National Theatre

Digital Archive Project Guidance: Creating and maintaining digital archive projects for performance

DRAFT

Archive Guidance

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Introduction

This guidance is for anyone looking to develop a digital archive project to catalogue and remember performance. This guidance will explore two aspects: the first is the process of discovery (investigating information from performances in addition to planning and developing your project); and the second is the process of building digital archive projects (the creation of a digital infrastructure to house archive data, website building, project sustainability, marketing and outreach).

This guidance will detail the benefits, practicalities, and challenges of archiving and pursuing a digital archive project for performance and is aimed at users previously unfamiliar with archives, cataloguing, and the creation of archival records. It is assumed that those using this guidance will be from theatre-making, performing, or other creative based practices who hope to highlight and archive their own or someone else's work. This guidance uses the Black Plays Archive (BPA), an ongoing digital archive project from the National Theatre, as a specific case study, and has been written in tandem with an evaluation of the BPA. Celebrating its 10th anniversary in 2023, the BPA is an online catalogue of the first professional productions of plays written by playwrights of Black British, African, and Caribbean heritage produced in the UK.

In addition to the BPA, other digital archive projects cataloguing performance of varying sizes and scales have been highlighted throughout this guidance. These include the Monstrous Regiment Theatre Company Archive (cataloguing the productions of Monstrous Regiment Theatre Company, 1975-1993), the Tower Theatre Archive (cataloguing the productions of Tower Theatre in Stoke Newington), the Royal Court Theatre's Living Archive (cataloguing the productions of the Royal Court Theatre), the Unfinished Histories Project (remembering the works of LGBTQ+, Global Majority, female and disabled theatre practitioners from 1960-1980 in the UK), and the Future Histories Trading Faces Exhibition (an exhibition from the Future Histories African, Asian, and Caribbean performing arts archive). Additionally, information from The National Archives (TNA), the Association of Performing Arts Collections (APAC) and the University of Bristol Theatre Collection will also be spotlighted throughout for users to learn more.

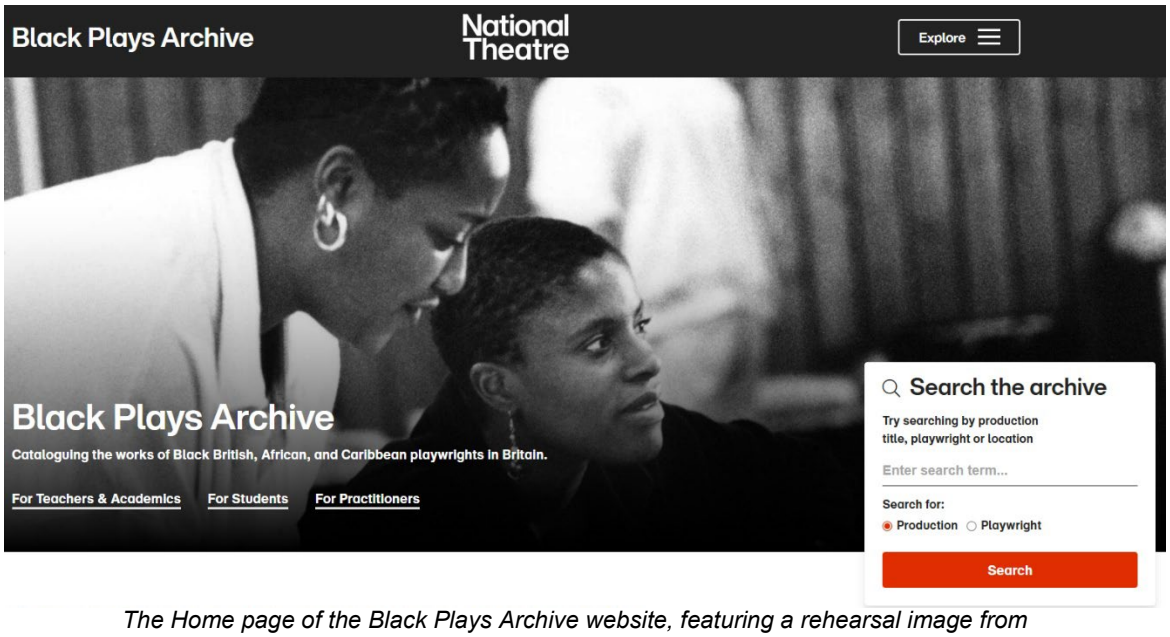
To assist in the writing of this guidance, several informal discussions took place with archivists, those currently working on and those hoping to pursue digital archive projects of this kind. These discussions also included those who initially worked on the BPA when the project was first developed.

Please contact the National Theatre Archive (archive@nationaltheatre.org.uk) for any questions or enquiries about the material within this document.

What are digital archive projects?

An archive is a collection of information, often firsthand evidence of something happening, which are referred to as records. These records can be pieces of information (meaning that they aren't physically tangible, like who starred in a play) or can exist as physical materials (like a poster or a programme). With information available, looked after, and preserved, it can become much easier to remember as well as research. In addition to documenting and organising material, an archive can also allow for records to be interpreted and interrogated, giving researchers, theatre-makers and academics alike the opportunity to delve deeper into histories of performance. With theatre, dance, and performance being inherently ephemeral by nature (as a play often 'ends' after it is performed, the run closes and the next play is pursued), archiving can help to establish a permanent record of a performance or production happening or existing in the first place. Archiving, in this way, is an excellent way to remember and recollect material and information on performance, as the records within an archive are catalogued and preserved with the intention of existing forever.

A digital archive project can take multiple different forms depending on the project's aims. The BPA aims to provide information about the first production of plays produced across the UK written by Black British, African, and Caribbean playwrights via a website. To do this, the BPA highlights casts and creative teams for productions in addition to being a union catalogue, a resource that pulls together information from a variety of library and archive collections (more information on archive terms can be found in this glossary from The National Archives). The BPA also consists of teaching resources and teaching guides, a podcast, short audio recordings of plays, interviews, and essays.



The Home page of the Black Plays Archive website, featuring a rehearsal image from 'Leave Taking' (1994) at the National Theatre. Photo by Richard H Smith

As a whole, digital archive projects for performance tend to provide information that might otherwise be inaccessible by those searching for it, as it may likely be scattered across a variety of places. The information being gathered could likely relate to the works of a playwright or theatre maker or be relevant to a specific theatre, theatre

company, group or performance collective with histories of performance. The gathering of information will be at the centre of these projects, as exemplified in the other digital archive projects this guidance later explores.

Archives seeking to remember and catalogue performance illuminate past productions, and they are integral to the memory and longevity of current ones, as they will eventually become past. If you are a practitioner, theatre or theatre company, it is in your best interests to have an archive (hopefully one which is publicly accessible). This is also true of any community group, heritage organisation and collective with histories or records of performance. The creation of a digital archive project will undoubtably aid in the knowledge that productions and performances occurred, allowing future and current practitioners, writers, researchers, and students to learn about and become more aware of your performance or production history.

Historically, archives have also been tools used to empower, as well as disempower, across time. Who and what gets remembered in the first place is often a specific political choice, and so an archive can establish records of events that might otherwise have dissolved into passing memory. In this way, archives can (to use a cliche) bring past worlds to life, making information, materials and testimony much more accessible, organised, and available. Providing this information in a digital format through a digital archive project means that this information will be even more accessible to users seeking it out.

Central prerequisites

There are some important issues to consider before embarking on this work, which are key to the planning and successful delivery of a digital archive project.

It should be noted, regardless of an archive project's scale, that a lot of time, dedication, and resource is necessary to build and develop a digital archive project for performance. This is particularly relevant if the scope of performances is not widely known (both amongst those working on the project itself and in the general consciousness) and if the information being gathered for the project lies in a variety of different places (for example, in people's memories, in personal or written correspondence, or in physically tangible materials). In this way, building, and more importantly, maintaining a digital archive project, can be a time consuming and costly endeavour, despite it being an excellent way to remember and document performance. Here are some of the activities required to run a digital archive project (following the project being scoped, funded and staffed):

- Cataloguing performance (creating performance records)
- Reading play scripts (if available)
- Designing, building, and testing the digital platform
- Hosting and supporting the digital platform
- Planning and creating podcasts or other public-facing content
- Commissioning or writing educational or contextual resources
- Publicising and marketing the archive

- Organising and hosting events

It is also worth mentioning that, just as a physical archive of materials can become dependent on space (such as the National Theatre Archive, which has many thousands of digital and physical documents in its collections), a digital archive project will also rely on digital storage, which can be costly. A digital archive can potentially amalgamate hundreds (or likely thousands) of records and digital assets regarding any number of performances and productions that have been written by a playwright or produced by a theatre, theatre company or performance collective. This is worth being aware of at the start of pursuing any archive project, as in many cases the amount of material can be at times overwhelming and will likely to grow as the project progresses and develops.

1) Funding and staffing

Skilled and knowledgeable people are required to deliver the above, with specialist expertise. Here, specialist knowledge can include IT and website building, cataloguing and data management experience, and subject knowledge relating to the information being gathered for the project brief. These three elements combined will facilitate in the creation of a digital platform that is, above all, organised and accurate.

Since 2013, the BPA has been managed and maintained by the National Theatre Archive, being updated and maintained over time by volunteers, one full or part-time staff member specifically working on the project, and the wider Archive department. This, however, does not consider the cost and labour of creating and maintaining the BPA's digital infrastructure, nor does it consider the cost of creating additional materials used to expand and develop the project (like recording podcast episodes or creating teaching resources) or the creation of any promotional materials (like leaflets or posters). As an example, the BPA was initially funded equally by the Arts Council England's (ACE) Sustainable Theatre Fund and the National Theatre back in 2009, which funded the initial research and scoping of the project. Over the past 10 years the National Theatre has been the sole funder of the BPA following its public launch in 2013.

Funding for digital archive projects can come from a variety of places, such as councils or local authorities, private funding from trusts or endowments as well as culture, arts, and heritage funded schemes. The National Lottery's Heritage Fund is the largest heritage funder in the UK, funding a wide range of projects across Britain and Ireland. More advice on where to access funding can be found from the Association of Performing Arts Collections (APAC) and The National Archives, who offer Research and Innovation Grants aimed at addressing digital transformation, environmental sustainability, and inclusive practice in the archives sector.

2) Collective and organisational buy-in

It is also beneficial to have a network of support around you when planning to build a

digital archive project. For the BPA, organisational buy-in from the wider National Theatre, its board, and the Marketing and IT departments was needed to ensure that the required support was in place for delivering the project. Digital archive projects for performance often touch on a variety of different elements and outputs so establishing a network within your community, area, group, or collective is also essential in developing your project. This helps to set agreed parameters for the project (deciding what the project is or is not), ensure the resulting digital archive platform is accessible and relevant to its intended audience, accrue financial and developmental support as well as encourage accountability in securing the ongoing longevity of the project.

A network of support will additionally be able to provide feedback on and build a community around the project itself. This may help to assist in the promotion of and, depending on the capacity of the community around the archive, be able to aid in building the project itself.

For established organisations looking to convince others of the importance of digital archive projects for performance, consider that an archive aims to catalogue and preserve records in perpetuity. How has your organisation previously remembered or celebrated past performances? How will it remember performances taking place currently? Digital archive projects of this kind can create an established process to remember performance, allowing organisations and collectives to preserve their history.

3) Sustainability planning

The funding of digital archive projects is often short-term, covering the planning and delivery phases but often not supporting the ongoing upkeep and maintenance of the digital platform. Archive projects of this nature can often balloon over time, steering off course from their initial proposals if no structural guidelines have been put in place. Planning the sustainability of the project from the outset is a key activity and could affect the sort of digital platform you select and where it is located. Planning for a long-term digital archive project can include making a dedicated strategy that is implemented over a period of time that lays out what the project aims to do and how it might meet those aims. Sustainability planning might also include writing up contingency plans, should the circumstances surrounding projects change, or simply be a list of ideas for additional projects or events that can become implemented later down the line.

Sustainability planning in this way ensures that forethought has gone into the future of the project and that there is space to continue running, adapting or even developing more of the project over time. Planning ahead allows for digital archive projects to avoid being one-off celebratory events and instead become more embedded in how a collective, group or organisation might interact with its performance history. In this way, digital archive projects can become embedded in an organisation's practice and become a part of their ongoing activities.

Phase 1: Discovery – developing a digital archive project

When planning to make an archive of any kind, digital or otherwise, project creators should be aware that they will likely come across more relevant productions and associated materials as they go. With this in mind, setting flexible parameters for your archive project is highly encouraged.
A good place to start is by establishing what it is those using the archive are hoping to get out of it. Are there specific enquiries an archive might be able to shed light on? Would an archive be able to give more details about how productions and events happened? These questions are useful to ascertain what exactly your digital archive project will be looking to capture (and in what depth or breadth), and which gaps it will aim to fill in the knowledge of your archive users. By framing your archive project as something to inform understanding and provide information, those pursuing projects can use this to help establish the project itself and to help explain or even pitch the project.

Additionally, project creators may want to consider which digital or physical assets they may want to (or be able to) preserve in an archive collection when exploring records for their digital archive projects. These materials may form the bulk of an individual, institution, or group's collection depending on its aims and so an understanding of which materials are of interest will aid establishing archive collections to be deposited or be preserved 'in house' outside of digital archive projects.

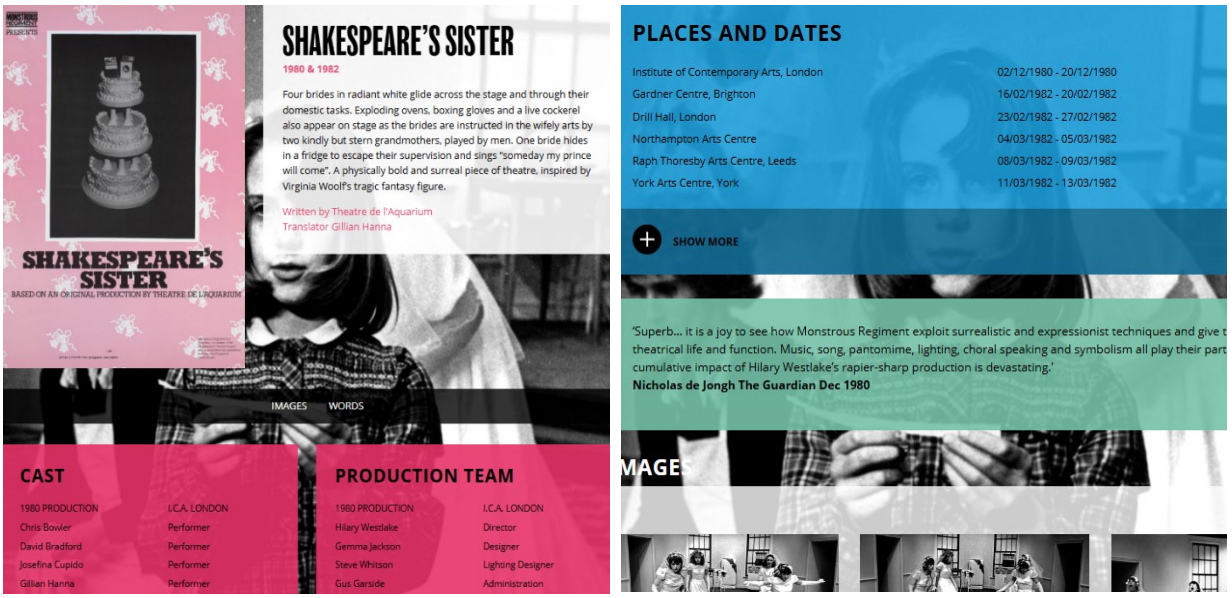
By determining the 'why' of your digital archive project (the question of what information it will provide to those using it) project creators can better understand what it is they are hoping to achieve.

A broad example like 'capturing and sharing the works of Black British, African, and Caribbean playwrights whose work has been produced in the UK' was the ambitious goal of the BPA in 2009. What this goal didn't necessarily consider was the sheer enormity of its central aim. How many plays by Black British, African, and Caribbean playwrights have been produced in Britian? How many playwrights did the project aim to cover? How did the project aim to share and cover these works and in what ways? By setting a central goal at the start of the process, further questions started to emerge which steered the direction of the project, later dictating its scale (the breadth of the project and how many performances it covered) and scope (the depth of the project and how much information is available).

1) Examples of digital archive projects

Determining the depth and breadth of a digital archive project will most often be

dictated by the amount of information available. For example, compare the Monstrous Regiment Theatre Company Archive and the Tower Theatre Archive, which both seek to show each organisation's previous performances. Monstrous Regiment was a theatre company determined to put women's lives centre stage, forming in 1975 before ceasing operations in 1993. The Monstrous Regiment Archive seeks to give users as much information as possible on the productions staged by the company during that time in addition to exploring how the company was created, run and managed. This is evident through selected materials like press cuttings, biographies, programmes, correspondence with the Arts Council, play scripts, photographs and more living on their site, in addition to the documentation of casts and production roles for the plays the company staged (which are known as



A production page from the Monstrous Regiment Theatre Company Archive website (2025)

production or performance records). As Monstrous Regiment is no longer operating, their archive is full of material that would likely be sensitive to the management of their business if it were still running today. Due to its volume of material, the entirety of the Monstrous Regiment archive is housed at the V&A Museum, where it has been deposited (for more information about depositing your records, please see the guidance from The National Archives.) Overall, the material displayed on their website helps to paint a complete and incredibly detailed picture of the company's operations and legacy following its closure, largely through the digital distribution of information and records on their website.

Meanwhile, the Tower Theatre Archive displays few records on how the theatre itself was previously and is currently managed and instead, their archive prioritises the

A production page from an early production on the of Tower Theatre Archive website (2025)

long history of the theatre, notably its past productions over 90 years on various sites. Tower Theatre began operations in 1932, under the title of Tavistock Repertory Company based at Tavistock Place in London. The theatre is now based in Stoke Newington, where it moved in 2018. The Tower Theatre Archive predominantly charts information about performances, listing out cast and creative teams for its many hundreds of productions (relying less on displaying things like

Cast List

#00 : Holly Faulkner
#2 : Frances Berry
#7 : Jacqueline Crain
#8 : Megan Davies
#11 : Lola Thatcher
#13 : Thea Mayeux
#14 : Julia Josephson
#25 : Amy Cash
#46 : Caroline Cromwell
Soccer Mom : Alexandra Charalambous

Production Team

Director : Ragan Keefer
Set Design : Fiona Tabastot
Costume Design : Roxanne Ivy Roberts
Lighting Design : Steven Cox
Sound Design : Anna Kidd

Stage Manager : Olga Walkowska
Assistant Director : Isabel Quiroz
Assistant Stage Manager: Rakshana Sivasurian
Lighting Operator: Clarisa Carvalho, Omer Warman *or* Jonathan Ringshall
Sound Operator: Sofia Chrisafis *or* Anna Kidd
Set Construction and Get-In: Mark Mabey, Jacqueline Knight, Holly Heron-Chambers, Gary O'Keefe, Max Batty, Phillip Ley, Masi Nagdee, Andy Hind & Keith Syrett

Holly Faulkner studied English at the University of Cambridge following a lifelong love of drama and literature. While there, she acted in and assistant directed several College productions. Outside of her work as the Climate & ESG Lead for a multi-national bank, she enjoys acting and has always remained involved in a variety of theatre shows, from outdoor Shakespeare to pantomime. Having moved to London

Frances Berry graduated from the full time drama program at Queensland University of Technology with a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Acting). After finishing and relocating to Sydney, she worked professionally across various film and television productions. In 2022, Frances revisited her theatre training when she was cast as Emma Darwin in *The Wider Earth*, alongside the team at Dead Puppets Society. After the Brisbane

A production page from a recent production on the Tower Theatre Archive website (2025)

scripts or programmes). The information about who starred and worked on a play is included alongside testimony of what it was like to perform in the show. Biographies of the cast also appear alongside this testimony, along with photographs from the productions. This all helps to paint a more detailed picture of the individuals taking part (as the archive seeks to remember and celebrate them), though it does not take away from the limited information from the pre-war and pre-digital periods. Additionally, the Tower Theatre Archive also provides a summarised history of the theatre's various sites using photographs in addition to information about how its website came to be, which is separate from their archive.
These archives are both great examples of how lots of information, or a lack of it, can still help to inform users and aid in remembering and cataloguing performance. At their most basic, both archives provide information regarding the cast and creative teams for performances (these being performance or production records). Finding the information that goes into creating performance or production records can be found in a variety of places. Such as:

- Play scripts or manuscripts (for written performance)
- Promotional material (posters, programmes or brochures)
- Internal business records
- Memories of performance
- Personal correspondence (emails, letters, diaries)
- Recorded testimony (oral histories)
- Press cuttings/clippings
- Photographs and recorded video of performance

It is worth noting that this information may itself lie within existing archives, records offices, or libraries depending on its context and origin. Some theatres, for example, may choose to deposit their collections with an archive, records office, or library to ensure that their records are securely stored and preserved, if they themselves

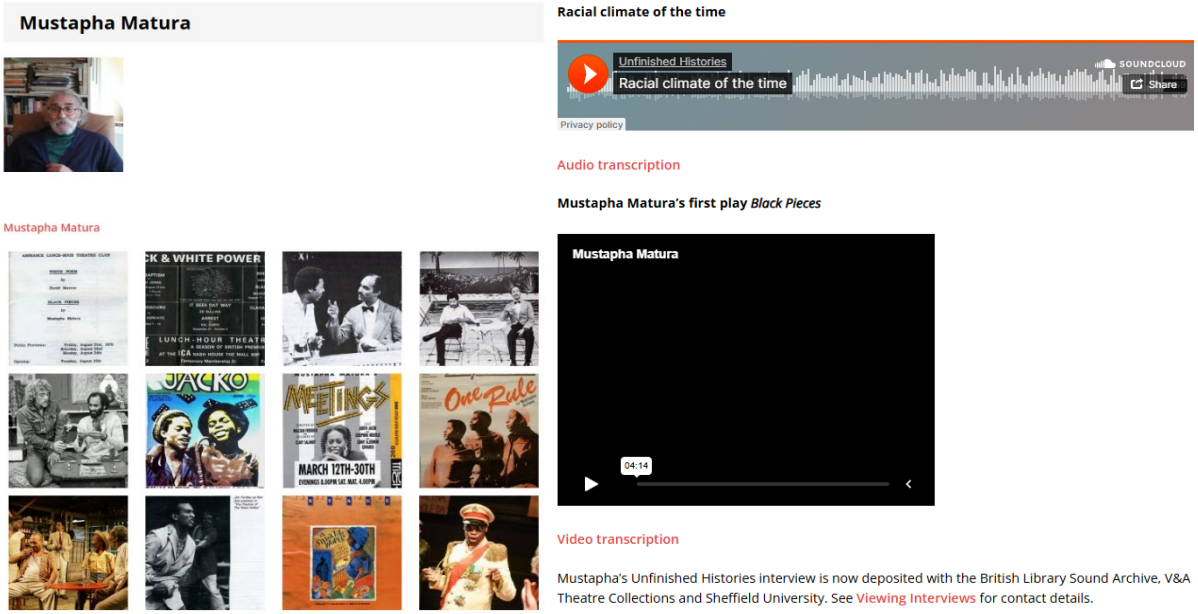
aren't able to ensure their safety (more information and guidance for theatres and theatre companies depositing records can be accessed via the Association of Performing Arts Collections (APAC) and from The National Archives (TNA)). Again, it should be stressed that researching this information will likely be time-consuming and may result in much more information than initially realised. During the early development phase of the Black Plays Archive, the number of productions grew much larger than initial estimates had suggested, and this will likely happen to you, depending on the remit of your project.

Another way a digital archive project for performance might work is through contextualising performance or giving information about practitioners. An example of this is the Royal Court Theatre's Living Archive. Since 1952, the Royal Court Theatre has staged over two thousand productions and has been called 'the writer's theatre' as it aims to amplify work of young and emerging playwrights from the UK and across the globe. The Court's Living Archive was established not only to chronicle the productions that have been staged at the theatre, but to begin providing information and further context for users hoping to learn more about individual plays. Unlike the previous digital archive projects discussed, the Court's Living Archive endeavours to categorise their productions by form. Here, each production is noted by whether it was devised, which language the play is in and if it follows a conventional narrative or linear structure, in addition to each play noting its cast and creative team. This provides a useful metric for users, particularly playwrights, who may be interested in exploring work by dramatic technique as opposed to biographical information, such as when a particular play was staged. Additionally, commissioned essays and 'deep dives' (various perspectives on a play from a team of commissioned readers) offer users specific and detailed criticism as well as additional contextual information for productions.

A 'Deep Dive' for a production on the Royal Court Theatre's Living Archive website (2025)

Regarding oral histories and interviews, the Unfinished Histories Project is specifically oriented around interviews with theatre practitioners. Founded in 2006, Unfinished Histories seeks to share information about "alterative theatre", this being theatre created outside the mainstream and made predominantly by LGBTQ, Global Majority, disabled and female practitioners from the 1960s through to the 1980s. Instead of providing biographical data on performances like the other digital archives projects listed previously, Unfinished Histories shares information pertaining to theatre companies and practitioners. It is largely an information sharing resource providing the names of and contexts for theatre companies, practitioners and venues

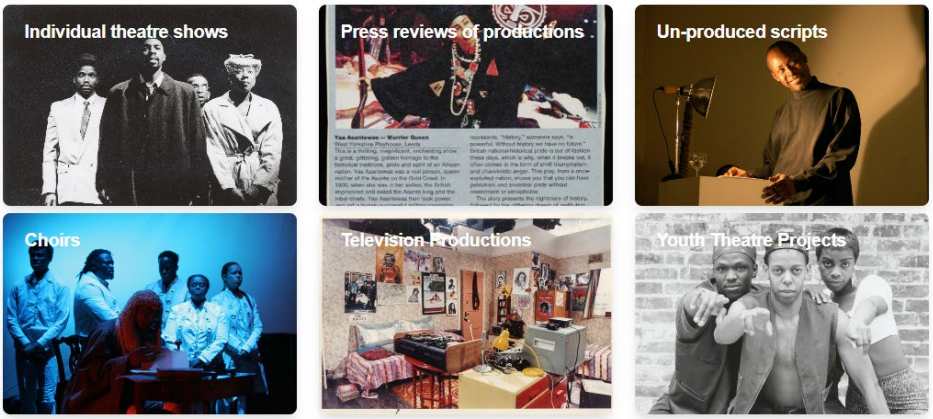
across the UK, so this history is not lost or obscured. This combined with the various oral histories and interviews on the site help to paint a clearer picture of which companies and practitioners were operating when and how they worked to create performance in the first place.



Information about Oral History interview subjects, including the interview and previous productions (2025)

Here, both the Royal Court's Living Archive project and Unfinished Histories take a slightly different approach to remembering and cataloguing performance. This may be a route desired by project creators hoping to further the knowledge of users, outside of strictly providing the biographical details of performance. Like all forms of archiving, interviews, written perspectives and testimonies have a place in remembering and cataloguing performance, particularly if the information being gathered is not widely known. Project creators may wish to create a digital archive project to share testimony from practitioners directly, in addition to highlighting and remembering their works. Further guidance specifically about conducting interviews and oral histories can be accessed by the Oral History Society, which provides detailed resources on the subject.

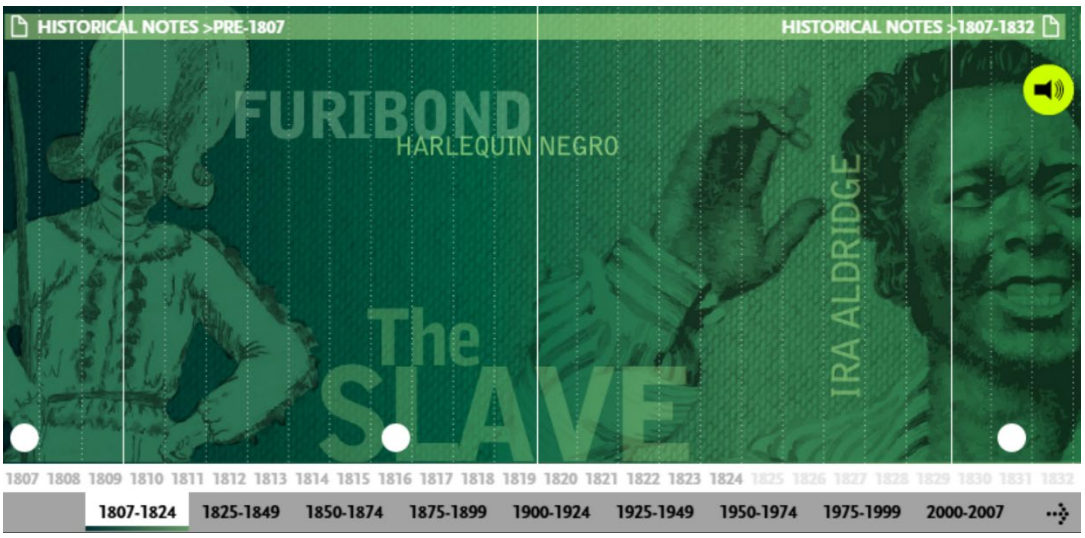
A further example of how project creators might choose to display and share information from performances are through digital exhibitions. The Future Histories Trading Faces Exhibition is an example of how digital exhibitions highlighting performance can allow for users to investigate productions in both the micro (who



Materials held within the Black Theatre Co-Op/Nitro Collection within Future Histories website (2025)

wrote, starred or worked on a specific performance) and the macro (how that performance might sit within a larger ecology or context). Future Histories is an archive specialising in African, Asian, and Caribbean performing arts in the UK. Based as a special collection within Goldsmiths University of London Library, the archive primarily holds materials (play scripts, posters, programmes and more) for theatre collectives and companies like Black Theatre Forum, Moti Roti, and Nitro (formerly known Black Theatre Co-Op) operating from the 1980s to the 2000s.

Trading Faces, which is part of the larger Trading Faces Recollecting Slavery Project, aims to highlight productions staged in the UK that explore the legacy of the Transatlantic Slave Trade in the British performing arts. The exhibition guides users through a variety of productions and uses a variety of digital assets (such as audio recordings, images of archive materials and more) to create a timeline of works (from 1807 to 2007). The exhibition also features a rolodex of contextual essays about varying aspects of performance from the African and Caribbean diasporas. Trading Faces is an ambitious and wide-reaching exhibition that aims to share contextual and performance specific information with users, particularly those with little to low subject knowledge. In this way, a digital exhibition of performance can seek to reach a broad range of users, providing context that sits alongside individual performances to create a larger over-arching narrative about a time and place, like Google's Arts and Culture digital exhibitions.



Interactive Timeline exploring Black British, African, and Caribbean performance histories via Future Histories website (2025)

2) Audience and users

Given the varying formats a digital archive project for performance can take, consider your target audiences and users. For example, are you looking to give playwrights, performers or theatre-makers information on their own or others' work or are you looking to engage young people and students? What about academic researchers, theatregoers, local historians or members of the public? Considering who the target audiences are for your project may help to identify what it is you will want to include. The needs of students studying a play will likely be different to the playwright who wrote the play or a historian writing about it. Each one of these users

will be seeking something specific. Is there information you can include in your project that could apply to them all?

To find out who might be using your archive, examine the kinds of audiences and user groups coming to engage in the performances you're seeking to remember and catalogue. What might suit them and their needs? To ascertain this, project creators may wish to poll their users or directly engage with them about the creation of their digital archive projects. As the project will aim to be a useful resource for those seeking out the information within it, project creators may also want to consider potential audiences in the testing of their eventual digital infrastructure. It is worth noting that a diverse set of audiences will have a diverse set of needs, so it is important that your project is, first and foremost, accessible to its users. An introduction to disability inclusive website design can be found via the Web Accessibility Initiative. The Web Accessibility Initiative also provides Web Content Accessibility Guidance (WCAG) on how to create web content that is more accessible to people with disabilities.

3) Collecting and collating data

Digital archive projects for performance primarily rely on performance records, which chronicle information about a performance. It is important to effectively collect the information used to create performance records as things can quickly become confusing when disorganised.

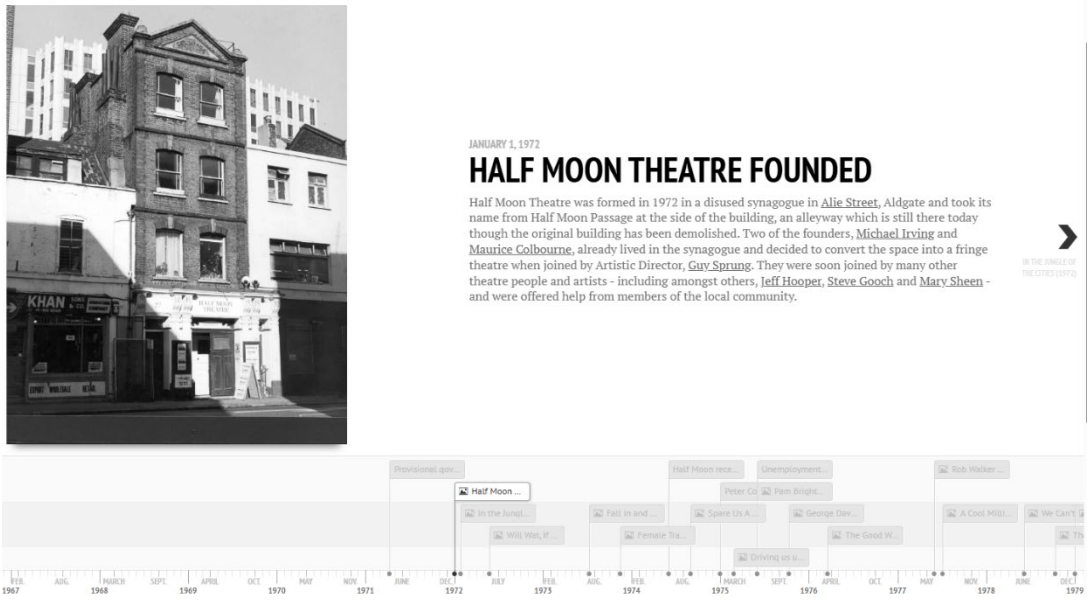
As mentioned in the previous examples of digital archive projects, production or performance records should give users an idea of how a play or performance happened and be reflective of the event itself. Production records can include the following pieces of information:

- Title of the play/performance
- Who wrote, devised or created the play/performance
- The year the play/performance was staged
- Opening night of the play/performance
- Theatre company which produced the show
- Where the play/performance was staged
- Cast size
- Synopsis of the play/performance
- Who starred in the play (the performers)
- Who worked on the play (the production team, the director, lighting designer, etc.)

Whilst those pursuing projects may not have all the information to hand for a performance, detailing as much as possible from what is available is important to give accurate information. Additionally, depending on the 'why' of your archive project, including information of this kind may not be wholly relevant. Those pursuing projects may wish instead (dependent on the resources) to collect information like performance titles or information relating to specific people (i.e., biographies of playwrights). Conducting interviews may also be another way to catalogue and

remember performance.

A digital archive project like the [Stages of Half Moon Heritage Project] seeks to celebrate and display information relating the long history of the Half Moon Theatre, pulling together production and rehearsal photography, press cuttings, set drawings, and more to give a detailed overview of the theatre's history. Similarly to the Monstrous Regiment and Tower Theatre Archives projects, Stages of Half Moon prioritises information regarding performances themselves, listing casts, creative teams, dates and venues for performance (and uses additional archive material to provide further context). This, in conjunction with interviews, testimonials and a



Interactive Timeline exploring Half Moon Theatre's history in context with historical events via the Stages of Half Moon website (2025)

timeline of the theatre's founding help to create an incredibly detailed picture of the theatre's history, situating its history in context for wider events.

The following information can be collected and stored in a variety of ways to be used for your digital archive project, but at a baseline, it is important the information is gathered consistently in the same place (e.g., a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet). Below is an example of how to lay out performance information within an Excel spreadsheet:

Title of Play	Playwright/s	Date	Venue	Cast	Creative Team (artistic and technical)	Play Synopsis

It is also worth establishing early on if your digital archive project is something that aims to include new performances and productions or if the archive will rely on a stagnant non-increasing amount of information, as this will impact on the size and scale of the project (which will then affect its cost and staffing needs). You may also need to consider how you can access the information you wish to include in your project if it lies within another organisation or collection.

As previously discussed, at its most basic, a digital archive project should include information related to the essentials of performance. This includes the who, what,

and where of a performance as outlined above. As in the previous digital archive project examples, many projects use additional records to provide further context to performances, included recorded testimony (interviews and oral history projects), photographs, internal memos, promotional materials and more. The inclusion of these additional materials in projects should be considered as additional given the time and resource spent recording, digitising[1], and licensing material to be cleared online. Below is a short section discussing copyright and risk management.

Copyright protections and digital distribution

Copyright is an important issue to keep in mind when creating an archive. This includes digitally distributing copyrighted materials such as playscripts, photographs, diaries and journals, programmes, posters, interviews and oral stories as well as video and audio recordings of performance. Considering who owns these works and their availability to be included in your archive can greatly impact on your project's scale and scope.

Copyright, as explained by The National Archives, is a form of intellectual property rights that controls how certain works can be used and distributed. Copyright is designed to prevent or restrict the copying and distribution of work without permission of the copyright owner (which may be different to the author of a work).

Copyright protects literary, dramatic, musical and artistic works, films, and sound recordings among other things. For example, the copyright of a play would likely belong to the playwright or their estate, and permission would need to be granted by the copyright owner/s to stage a performance of it. Additionally, photos from a performance of that play would belong to the photographer (not necessarily to the people in the photos). In the UK, copyright arises when a work is created (which is not the case in other jurisdictions). In the case of theatre and performance, where works are often created by multiple individuals, copyright will likely belong to a variety of different people across a variety works, often with multiple people holding copyright in one record, which can quickly become time consuming to track and identify when seeking permissions.

In order to digitally distribute photographs, play scripts or other copyrighted materials, project creators should first identify and seek permission from the copyright owners of a work. As copyright owners control a work's distribution (unless it is in the public domain, which is typically 70 years after the creator of a work has died), copyright owners may charge a fee to distribute their work online or wish to simply be credited for it. Work being published online should only be shared in good faith, after a copyright owner has been contacted. However, you may be wanting to

[1] Guidance from TNA about the benefits of digitisation (https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/about/commercial-opportunities/digitisation-services/benefits-of-digitisation/)

include what is known as an orphan work. Orphan works have no contactable rights holder, which is determined after a reasonable search has been conducted to try and establish the copyright owner. More information and guidance on orphan works can be accessed via The National Archives.

In the case where copyright owners are unable to be contacted, it may be good practice to implement what is known as a takedown policy. A takedown policy is a dedicated plan or policy that ensures the removal of material or information from archives and digital archive projects. If someone is opposed to their work being included within your digital archive project, a takedown policy ensures a process that details how they can have their material removed. An example takedown policy can be seen from The London Archives. More information about copyright can be found, via The National Archives.

Phase 2: Making – Building a digital archive project

As detailed previously, those pursuing projects should aim to work with likeminded collaborators and seek to a establish a team to create digital archive projects. In creating a team to build the project, those involved become accountable for its varying aspects, which can be helpful in the divvying up of responsibilities necessary to create projects of this kind.

The following section will detail aspects of what it is like to work with a website developer and will also give advice on marketing and advocating for your digital archive project in addition to what it's like to conduct and create additional materials for digital archive projects, like podcasts, oral histories and more.

1) Working with a website developer

Because digital archive projects often rely on large amounts of information and data, not to mention the inclusion of many digital assets (such as images, videos, recordings, documents, and many others in perhaps a variety of file formats), it is advisable to work with a skilled and knowledgeable individual or organisation to build the digital infrastructure for your project. A website developer can establish how:

- The design and layout of a digital infrastructure can best store, hold, maintain, and update the archive data being shared for projects (building the back end of a website specifically for archive data, the side that project creators will work with or update)
- To share and display the information from your archive for users (create the front end of a website, the side that users will engage with)
- To transfer large amounts of data on to a digital platform when it may exist in

a variety of places or a variety of file formats
- To best employ Search Engine Optimisation to highlight your digital archive project on websites like Google or Bing and better inform users looking for the information online that is housed in your project
- To create a digital infrastructure that is accessible and navigable for a variety of users
- To test and navigate the infrastructure of a digital archive project prior to launch
- Your digital archive project might live on a separate platform or be combined with any live and active website for your collective or organisation

In addition to building the digital infrastructure to house a digital archive project, a website developer can be contracted to provide a support and maintenance service to maintain and update the digital infrastructure once the project is live and available to users. This is particularly important as websites and digital assets can decay over time. A website that is not maintained will eventually deteriorate, causing projects to become faulty or even obsolescent over time, which can void the longevity or sustainability of a project. This support and maintenance for the technical aspects of the project and any content updates could be managed ‘in-house' to both save costs and ensure the work is done by subject experts. For organisations or collectives with ongoing and running websites, a website developer can also likely establish how the infrastructure for a digital archive project might be applied to current sites, though this may be costly.

2) Marketing and distribution

Just as an organisation or performance collective might advertise its performances, project creators should also factor in advertising their digital archive projects. In addition to enabling a broader range of users being aware of the project, the creation of marketing materials for projects of this kind will likely enable more information to come to light from members of the public and those previously involved with the performances getting in touch. This can then enable more accurate information or, for projects with an ever-expanding number of performances to include, it can ensure that performances have not been left out.

You can advocate for your project by:

- Traditional print or digital advertising
- Newsletters and mailing lists
- Interviews on radio, in newspapers and magazines
- Word of mouth
- Hosting celebratory events like project launches or play readings
- Producing and disseminating posters, leaflets and flyers

3) Additional archive projects

In addition to cataloguing performance by the methods previously specified in this guidance, project creators may want to create additional archive projects to support, celebrate, or contextualise the work they have undertaken. Additional projects might include creating a podcast, recording oral histories, conducting interviews, organising play readings and recordings, commissioning essays or teaching resources, talks, or creating exhibitions. Like digital archive projects, additional archive projects will also cost and take a dedicated and skilled group of individuals to complete. However, these projects will likely be beneficial to get users further engaging with the material and gathering more information within your digital archive project, allowing for a deeper understanding and knowledge of an organisation's or collective's performance history. Many of the digital archive projects listed throughout this guidance employ additional archive resources to further engage their users, providing information that goes beyond the who, what, where and how of any given performance taking place. This may involve a variety of perspectives on a single performance, from those taking part in a production to those who watched a production or worked on it.

Conclusion

Pursuing a digital archive project for performance will allow project creators to explore and share the past performances, records or practices of a collective, organisation or institution. This work is scalable and can be undertaken at varying levels depending on the size, scale, teams and the time afforded to projects. Overall, digital archive projects will provide access to information about histories of performance and likely lead to an increase in knowledge sharing for both new users and those previously familiar with the performances.

As exemplified in the examples referred to throughout this guidance, digital archive projects can speak to forgotten and unsung histories as well as being tools used to capture and catalogue. In this way, they are excellent opportunities for theatre and performance-based practitioners to reflect and celebrate their practice.

Please contact the National Theatre Archive (archive@nationaltheatre.org.uk) for any questions or enquires about the material within this document.

Thank You

The National Theatre Archive would like to thank the following people for their time in discussing their practice and work, and for sharing their perspectives to help in the creation of this guidance: Suman Bhuchar, Sudha Bhuchar, Susan Croft, Alastair Curtis, Jerri Daboo, Kate Dorney, Hannah Jones.

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National Theatre

Thank you

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