

# **Society for the Study of Labour History**

## **Archives & Resources Committee**

### **Keeping Your Records**

#### **A Guide to the Location and Preservation of Archives**

Preserving written records from all parts of the labour movement is important. Efficient management of the records you create, whether at branch level or in a national institution, enhances the performance of that organisation. If nothing else, it makes it easier to find that vital file when you most need it. And when that file is no longer needed, it may provide a unique insight into how the labour movement operated, which will help historians and other researchers in generations to come to understand why the movement, locally or nationally, developed as it did. As secretaries and other officials within the labour movement we have a responsibility to ensure that our papers are kept safe and handed over to an archive when we have finished with them.

This pamphlet has been prepared by the Archives and Resources Committee of the Society for the Study of Labour History. The Committee consists of representatives from the TUC, The Modern Records Centre, The Labour History Archive and Study Centre, the People's History Museum (formerly National Museum of Labour History), Co-operative College, Labour Heritage, and professional archivists.

It is intended as a brief, practical guide for Labour Party branches, co-operative societies and trade unions on preserving their historical records.

#### **Where records should be kept**

There is no single place where records of the labour movement, whether trade unions, trades councils, Labour Party branches, and other labour organisations are kept. This means that it can be difficult to find where is the best place to keep your records and to get advice on what to keep.

As a general rule, local and regional material, whether it be from an entirely local organisation (eg a campaign to keep a hospital open) or a local branch of a national organisation should be deposited with the local county or city record office or with the archives department of a local library. Some unions or other bodies may want to keep all records centrally. If you are not sure contact your national headquarters.

In deciding where to deposit national records, existing centres of specialisation should be consulted, such as the British Library of Political and Economic Science at the LSE, the Modern Records Centre at the University of Warwick (which holds one of the largest collections of trade union records in the country), and the Labour History Archive and Study Centre, Manchester. In Scotland you may wish to talk to

the National Archives of Scotland or National Library of Scotland. In Wales you may wish to contact the National Library of Wales. For co-operative movement records the National Co-operative Archive in Manchester should be approached. Addresses of these institutions are given at the end of this pamphlet.

Papers of individuals of local significance should normally be kept locally. If however they are of national importance they should be deposited with an appropriate national record centre. In these cases it is best to seek the advice of an archivist or historian.

It should be stressed that archivists nationally or locally will normally be ready to give advice without necessarily committing the individual to placing records in the archive first approached. If you are in doubt about a suitable location for your records, consult the organisations listed below.

Ownership of the records need not be given up. The normal arrangement is to loan records to an archive on a long-term basis. Depositors of records should make an agreement with the record office or library about who has access to the records and when they are made available to researchers. You may wish, for example, to only allow access to those records of your local Labour Party which are more than ten years old. Advice should be sought from the national organisation.

The Labour Party advises local parties to close records to public access for ten years after the file or document has been finished with.

## **What should you keep?**

The following advice is for secretaries and other people interested in looking after the records of local branches of trade unions, Labour Parties and co-operative societies, while they are still being used. You will not wish to keep every piece of paper created. There are some things which should be kept in a safe place which are important not just at present but also for future generations of researchers.

Certain types of records should be kept. They include:

- Minutes (ideally they should include a signed set, with up to three duplicate sets if available). Minutes of committees, sub-committees and working parties should also be kept.
- Reports or other documentation accompanying or necessary for understanding the minutes (such as reports of the premises committee or copies of resolutions).
- Audited balance sheets, including printed accounts. .
- Income and expenditure analysis records.
- Correspondence or subject files dealing with major topics, such as policy, relations with other bodies, controversial matters, and selections of candidates in the case of Constituency Labour Parties.
- Publications of the organisation itself, including printed reports, periodicals, rules, leaflets and news sheets, election literature, and price lists.
- Ephemeral or scarce publications of other bodies collected by the depositing organisation (but not circulated material from such organisations as the Labour

Party, the TUC, and the Co-operative Union after 1945, which may be assumed to be available elsewhere).

- Separate sub-groups, such as the papers of former members, officials, affiliated organisations and other bodies now defunct.
- Photographs.
- Banners, badges and other mementos (for display either in local museums or those museums with Labour and Co-operative history collections). The National Museum of Labour History will give specialist advice about the preservation of these artefacts. There is also a trade union banner collection based at the Museum with a conservation workshop.

Certain records need not normally be kept:

- Bulky records of minor financial transactions, such as postage and petty cash books, unless they contain important evidence, for example, on the early contacts or propaganda methods of an organisation. (Most minor financial records need only be kept for three years and then destroyed).
- Routine correspondence, for example, dealing with the administration of membership or arrangements made for routine meetings, although it may be desirable to preserve samples to show a particular activity.

Please remember however that if there are few early records of any organisation you may wish to keep them, even if they appear to be trivial.

In the case of individuals there is normally less need or opportunity to destroy trivia, duplicates etc. Sets of minutes of institutions may be thrown out, if official runs of these are already preserved and provided there are no significant personal annotations. Attempts should be made to collect biographical information on the individuals concerned. To this end personal diaries are of particular value.

**If you are unsure about what to keep and what to throw out seek advice from an archivist at the local record office or library or from the organisations listed below.**

## **Keeping records safe**

There are a number of ways in which you can help yourself and posterity by consciously creating a filing and collecting system. Suggestions are given below:

- **Correspondence:** throw out unimportant correspondence when it is over a year old. Only letters covering policy, organisation, or containing particularly interesting material should be kept.
- **Minute books:** write the name of the organisation at the heading of each meeting's minutes, and ensure that all minutes are signed and dated, as this will demonstrate continuity to future researchers. Encourage minute secretaries to make minutes more informative, naming participants, and outlining arrangements and ideas proposed.
- **Printed material:** make sure you keep in a safe place a sample copy of every leaflet, poster or circular.
- **Photographs:** If any photographs come into your possession, ensure that the

subject is identified and it is dated on the back.

For institutions without permanent office accommodation it is vital to ensure that minute books, correspondence, etc. are handed over by all officers to their successors. It is also a good idea to make regular deposits of records no longer used to the local record office or library, perhaps every five years. A list of those records so deposited should be kept.

## Keeping records in good condition

Your records should be kept where they are not affected by **damp, flooding, excessive heat, rodents and insects, pollution, and unauthorised access**. Garages, attics and cellars are not suitable places for storing papers, even for a short period. Piles of loose, unboxed, papers will easily get lost or destroyed as well as presenting an extra fire risk.

If you come across important papers in a poor condition do not attempt to repair them yourself, but seek advice from your local record office or library. Please do not use adhesive tape (ie Sellotape) on your records as this will ultimately severely damage them.

## Useful addresses

**Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts, National Register of Archives**, The National Archives, Kew, Richmond, Surrey, TW9 4DU (email [enquiry@nationalarchives.gov.uk](mailto:enquiry@nationalarchives.gov.uk), URL <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>, Tel. 020 8876 3444) (they should be able to tell you where previous records of any organisation or individual are deposited)

**London School of Economics**, 10 Portugal Street, London WC2A 2HD (email [Document@lse.ac.uk](mailto:Document@lse.ac.uk), URL <http://www.lse.ac.uk/library/archive/>, Tel. 020 7955 7223) (they hold large collections of private papers of prominent individuals in the labour movement and records of pressure groups)

**National Co-operative Archive**, Co-operative College, Holyoake House, Hanover Street, Manchester M60 0AS (email [archive@co-op.ac.uk](mailto:archive@co-op.ac.uk), URL <http://archive.co-op.ac.uk/>, Tel. 0161-246 2925) (for advice on the deposit of records of co-operative societies)

**Labour Heritage**, 18 Ridge Road, Mitcham, Surrey, CR4 2ET (Tel. 020 9640 1814) (for informal advice on preserving records of local Labour Parties)

**Labour History Archive and Study Centre**, 103 Princess Street, Manchester M1 6DD (email [lhasc@fs1.li.man.ac.uk](mailto:lhasc@fs1.li.man.ac.uk), URL <http://www.peopleshistorymuseum.org.uk>, Tel. 0161-228 7212) (the LHASC cares for the Labour Party and Communist Party of Great Britain Archives)

**Modern Records Centre**, University of Warwick Library, Coventry CV4 7AL (email [archives@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:archives@warwick.ac.uk), URL <http://modernrecords.warwick.ac.uk>, Tel. 024 76 524219) (the major centre for the deposit of records of trade unions)

**National Library of Scotland**, Department of Manuscripts, George IV Bridge, Edinburgh EH1 1EW (email [enquiries@nls.uk](mailto:enquiries@nls.uk), URL <http://www.nls.uk/>, Tel. 0131-226 4531)

**National Library of Wales**, Department of Manuscripts and Records, Aberystwyth SY23 3BU (email [ymh.lc@llgc.org.uk](mailto:ymh.lc@llgc.org.uk), URL <http://www.llgc.org.uk>, Tel. 01970 632800)

**People's History Museum (formerly the National Museum of Labour History)**, 103 Princess Street, Manchester, M1 6DD.  
Tel. 0161 228 7212 URL: <http://www.peopleshistorymuseum.org.uk/>  
Email: [admin@peopleshistorymuseum.org.uk](mailto:admin@peopleshistorymuseum.org.uk)

**Public Record Office of Northern Ireland**, 66 Balmoral Avenue, Belfast BT9 6NY (email [proni@dcalni.gov.uk](mailto:proni@dcalni.gov.uk), URL <http://proni.nics.gov.uk/>, Tel. 028 9025 5905) (for all records of the labour movement in Northern Ireland)

**Scottish Record Office**, HM General Register House, Princes Street, Edinburgh EH1 3YY (Email [enquiries@nas.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@nas.gov.uk), URL <http://www.nas.gov.uk>, Tel. 0131 535 1314)

**London Metropolitan University: Trades Union Congress Library Collections**  
The Learning Centre 236-250 Holloway Road, London, N7 6PP (email [tuclib@londonmet.ac.uk](mailto:tuclib@londonmet.ac.uk), URL [www.londonmet.ac.uk/libraries/tuc](http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/libraries/tuc) Tel. 020 7133 2260)