

British Archive for Contemporary Writing (BACW) Collection Development Policy (CDP)

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Context

The idea of a forward-looking archive may seem a paradoxical one. But it describes something essential to the spirit in which the British Archive for Contemporary Writing was founded and has developed since its inception in 2015. UEA pioneered the study of Creative Writing as a branch of literary studies in the UK in the belief that reading and writing are intertwined activities. To have an archive where selections from the work of living writers may – under the Storehouse Model – come and go over time is to build, in the words of the cultural theorist Stuart Hall, a 'living archive [...] an on-going, never-completed project', like the ever-shifting mass of writing we select from and call 'literature'. By holding temporary loans and permanent gifts in the same space, BACW aims to respond to the changing needs of an academic community of researchers, teachers and students, and also to serve a wider public body of readers, present and future, to whom the existence and recognition of a wide range of writers and their works is of enduring value and importance.

Key Collecting Criteria

- UEA takes a proactive approach to its collection, approaching writers of interest to our research and teaching using an agreed BACW Governance Group protocol (Annex B) for considering new collections/ approaching donors.
- The protocol includes criteria for assessment to ensure that collections remain relevant to the agreed strategic aims of BACW. These criteria focus on relevance to UEA's current research and teaching activities, regardless of the reputation and publishing record of the writer under consideration, and are normally assessed by the BACW Governance Group.
- In addition to the academic criteria, part of the assessment must also include an estimate of the costs such as the level of cataloguing expertise needed and the likely duration of the project. Any collection being considered must have a sustainable plan for resource and cataloguing for it to be approved by the BACW Executive which has final sign-off on each proposed collection.
- *Purchasing*: The purchase of archives is not part of UEA's collection strategy since it is unable to compete in the international market for this kind of acquisition.

- *Donations:*
 - UEA can only accept donations of material in exceptional circumstances where prior consultation has taken place and where the material fits with the above collecting priorities.
 - UEA may consider archives donated under the Arts Council for England's Cultural Gifts Scheme or Acceptance in Lieu Scheme and other such national schemes if the material meets our selection criteria, but only after significant consultation and the approval of the BACW Governance Group and BACW Executive.

Collecting Models

The Storehouse – Flexible Loan Model

This flexible approach to collecting allows UEA to be agile, proactive and strategic in approaching practising contemporary writers of relevance to teaching and research. It also enables the institution to be selective in terms of the extent and scope of material archived i.e. collecting items that relate to a single literary work, or series/collection, rather than archiving an entire writer's working material. This maximises available resources and finite infrastructure.

While all collecting has significant long term resourcing costs, the Storehouse Model is a more sustainable way to develop the BACW and *is therefore the recommended approach.*

The Collection – Traditional Model

The more traditional approach to archiving is to collect the papers of writers who are at the end of their career, or have died, either as a donation (gift) or on a long-term deposit (minimum 20 years). These collections tend to be large in volume and complexity, and the work required to process and maintain to international archiving and digital preservation standards is very significant and has long-term implications.

BACW has accepted deposits/donations from several pre-eminent writers under The Collection model given the exceptional value of their collection to UEA's teaching and research, but this is generally not the recommended approach, unless as part of a significant and costed research grant proposal or with a substantial financial donation/contribution.

Collecting Born-Digital Material

The development of UEA's infrastructure for the collection management of born digital material is still at a proof-of-concept stage. For UEA, the challenge of digitally preserving a writer's born-digital material, and making it available within a sophisticated archive discovery service, presents a substantial cost and therefore a potential risk if that writer seeks to withdraw the archive at a later date.

Any large scale, appraisal, preservation-structuring and cataloguing of born-digital data and records within a digital archive is a significant undertaking. Therefore, it is advised that selection for any pilot projects is carefully

considered and prioritised by the Archivist in consultation with the BACW Academic Director and the Library Director.

Digitisation of Physical Material

Whilst BACW has undertaken some small-scale digitisation projects -- either for teaching or where research or other public funding was available and copyright could be cleared -- large-scale digitisation of physical archives is not a solution routinely offered as part of the Archives service.

Appendix A: List of Collections

The public access catalogue for UEA Archives can be viewed here (but note not all collections have been catalogued and made available as yet): <https://archivecollections.uea.ac.uk/themes-article>

Collections that predate the launch of the BACW in 2015 but which are now incorporated

Doris Lessing, JD Salinger-Hartog Letters, Malcolm Bradbury, Lorna Sage, Roger Deakin, Robert Edric, Charles Pick, UEA Literary Festival, UEA Creative Writing

New collections added since the launch of the BACW in 2015

Deposited under the Storehouse Flexible Loan Model (selected / withdrawable deposit)

Naomi Alderman; Tash Aw; Jay Bernard; Richard Beard; David Bellos; Anthony Vahni Capildeo; Mark Cocker; Andrew Cowan; Adam Foulds; Daniel Hahn; Will Harris; Gail McConnell; Joelle Taylor

Deposited as part of The Collection (permanent / longer term deposit)

Lee Child; Patricia Crampton; Sarah Maguire; Snoo Wilson; AP Watt (selection only)

Appendix B: Protocol for Considering New Collections/Approaching Donors

- As its reputation grows, BACW is receiving many more archival offers than it can accommodate. A decision, taken without robust consideration, could result in the archive tying up resources and infrastructure that would be better utilised on other collections more closely aligned to BACW planning and collecting priorities.
- Similarly, academic staff may be interested in adding to the collections but must give careful consideration to the longer-term legacy and maintenance requirement of the collection if their research and teaching focus evolves.
- The BACW Academic Director advises academic staff on proposals from an academic perspective.
- The BACW Archivist assesses infrastructure/resource and cost implications in consultation with the Library Director.

Governance Group Member Proposals for New Archive Deposits

Governance Group Members are invited to submit suggestions of potential writers to the BACW Academic Director and Archivist, together with a brief rationale. The rationale should ideally include the following:

- Author name and information about any pre-existing relationship/link with UEA
- Perceived value and of the potential archive deposit for UEA teaching and research (and engagement/impact) and perceived likelihood of its use by academic/teaching colleagues, together with an outline of specific plans
- Material of particular interest (e.g. a particular work or works) and its extent
- Outline of perceived reputational benefit to UEA
- Likelihood of a favourable response from the writer/organisation
- Nominated Faculty member to lead on the initial approach to the author (if not the Academic Director/Archivist), noting the potential barriers to collecting below

Agreement from Group Members only permits an initial approach to the writer to express an interest. It may be that through a subsequent appraisal of material by the BACW Archivist it becomes clear that some material is out of scope or unsuitable (see above re: born-digital archives) or that the Group needs to re-assess. Similarly, a writer may review the terms and conditions and decide not to proceed. The Archivist will report to the Group on progress.

Despite the BACW's growing reputation, there are significant challenges in persuading some writers to deposit their material on loan. Even with the flexibility afforded by The Storehouse Model, asking for an archive loan is a significant request that requires careful relationship management and may take a substantial amount of time, with a staged development process.