

YORK HEALTH ARCHIVES

THE ARCHIVES OF YORK HOSPITALS NHS TRUST

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Background

York Health Archives was set up by the then York Health Authority on 1990, with one half-time archivist, in temporary accommodation in a disused ward in Clifton Hospital. In 1995, the archives and archivist moved to dedicated office and strongroom space at the Borthwick Institute, at St Anthony's Hall, York. The Borthwick Institute for Archives is a long established archive office - founded in 1953 - and it is a department of the University of York. In Autumn 2004, the Borthwick moved to new premises at the main university campus.

What is York Health Archives?

York Health Archives holds the archives of York Hospitals NHS Trust. These are the archives of the Trust and all its predecessor NHS management bodies covering York and district since the inception of the NHS on 1948. But it also contains many older archives: these relate to the hospitals inherited by the NHS, including York County Hospital (founded 1740), Bootham Park (founded 1774) and Clifton Hospital (opened 1847) and many other smaller hospitals. The date range of material in the archives ranges from the 1740s to the 1990s.

Why is this material kept?

This is the written record of York Hospitals NHS Trust, and of the organisations which preceded it. It is kept for the purposes of use and reference by the Trust itself, which like all other NHS Trusts and Health Authorities has a duty to manage its records. NHS records are defined as "public records" under the terms of the Public Records Act 1958. While many of the records created in the course of business can eventually be disposed of, some records are worthy of permanent preservation as the "memory" of the NHS. Because they are public records they have to be kept in a local place of deposit appointed by the National Archives - the Borthwick Institute is a local place of deposit. Such places have to maintain a high standard of storage and access, matching that of the National Archives itself.

But who has access to the archives?

Anyone can look at the archives. They are very extensive - despite the fact that not everything survives - and include administrative, financial, staff, patient, building and other records. Some recent and confidential material is subject to legal restrictions on access.

How do I use it?

The archives are catalogued, and you can browse through the archive finding aids. Or, if you have a specific query, you can ring up and speak to the Trust's archivist, Katherine Webb (tel: 321163, e-mail: kw10@york.ac.uk) who may be able to answer your query, or advise you what records are held at the Borthwick which will answer your question, or which will be useful for your particular research area. When you come to look at archives, you will order items which will be brought to you. The archives are not kept on open shelves, like a library, but in strongroom accommodation, accessed by staff.

What are the archives useful for?

The range of users is quite extensive. Because York has always been a leader in mental health, for example, a steady stream of users look at the history of mental health care, including using patients records. Users can be academics doing research, or people doing local history, or their family trees - an ancestor might have been a member of staff or patient at a hospital.

What does the archivist do?

The archivist identifies, selects, catalogues and processes the archives, makes sure they are correctly stored and cared for, and makes them accessible for users. This includes a range of activities: producing catalogues and other material, advising users, preparing exhibitions, giving talks, and providing an information and advice service for users at all levels.

York Hospitals NHS Trust has been innovative in having its own archivist - there are very few health archivists in England, outside London. There are various advantages in having an in-house specialist. For example, archivists in local authority run County Record Offices (which take a huge range of archive material from many different organisations, but do not have specialist archivists on the staff) complain that hospital records are hardly used by the public. This is certainly not the case with the records here in York, and the main reason for this is the fact that users find them catalogued and with someone to offer advice.

The archivist has also been able to provide special services for the Trust, utilising the material in the archives.

In 1998, the archivist designed and produced the large exhibition celebrating 50 years of the NHS, situated along the walls of the main corridor of the District Hospital from July to December that year.

Finding Aids

There are catalogues of the archives available for consultation at the Borthwick Institute. There is a guide to the archives: K.A. Webb, *From County Hospital to NHS Trust. The history and archives of NHS hospitals, services and management in York, 1740-2000* (2 vols, Borthwick Texts and Calendars 27, University of York, 2002). This lists the archives and also contains a history of the structures of NHS managing bodies in York since 1948, and histories of all NHS hospitals, including the many which long predate the NHS. The full catalogues of the archives can also be found on the national Access to Archives database: www.a2a.org.uk