

FINAL REPORT ON THE OLD PALACE ARCHIVES - September 2019 - 1ST JULY 2025

Looking back at the records, work started in earnest on the Archives by a group of Volunteers & OP members in September 2019. The group was led by Esther Mann, Archivist & Heritage Manager recruited by the Whitgift Foundation. She told us that out of three Whitgift Foundation school archives, OP was in the worst state by far! Over the months & years we spent days finding & recording items, their locations along with the general state of wear and tear. Some of the unique archives had also been catalogued on the general school asset list. The team worked in the school holidays so as to avoid any disruption to the school. Upper Porch was selected as the only suitable, safe room for storage of the smaller items, registers, Head's diaries & school photos etc.

In 2020 there were pauses during the Covid outbreak when both the school & world stood still. By September 2020 we received the good news that the long awaited scanner had arrived at the WF offices in George Street. This would be used to scan in the documents, pupil registers & photos etc for them to be eventually catalogued, digitized & put on cloud storage, ready to be accessed by all.
(NB: The dedicated scanner is now housed at Whitgift school!)

Up until October 2021 work continued under the guidance of Esther Mann; we were all saddened to learn that her job had been made redundant. Our other non OP volunteers left with her leaving Katherine & I to carry on with the indexing during the school holidays. Upper Porch could only accommodate 2 people!!

In 2023 the announcement was made of the school closure; by 2024 the Prep school in South Croydon had been closed & the buildings sold on. Archives from the Prep school were placed into Upper Porch & not indexed by us owing to GDPR guidelines.

Katherine & I had a joint meeting with the Whitgift & Trinity Archivists in March 2024. It was inferred that the final, ideal destination of all the OP archives would be in the climate controlled facility at Whitgift School.

A further area of archives were located in Cathedral building. A large draughtsman cabinet housing a vast variety of photos, photo boards of historic school events, plays, Royal visits & retirement of the Sisters of the Church to name a few. More came to light as teachers left the school as pupil numbers reduced.

We continued to hope that along the way we'd find a document to confirm official ownership of the Archives & past pupil & teacher memorabilia in the grounds of the school; sadly no documents were forthcoming. During that time most of the members of the Court & CEO of JWF & staff had left. Gradually, appointments were made for the key staff positions. Work on the archives continued. The senior school site was put up for sale in lots, in December 2024.

It was decided that the OPA committee should write to the current CEO, Roisha Hughes in April to ascertain ownership of the Archives & memorabilia in the school grounds, requesting future access & terms of any loan agreements. In her reply of 19th May 2025 she stated they were owned by JWF & we were "Key Stakeholders". Conservation of them & appropriate access to them was their responsibility.

A letter on the same day confirmed that a prospective buyer had been found for some of the OP site by The Curwen Group. Roisha Hughes stated that sales negotiations were underway with arrangements that could (possibly) give Alumnae access for the annual event & peace of mind for families & wider community around the memorials.

As no museum had been found to house the Archives long term, the decision was made by the John Whitgift Foundation to move the items into different storage facilities by June - before the closure of the school in July. The committee expressed concerns over; the future suitability of chosen temporary school storage facilities, hoped that good archival practice would be followed & requested that an Archivist be employed to oversee the storage sites, packing, removal & final destination. The responsibility of moving the Archives was delegated to Helen Richards (Deputy Head) with the help of a temporary, volunteer archivist; sadly not directly by the Whitgift school specialist Archivist mentioned by Ms Hughes in the letter. (The OPA digital copy with additions from 2021 - 2025 was transferred to JWF Archivist)

As of 26th June, Helen informed us that: Headteacher log books, student record cards/record books in approximately 10 boxes were sent to the dedicated Archive storage at John Whitgift school. The other 90+ boxes and photos will be moved (professionally) to the top floor of the Foundation offices in the next week or so. (Framed photos are remaining in their frames). Plus, Helen has a digital file to send through to the Google drive, with some photos etc.

The committee are aware that many of you have asked as to the whereabouts of the Head Girl & Head of House boards since the early days of the school - sadly they have not been found.

Katherine & the committee join me in thanking Helen Richards & the closure team for their hard work to date endeavouring to safeguard our precious history & memorabilia.

As we represent past & present "key stakeholders" to the archive, we hope that the CEO & Court of John Whitgift will assign some of the proceeds from the sale of both school sites to provide a dedicated Museum space for our archives & to employ an Archivist to fully digitize the archives so they may be accessible to us all in the future.

In the interim any enquiries relating to the archives/memorabilia can be made to David Clifford: enquiries@johnwhitgiftfoundation.org

H C Gadd (nee Anderson -Class of 1973)