

Research Project Statement

The project evaluates the impact of archives and their accessibility for the local community and would compare two archive collections; The Cambridge Arts Theatre and National Railway Museum archives. Research would focus on the importance of the digitalization of archival material and assess the involvement of the local community in archival development and expansion. This would be done by placing an emphasis on the oral histories of each collection, with additional reference being made to the physical collections.

Through this research, an assessment of the impact of smaller archives on the local community will be made and, with a focus on digitalization, a greater understanding of the move towards the digital storage of historical sources. By the end of the project, a comparison of the use of technology by two local archives and an evaluation of their community impact will be presented.

I selected this research topic due to my aspirations to work with archives, and thus any exposure to archival institutions is of immense value. The move to an online world due to the COVID-19 pandemic also caused a growth of interest in the digitalization of archives, especially with my experience of digitally cataloguing a range of archives throughout the summer of 2020. In an ever-increasing technological world, it is important to modernize how we access the past, and particularly with the prospect of remote learning, online access to materials is of increasing significance.

To complete this research, I propose to collaborate with the contacts I have made at the Cambridge Arts Theatre, as well as developing new contacts with the National Railway Museum, to compare the two archives and their online accessibility. These institutions were chosen due to the similarities and differences they possess, providing solid foundations for an evaluation and comparison.

Similarities that would be explored further include the recording of oral histories from members of the local community, and their subsequent upload to the respective websites. The key difference that would initially be explored is the digitalization of archives at the National Railway Museum, which resulted in an online catalogue with public access. Whilst the Cambridge Arts Theatre uses their website for the oral histories, there is not an online catalogue at present, and the reasoning and limitations behind this incite further discussion. Further avenues of research could include the origins and funding of each archive, and how these two factors are connected to digitalization.

This project links to the York research theme of culture and communication, as it evaluates the diverse ways knowledge and emotion have been expressed in artefacts, as well as in oral histories. The research will also explore how these materials influence the respective localities view of their own history, linking more specifically to the research topic of the mental and the material.