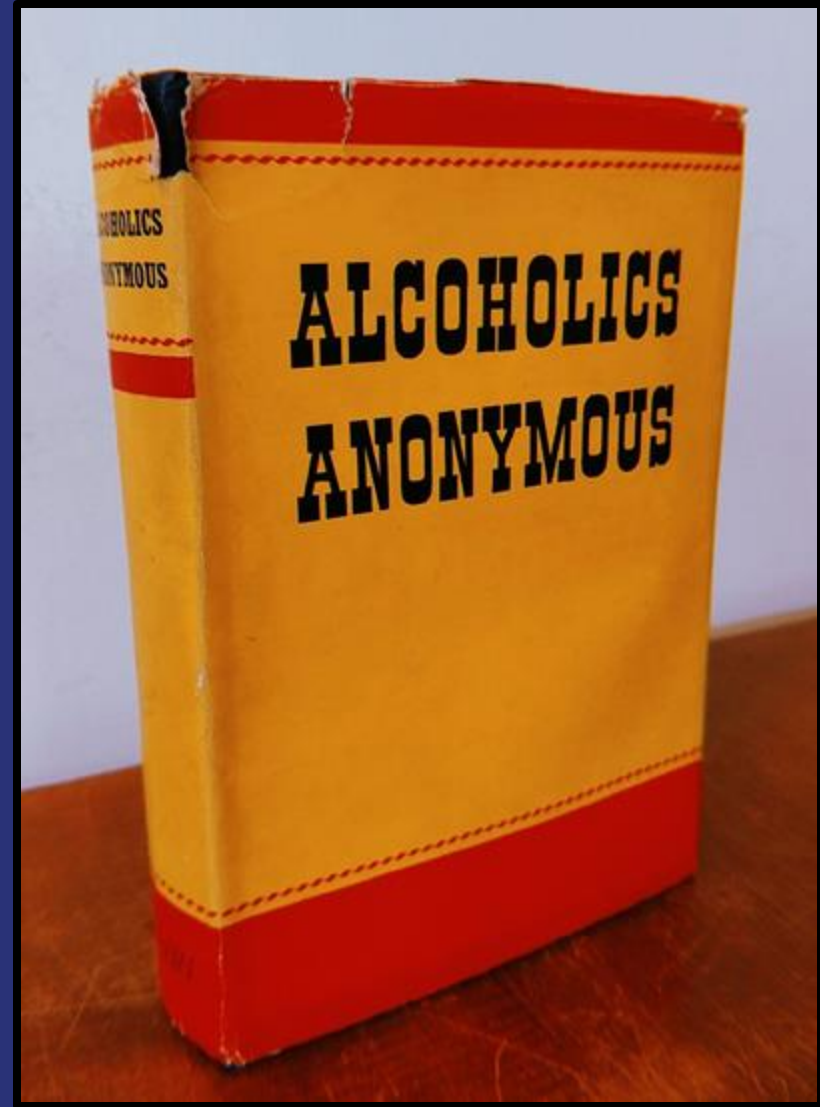
- Protect your display! Put up signs asking saying 'No food or drinks please'
- Chose a prominent place close to or in the main body of people.
- Advertise that there will be an Archives display on the 'event flyer'.
- Make secure any original material and supervise people looking at it.
- Photocopy or laminate material which is replaceable or durable as this can encourage a 'hands on' approach.
- Check your display to protect confidentiality & anonymity.
- Photos of members should not be displayed apart from our founders and people from the attached list
- Have hand-outs of significant documents to stimulate interest.
- Have forms available to record any donation of materials.
- Focus on local Intergroup/Region in which display staged.
- Explanations where necessary, should be brief and easy on the eye.

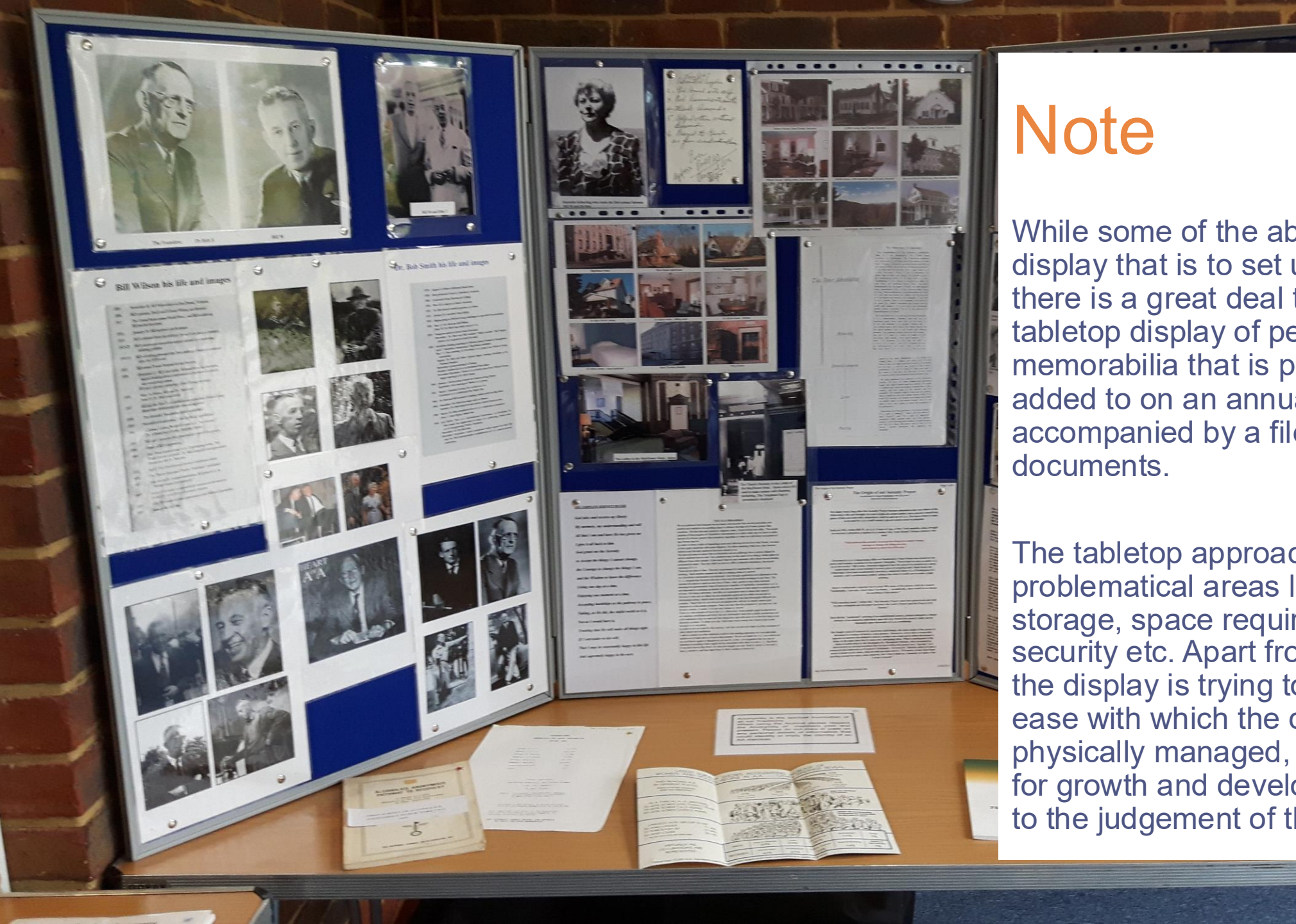




Displays ctd...

- Give documents and displays titles in large type which enables people to scan.
- Display material should be well lit.
- A video may form a small display in itself. Set this up with headphones and a chair so people can hear what is being said
- A core of maybe two people should be committed solely to the display with other help as and when.
- All equipment should be insured, in addition to 3rd party cover.
- Have a pen and paper at hand to follow up any enquiries or offers.





Note

While some of the above refer to a display that is to set up then dismantled, there is a great deal to be said for a tabletop display of perhaps photos / memorabilia that is pre-prepared and is added to on an annual basis. This may be accompanied by a file of copied documents.

The tabletop approach can cut out many problematical areas like transport, storage, space required for display, security etc. Apart from the message that the display is trying to put across, the ease with which the display can be physically managed, whilst still allowing for growth and development, must be left to the judgement of the individual/Group.



End of presentation

Barbara M, Archives Sub-committee
March 2026



Interview Questions

Here is a list of questions to help you in conducting your interview.

Allow the interview to take on a life of its own and, most importantly, to have fun! Before you begin taping, explain that our primary interest is in AA's role in the story.

The focus is on our AA History, how we were, what happened, and what we are like now. As always, the emphasis is on sobriety, rather than drinking. Perhaps the member can begin his/her story with his/her initial contact with the programme.

Begin the recording by identifying yourself, and providing the date of the recording. Then introduce the member.

How and when did you get started in AA? When and where did you sober up? Where did you go to your first meeting? How did you first learn about AA?

What type of sponsorship did you have?

How many groups or meetings were in existence?

Can you recall the formats used at some of these early meetings? How were they run?



Interview Questions 2

When was AA started in your town or area? How often were meetings held? Who were some of the people playing important roles in the formation of new groups? What else do you know about the growth of AA during that time?

What contributions did you, yourself, make to the growth of the Fellowship? (Don't be unnecessarily modest!)

We say sometimes that all that's needed to form an AA meeting is two drunks, a resentment and a coffeepot. Can you talk at all about what led to new groups being formed in your area?

What individuals were especially prominent in your sobriety?

How were new members contacted? Can you give some examples of Twelfth Step work? Are there any Twelfth Step anecdotes that stick out in your mind that you'd care to share?

Today, AA is well known to, and supported by, police officers, judges and corrections officials.

What kind of relationship did AA in your area have with local authorities? How has that changed since you sobered up?

Did you seek the cooperation of other local community or professional agencies?



Photos of people in Archive Displays

To protect people's anonymity, it is recommended only to display photos of the following people:

1. William Griffith "Bill" Wilson (1895 – 1971) and Edwin Throckmorton "Ebby" Thacher (1896 – 1966) who introduced Bill to the Oxford Group and the principles that would develop into the principles of AA
2. Dr William Silkworth . M.D. (1874 - 1951) - Towns Hospital, Physician-In-Chief. Bill W. was his patient. He was one of A.A.s earliest supporters in the medical profession.
3. Reverend Walter F. Tunks– Bill W selected the name of Reverend Walter F. Tunks from the church directory in the lobby of the Mayflower hotel, he invested a nickel to make one of the most important calls in AA history
4. Rev.-Dr. Samuel M. Shoemaker. Jr.. (1893 - 1963) - Rector, Calvary Episcopal Church, N.Y.C. (1925-1951). He was the leader of the Oxford Group Movement in the United States (1921-1938). His teachings inspired Bill W. and the early A.A. members.
5. Dr Robert "Bob" Holbrook Smith (1879 – 1950), was an American physician and surgeon who cofounded Alcoholics Anonymous with Bill Wilson



Photos of people in Archive Displays 2

6. Sister Mary Ignatia (1889 - 1966) - Of the Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine. Dr. Bob's partner in treating alcoholics at St. Thomas Hospital, Akron, from 1939-1952.
7. Dr. John Norris (1903 - 1989) - Also known as Dr. Jack, Dr. Norris served A.A. as a non-alcoholic Trustee, Chairman of the General Service Board and Trustee Emeritus.
8. Bernard Smith (1902 - 1970) - Bernard Smith was a New York lawyer who served A.A. as a non-alcoholic Trustee from 1944 to 1956. He was also instrumental in the formation of the General Service Conference structure.
9. Milton Maxwell (1907 - 1988) - Milton Maxwell was a sociologist who served A.A. as a non-alcoholic Trustee from 1971 to 1982. He also served as Chairman of the General Service Board from 1978 to 1982.
10. Dr Bob Smith and Bill Wilson
11. Dr Henrietta McBrayer Buckler Seiberling (1888 – 1979) at whose house Bill W first met Dr Bob.



Photos of people in Archive Displays 3

12. Bill W. (1895 - 1971) - Bill with a coffee pot at his home, Stepping Stones, in Bedford Hills, New York, where he lived with his wife Lois for more than thirty years.

Bill W. (1895 - 1971) - In this photograph Bill is sitting at his desk in his Bedford Hills, New York studio, which he referred to as Wits End;

13. Bill and Lois Wilson (1891 – 1988) at Stepping Stones

14. Dr. Harry Tiebout (1896 - 1966) - Dr. Tiebout was a renowned psychiatrist who served A.A. as a non-alcoholic Trustee from 1957 to 1966.

15. Grace Perkins Oursler (1900 – 1955) In 1947 Grace O and her husband Fulton Oursler visited England on 'The Queens'. Grace and her husband met Canadian Bob when they arrived in London, and they arranged to have the first AA meeting in the UK at their hotel, The Dorchester, the following Monday evening 31 March 1947.

16. Sir Philip Dundas (1899 – 1952) traveled to America to find a cure for his alcoholism and upon his return, Dundas reached out to the First London Group in March 1948 and arranged a visit. In August that year, the first recorded AA meeting in Scotland took place in Perth.



Photos of people in Archive Displays 3

17. A photo of Bill W inscribed to Philip Dundas

18. Margaret Marty Mann (1904 – 1980) was an American writer and the first woman to achieve long-term sobriety in AA. She organized the National Committee for Education on Alcoholism (NCEA) in 1944. She traveled across the U.S. educating medical professionals, legislators, businessmen, and the public on the importance of treatment and education of the fatal disease of alcoholism

19. Bill Dotson (1890 - 1954) , the "Man on the Bed," was AA number 3. At his death, he had not had a drink in more than nineteen years.



Archive Photos



1. Bill W & Ebby T



2. Dr William Silkworth



3. Reverend Walter F. Tunks



Archive Photos 2



4. Rev.-dr. Samuel M. Shoemaker



5. Dr Bob



6. Sister Mary Ignatia



Archive Photos 3



7. Dr. John (Jack) L. Norris



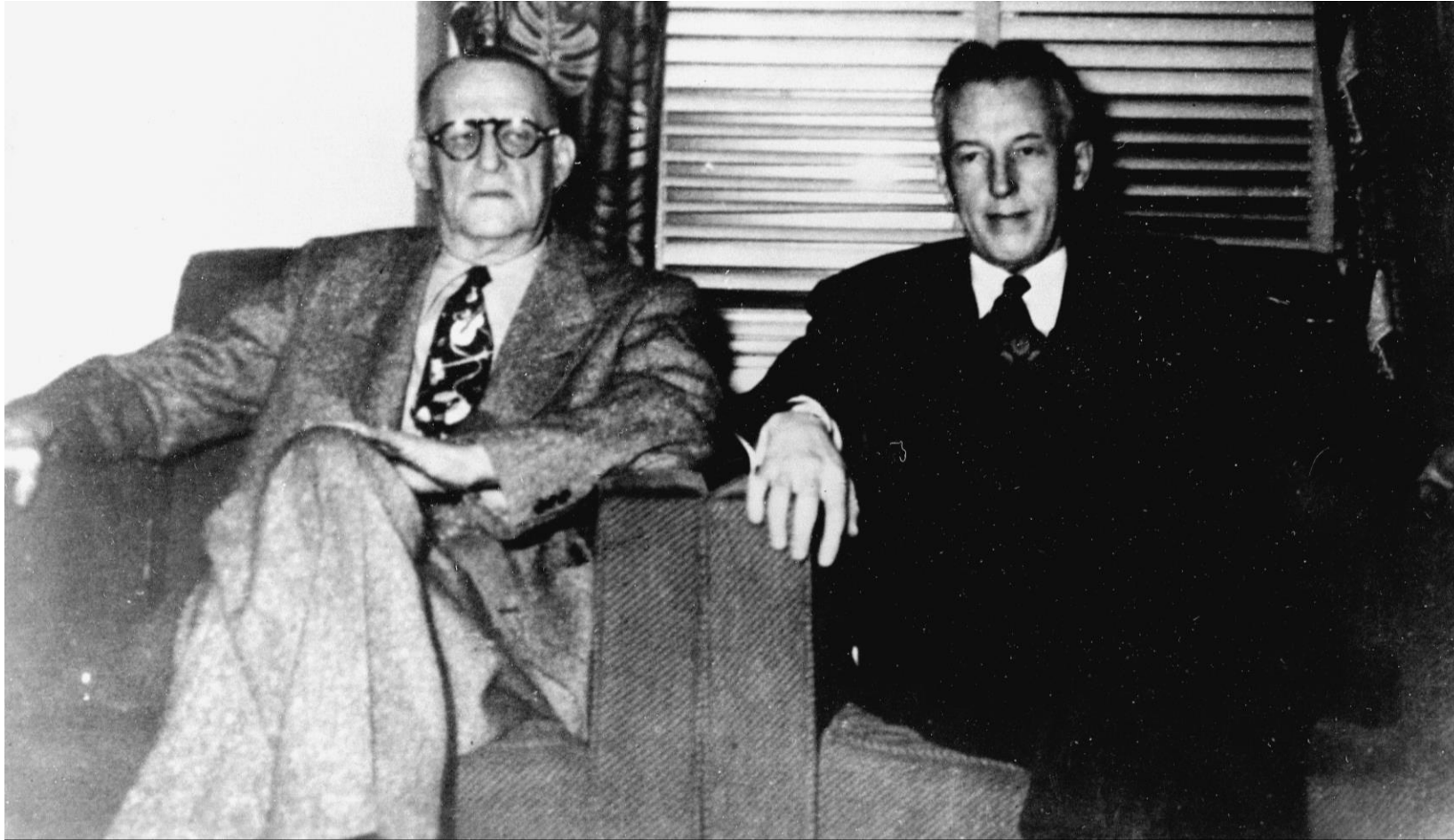
8. Bernard Smith



9. Milton A. Maxwell



Archive Photos 4



10. Dr Bob S & Bill W



11. Henrietta Buckler Seiberling



Archive Photos 5



12. Bill W in Stepping Stones in his kitchen, and his office



Archive Photos 6



13. Bill and Lois Wilson



14. Dr. Harry Tiebout



15. Grace Perkins Oursler



Archive Photos 7



15. Grace Oursler



16. Sir Philip Dundas



17 A photo pf Bill W inscribed to Philip D



Archive Photos 8



18 Marty Mann



19. Bill Dotson

