

## What is an archive?

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**Joe Crowley:** If you want to go history hunting, you need to dig deep. The best way to uncover the facts is to use the same skills and methods that real professional historians use.

Today we are going to be looking at archives. These are places where historical records are collected and stored. They can be a real mine of information but you have to know what to look for and how to investigate them properly, if you're going to get what you need from them.

You can find archives in most towns and cities across the country. There are national archives too, most of which, will be based in London.

They're full of material that is useful for historians trying to find out about events and people in the past. In them, you'll find all sorts of evidence of events that you'll be investigating. Things like newspapers, photographs, letters and notebooks.

Now if the person or event is particularly famous the archive may already have a separate section, especially for them. Otherwise, you may have to go looking for information in catalogues or on things like microfiche readers.

One important thing you need to remember about archives is that they're full of material that is impossible to replace. That means you have to be really careful about how you treat the documents and artefacts that you'll be looking at.

It just depends on what the material is, if you are looking at some fragile object, you'll need to wear gloves. Because if people touch them, even the things that you might not think would be a problem, say like sweat on your hands, that could damage them.

**Archivist:** First can I get you to put on the white gloves? This particular document that you are going to see is very fragile; also we don't want any greasy finger marks on it or anything.

**Joe:** Many of the documents will be contemporary accounts of things that happened, that means that they were written at the time. We have to really think about what we are dealing with, especially when they state opinions.

**Children:** The Times are not really for women's rights...

...probably because most people who write The Times are men.

**Joe:** Often people don't have a full picture of events; they can only see things from their point of view. They may be wrong or they may be biased. So, you have to think about why the people involved maybe saying certain things and what that tells us about the person.

**Archivist:** Because it's a police report, it's written in the style that a policeman would write a report so...

**Children:** ...instead of the style that a newspaper might want to find the angle.

The newspaper's finding the angle what it thinks people will like and the policeman is trying to find the angle which is right!

**Joe:** It can be a real privilege seeing and handling original documents produced by the people from history that we are investigating.

It can give us a fascinating insight into the past and a reminder these weren't just names on a page, these were real people.