

Religious Archives Survey 2010

A survey of the archives of
religious bodies within the United Kingdom
and of related personal papers

November 2010

Supported by
The Pilgrim Trust



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Note: the appendices to this report have been published at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/religiousarchives

Foreword by the Bishop of London

The origins of a continuous tradition of record-keeping in the United Kingdom are directly traceable to religious institutions. During the past century or so the number of faiths practised within this country has expanded enormously and this diversity has extended and strengthened interest in our religious history. Much of our national heritage is recorded in the archives of our religious institutions and communities and other related bodies. The Religious Archives Survey has set out to map these in the first study of its kind, covering all faiths practised here, which reflect our position within a wider global community. The information captured in these records extends far beyond the religious sphere and provides a key to our self-understanding as a diverse union of nations built out of very different communities and traditions. I very much hope that the findings and recommendations as set out in this report will inform future initiatives at both national and local level to utilise and preserve for the common good the wealth of written and other historical records which has been revealed. The far-sighted support of the Pilgrim Trust which made this survey possible is most welcome and is gratefully acknowledged.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Richard Chartres". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Rt Revd and Rt Hon Richard Chartres, Bishop of London

Executive summary

- Religious archives are important both for faith communities and society as a whole in the constituent countries of the United Kingdom. They constitute a crucial element of our national heritage. Not all such collections are equally accessible but it is important that they are preserved, in all their diversity, by their owners or creators, as part of this patrimony. They cover a wide span of subjects and, where they can be made available, serve a range of researchers from academics to genealogists.
- The support available for the sustenance of these archival assets ought to be improved and extended. Gaps in the coverage offered by collecting institutions need to be filled. Advice, guidance and resources need to be channelled into the care of archives retained by their creators.
- Encouragement should be given to strengthen the culture of record-keeping among faith communities and religious leaders or opinion-formers where it is less well-established. This is particularly important in a digital age since records which will form the archives of the future need to be carefully managed from the time of their creation. The importance of good record-keeping to good governance also needs to be better understood in the light of current charity law. Where historical records of faith groups largely exist in oral or audio-visual form, appropriate arrangements need to be made to preserve them for posterity.
- High-level advocacy is needed in an age of austerity to raise the profile of religious archives and to bring their needs to the attention of opinion-formers and policy makers within faith communities and the country as a whole. It is important that any action to meet their needs reflects the diversity of faith groups in the United Kingdom today.
- Funding bodies should be encouraged to support and strengthen arrangements for the care and (where appropriate) accessibility of archival collections. This would provide recognition for the centrality of such material to the history of the United Kingdom and its importance to our communal identity.
- The National Archives, the Archives and Records Association, and the Religious Archives Group, together with other bodies which have a continuing interest in the religious archives sector, should seek to provide support and encouragement for its continuing development. Further targeted research and consultation should be undertaken in order that such support is properly focused and rendered more effective.

1. The UK's religious landscape

1.1 Religious beliefs and practices have been formative influences in shaping the historical development of the United Kingdom from at least the fourth millennium BC. Well before the arrival of Christianity to our shores, the lives of people in the Neolithic and Bronze Ages were dominated by beliefs in gods and divine powers, as suggested by the construction of ceremonial monuments such as Stonehenge and elaborate tombs for the dead. Even after Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire in the fourth century AD, much of British religion took pagan forms, including the Romanisation of indigenous cults. Christianisation (certainly of England) was a function of missionary activity during the seventh century. It is from this point that the earliest religious archives survive, although some of the documentary legacy was lost with the destruction associated with Danish invasions of the ninth century. Anglo-Saxon Christianity, which owed much to Celtic influences, as is shown most strikingly in the illumination of religious texts, was transformed by the Norman Conquest. This progressively consolidated a Roman model of the Church, attracting the nominal allegiance of the whole of the population, and with a complex and multi-layered organisation, which generated much record-keeping.

1.2 With the Reformation, the model flipped to a Protestant one, reinforced by legislation which fused Church and state and which imposed religious uniformity. There continue to be established churches in England and Scotland to this day, with well-defined codes of practice for their record-keeping, while laws compelling attendance at parish churches were not removed from the statute books until 1969. In Ireland and Wales however, the established status of the

Anglican Church did not survive after legislation of 1869 and 1914 respectively in the face of the political resurgence of a population largely adhering to other religious traditions. A Catholic community maintaining allegiance to Rome survived the Reformation in England with considerable difficulty until reinvigorated by a wave of immigration from Ireland from the 1780s. For such a hierarchical Church, its records in the United Kingdom are quite decentralised (except in Scotland). Protestant Dissent emerged during the Elizabethan era but did not become a separate movement until 1662 and was not formally tolerated until 1689. It only developed into a significant force from the late 18th century, rivalling the established church in worshippers in England by the mid-19th century and surpassing it in Wales. The Nonconformists did not achieve full religious equality until the later 19th century but meanwhile found alternative creative outlets in fields such as business, education and science. The heyday of the traditional Free Churches ceased in the Edwardian age, but there has been compensating growth from newer Christian religious traditions, several imported from the United States, and especially from the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements, which have notably attracted the Afro-Caribbean community which settled in Britain after the Second World War. Many of these newer movements do not yet have formal patterns of record-keeping, but even the archives of mainstream Nonconformity are widely scattered, despite some concentration at Dr Williams's Library, the John Rylands University Library and the National Library of Wales. The papers of many Free Church leaders of the 19th and early 20th centuries have been irretrievably lost.

1.3 Although irreligion emerged with the French Revolution in the 1790s, it made little headway in any institutional form. Until at least the mid-20th century the overwhelming majority of the United Kingdom's population, when interviewed in opinion polls, identified with Christianity, in the sense of professing allegiance to a Christian denomination and expressing belief, however vaguely, in a Christian God. The Jewish community was the most prominent non-Christian faith, albeit a fairly small one, although Muslim communities can be traced in some British ports from the 19th century. The situation was transformed from the 1960s by an influx of immigrants from the Indian sub-continent, which has greatly strengthened the presence of Sikhism, Buddhism and – especially – Islam. Whereas in 1970 there were probably 250,000 Muslims among the overall population, the number is now estimated at ten times that figure. Apart from Judaism, little information has been available about the archives of non-Christian faiths, and few have been deposited in publicly-accessible repositories. The period since the 1960s and, more particularly, the 1980s has also been characterised by the rise of alternative spiritualities and religious groups lying beyond the great world faiths, including so-called new religious movements (NRMs) and the New Age. There has similarly been an acceleration in secularisation, reflected in a growing minority which chooses, in terms of both belief and practice, to reject religion in all forms. These alternative religions and expressions of non-faith are again poorly reflected in the available archives. In this way, the United Kingdom has moved in comparatively short order from a society which was overwhelmingly Christian to one which is religiously and ethnically pluralistic and diverse.

1.4 The persistence of religious identity was demonstrated in the 2001 census, which was the first in mainland Britain to enquire into religious profession. Over three-quarters of the population (77%) still claimed to have a religion, with 16% declaring they had none and 7% declining to answer this voluntary question. The number of places of worship in the United Kingdom is currently in excess of 50,000. In addition to addressing the spiritual needs of people, they also invariably make a major contribution to the wider life of the communities they serve, as is reflected in a whole series of recent studies of religion as social capital. Government increasingly regards faith communities as forces for community cohesion and as adjuncts of social and public policy. This echoes the situation before the establishment of the welfare state when, in a predominantly Christian era, the churches were the principal providers of services such as education and charity. Throughout the Victorian and Edwardian eras they were also the main alternative to the public house as the centre of social life and recreation. For a long time they discharged an essential function in registering births, marriages and deaths, and proving wills, which makes their records of the utmost importance to family historians. At a national level, it is impossible to separate the politics of the past four hundred years from religion and religious divisions. In these – and countless other – ways, religious archives reach out to a much wider constituency than that interested in the history of individual faith groups, important as that is.¹

¹ This is a necessarily simplistic account. For further detail, see especially Sheridan Gilley and William Sheils (eds), *A History of Religion in Britain: Practice and Belief from Pre-Roman Times to the Present*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1994; Paul Weller (ed.), *Religions in the UK, 2007-2010*, Derby: Multi-Faith Centre, University of Derby, 2007; and Paul Weller, *Religious Diversity in the UK: Contours and Issues*, London: Continuum, 2008. For the quantitative evidence about religion in Britain, see www.brin.ac.uk.

2. Genesis of the survey

2.1 Despite the significant extent and intrinsic research value of religious archives in the United Kingdom, they have attracted far less attention, and commanded far fewer resources, than, say, the more 'fashionable' political or literary archives. This is partly perhaps because they are not only overwhelmingly privately owned but, in many cases, still managed by the organisations which created them, with significantly varying degrees of public access. One dimension of this comparative neglect has been that there has never before been a comprehensive attempt to survey religious archives in the United Kingdom. Of individual faith communities, the Church of England has perhaps fared best in this regard, although, even here, no substantive national report has been produced for thirty-four years. Dorothy Owen's booklet, while useful, is nevertheless more a description of the various classes of records than a detailed inventory of their location.² The Pilgrim Trust's multi-volume and six-year-long investigation of the provincial, diocesan, archidiaconal and capitular archives of the Church of England is very detailed but now seriously dated and available in few libraries.³ A parallel and later review of the Church's central records also needs refreshing.⁴ The British Records Association was responsible for a study of non-Anglican archives as far back as 1936,⁵ after which there was a long gap until Clive Field attempted an overview of Free Church archives in 2007 (published the following year).⁶ The Catholic Archives Society, formed in 1979, has performed

useful work in documenting Roman Catholic records, especially through reports in its periodical *Catholic Archives* since 1981, but it has not had the resources to undertake any full-scale survey of the Church's archives. The only significant thematic investigation has been *Mundus*, a survey of overseas missionary collections.⁷

2.2 It has therefore largely fallen to the National Register of Archives, created within the Historical Manuscripts Commission in 1945 and with its indexes available online since 1995, to build and maintain a national location register of religious archives, as part of its wider brief. The Register is now the responsibility of The National Archives. It is a central collecting point for archival information, now often enriched by links to full-text catalogues, and one of its derivative printed publications continues to be a helpful pointer to the availability of the private papers of religious leaders.⁸ However, it is still decidedly patchy in its coverage of religious archives, with no fewer than 86% of its entries relating to the records of Protestant Nonconformity, mostly the archives of individual chapels (frequently closed). In particular, there is poor representation of non-Christian faiths, alternative religions and non-faith movements, all of which have become very important during the past quarter-century. The principal initiative in the non-Christian field has come from the University of Southampton with its survey of Jewish archives in the UK and Ireland.⁹

² Dorothy Owen, *The Records of the Established Church in England, excluding Parochial Records*, London: British Records Association, 1970.

³ Pilgrim Trust, *Survey of Ecclesiastical Archives: Report of the Committee appointed by the Pilgrim Trustees in 1946 to carry out a Survey of the Provincial, Diocesan, Archidiaconal and Capitular Archives of the Church of England*, London: the Trust, 1952, 5 vols

⁴ Christopher Kitching, *The Central Records of the Church of England: A Report and Survey presented to the Pilgrim and Radcliffe Trustees*, London: CIO Publishing, 1976

⁵ British Records Association Committee on Classification, *Archives of Religious and Ecclesiastical Bodies and Organisations other than the Church of England, British Records Association Reports from Committees, No. 3*, London: the Association, 1936

⁶ Clive Field, 'Preserving Zion: The anatomy of Protestant Nonconformist archives in Great Britain and Ireland', *Archives*, Vol. XXXIII, No. 118, April 2008, pp. 14-51

⁷ www.mundus.ac.uk

⁸ Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts, *Papers of British Churchmen, 1780-1940, Guides to Sources for British History, No. 6*, London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1987

⁹ www.archives.soton.ac.uk/jewish

2.3 This absence of a full national map of religious archives became a preoccupation of the Religious Archives Group, which was established in 1989 as an informal network of archivists, librarians and others with an interest in the collection, management and use of archives related to the various faith communities in the United Kingdom. The Religious Archives Group later became affiliated to the Specialist Repositories Group of the Society of Archivists (now one of the constituent partners in the Archives and Records Association). The Group's 2007 conference, in association with The National Archives, was devoted to 'The State of Religious Archives in the UK Today' and included major presentations on the condition of Anglican, Catholic and Free Church archives. From these and other papers, and plenary discussions, emerged a keenly-felt need among delegates for a more strategic approach in meeting the needs of religious archives.¹⁰ A small steering group was appointed to investigate options, and a national (collection-level) survey of religious archives linked to the National Register of Archives was identified as a key priority. The initial proposal for such a survey was drafted in November 2008 and The National Archives offered logistical support and part-funding of the costs. The balance of the costs was to be sought from the Pilgrim Trust. However, as the Religious Archives Group (RAG) is not a legal entity in its own right, the then Society of Archivists generously agreed to submit a grant application to the Pilgrim Trust on behalf of RAG which occurred in March 2009. Provisional approval of the grant by the Pilgrim Trust was forthcoming in May, subject to conclusion of formal heads of agreement between The National Archives and the Archives and Records Association (which were signed in June). A press release announcing the survey as imminent was issued by the partners on 7 July 2009.

2.4 The National Archives and the Archives and Records Association agreed that the survey should be overseen by a steering committee of nine members, comprising three nominees of each organisation

and three independent experts. The following appointments to the steering committee were made in May to June 2009, thereby achieving an optimum mix of professional, academic and faith knowledge:

Prof Humayun Ansari OBE – Royal Holloway, University of London
Dr Rachel Cosgrave – Lambeth Palace Library
Dr Clive Field OBE (chair) – University of Birmingham and University of Manchester
Dr Norman James – The National Archives
Jenny Moran – The Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland
Andrew Nicoll – Scottish Catholic Archives
Dr Michael Pearson – National Library of Wales
Karen Robson – University of Southampton
Rosemary Seton – School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London

2.5 The steering committee has met formally at Lambeth Palace on three occasions (10 December 2009, 10 March and 26 July 2010), but has also been very active between meetings. Claire Muller was appointed as Resource Discovery Officer, following an open recruitment process in October 2009, to take forward the Religious Archives Survey, based at The National Archives under the direction of Dr Norman James. A professionally-qualified archivist with substantial experience of religious archives, she took up her duties in November 2009, for a period of nine months. The bulk of the work has fallen to her. The National Archives also committed significant extra resources in the form of the time of Robert Athol and Philip Gale. This enabled the survey to be extended to cover creators of personal religious papers. The steering committee and the Religious Archives Group wishes to place on record its sincere thanks to all these staff members for their input to the survey and to other senior figures at The National Archives, especially Nick Kingsley (Head of Archives Sector Development), for his interest and encouragement.

¹⁰ A summary of the 2007 Religious Archives Group conference will be found at rylibweb.man.ac.uk/rag2/activities/conference/2007/Cnfrpt07.pdf

3. Scope and methodology

3.1 The primary aim of the project was not to produce an all-embracing survey of archival material of a religious nature unknown to, or inadequately covered by, the National Register of Archives, although filling gaps in the Register was one important objective. A fully comprehensive survey would not have been possible with the time and resources available. Rather it was an attempt to establish an outline of the holdings and the extent of the challenges faced by religious archives across all faiths especially those bodies looking after their own historical records who have not surrendered this task to collecting institutions providing care and public access in line with professional standards. As outlined in the account of the survey's genesis, work has been driven by the imperative for archival mapping in order to bring a greater degree of strategic co-ordination and prioritisation to meet the needs of the sector. However, the survey has also shown just how much more has to be done to engage with faith groups which currently have little involvement with the wider archival community.

3.2 In order to make the survey manageable, the main target has been the historical records of national and regional bodies and organisations, but in the case of major non-Christian faiths and some smaller Christian denominations individual places of worship or local communities were surveyed as it was felt that much might survive at local level to complement the parish, chapel and other congregational records of major Christian denominations. Our work does not, therefore, encompass the well-charted collections of religious material in great national collections such as the National Archives of Scotland, the National Library of Wales, the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, the Anglican archives in Lambeth Palace Library and the Borthwick Institute, or the wider religious holdings

of other specialist repositories such as the School of Oriental and African Studies, Friends' House Library, John Rylands University Library and Dr Williams' Library, to name some of the most prominent. The religious holdings of local authority record offices, already routinely reported to the National Register of Archives, were also excluded. Nor did we seek to go over the same ground covered by other recent surveys of missionary records (*Mundus*), Catholic lay societies or the University of Southampton's survey of Jewish records, except in a few cases where there was the prospect of some new information emerging. Rather we have concentrated on mapping material which was previously unknown or inadequately known and attempted to chart the overall circumstances of such collections outside the confines of such nationally important or other publicly funded repositories.

3.3 With the time and resources available (nine months in all), the scope of the survey had to be limited, but, in all, almost 2,700 religious and secularist bodies were approached together with nearly 700 leading religious figures whose contact details were publicly available. These were mainly derived from *Who's Who* 2010, which has a high proportion of figures from the established Church of England and its senior office-holders, but were augmented from other directories. Consequently the Anglican respondents are over-represented while Nonconformity and non-Christian groups are greatly under-represented. It had previously been established that Roman Catholic bishops and heads of religious communities normally deposit their papers in their relevant ecclesiastical archives and that, in this community, a distinction between official and personal papers was rarely valid, so that they were not separately surveyed. However, other leading Roman Catholic figures were approached.

3.4 A list of the types of bodies whose archives were not included in the survey can be found in Appendix II at: www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/religiousarchives.

3.5 A questionnaire and explanatory covering letter were drafted in late 2009 (see Appendix IV and V at: www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/religiousarchives) and circulated to steering committee members for revision and comment. The questionnaire was then piloted with six archive holding institutions, chosen to reflect a range of faiths and circumstances. These were the BBC Written Archives Centre, East London Mosque, Liberal Jewish Synagogue, Faithful Companions of Jesus, Wycliffe Bible Translators and the Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham. The questionnaire covered three main areas: holdings, with questions about whether archives were retained or deposited, the nature, dates, format and quantity of the collection, accruals and language; accommodation, with questions about storage space, security and environmental conditions; access and preservation, with questions about public access, staffing, cataloguing and outreach. Alterations were then made to the questionnaire and covering letter based on the comments of this pilot group. An online version of the survey was made available on the Religious Archives Group's website (<http://rylibweb.man.ac.uk/rag2>) but the primary method of delivery was by post, in order not to exclude those organisations without Internet access or where email addresses were unobtainable. Between January and June 2010, questionnaires were sent out in tranches to Muslim organisations, Jewish bodies, other non-Christian faiths and then Interfaith and secularist institutions. Finally, the questionnaire was sent to Roman Catholic, Nonconformist and interdenominational Christian organisations and to Anglican organisations in another three tranches.

3.6 The targeted institutions were selected using printed and online directories of faith bodies and archives, websites, published and unpublished articles and resource discovery tools such as the National Register of Archives. They were classified according to the nature and scope of their work, for instance whether they had a national or local remit, or whether they were a place of worship, a welfare organisation, a religious community or one of a number of other categories. They were then ranked according to their likelihood of having accumulated significant quantities of archival material judged on their age (over 20 years old); whether historical records were likely to be kept at that level of the institution; how far these would constitute records of specifically religious functions; whether excluding a particular set of organisations would lead to under-representation in the survey results; and whether there was already extensive and up-to-date coverage in the National Register of Archives. Organisations judged unlikely to be holding archives on these criteria were then excluded from our research.

3.7 Individuals potentially holding personal papers of interest were contacted by post in June to July 2010. A simple letter, rather than a questionnaire, was used (see Appendix VI at: www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/religiousarchives).

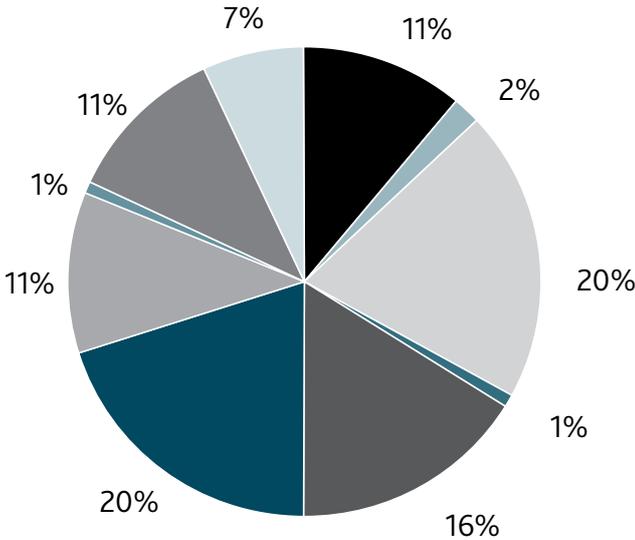
4. Findings: institutional archives

4.1 Overall response

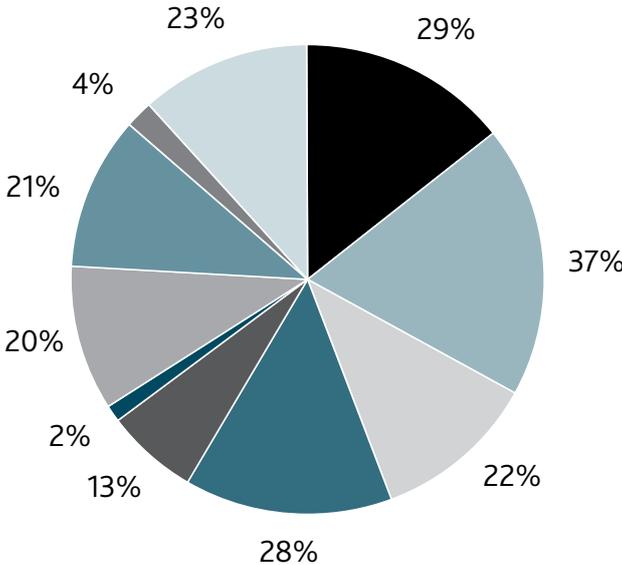
4.1.1 In total, 2689 questionnaires were sent out to faith and secularist bodies established for over 20 years and 414 were returned, giving a response rate of 15% overall. The charts below show the proportion of questionnaires sent to each grouping and the proportion returned. It is perhaps not surprising to see that although well over half of the questionnaires sent were to non-Christian organisations, Christian

bodies account for 76% of responses. The faiths where we know little about the pattern of record-keeping, including Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism account for a very small proportion of returns. This should be borne in mind when considering the analysis of these results and it may be that another form of approach to, and engagement with, these communities should be considered in future.

Questionnaire distribution



Response rate



- Anglican Christian
- Buddhist
- Catholic Christian
- Interfaith
- Jewish
- Muslim
- Nonconformist Christian
- Secularist
- Other religion
- Other Christian

4.2 Patterns of record-keeping and collecting

4.2.1 Of responses received, 74% of organisations and institutions have produced and retained some form of records over 20 years old. Of these, 73% continue to hold some or all of these archives within the organisation while others have deposited their archival collections entirely with another organisation. Only 26% of respondents have not retained, or have not produced, anything that they judge to be of archival value.

4.2.2 Patterns of record-keeping for archival collections vary enormously and this was the first time that many faith bodies had been approached about such historical material. This may explain why the response rate from Muslim organisations was low (2%) considering that questionnaires to this faith made up 20% of the total sent out. In contrast, it is notable that English Heritage had a rather higher level of engagement with mosques in their *Heritage at Risk Survey 2010* (see: www.english-heritage.org.uk/publications/har-2010-summary/HAR-summary-2010.pdf/) involving a 15% survey of listed places of worship (including mosques) which involved personal visits or contact by the staff undertaking the work. The archival community has to date had little engagement with Islamic bodies and there was not the time to explain through representative institutions (of which there are many) why we were seeking this information, or to arrange personal visits. The responses received tended to be from mosques and small organisations and the majority stated that they did not have any archives or that any such older records had been destroyed. Those respondents holding relevant material who replied appeared appreciative that someone was taking an interest in their collections and enthusiastic about their administration. The idea of archives and records management leading to good governance was crucial for some respondents. One said that because they had strengthened their management in this field:

“We face the twenty-first century stronger...working toward good governance embedded in all our business with openness, transparency and accountability at the forefront of all we do.”

4.2.3 Hindu and Sikh organisations also produced a low response rate, of less than 2% in total, but a much smaller proportion of the total number of questionnaires were sent out to these faiths. Again, replies came mainly from temples and small organisations. The majority of these held their own archives and there was one collecting institution, the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies. None of these archives were professionally managed at the time of the survey. Archives were seen as important to the history and traditions of these faith communities but, as none were open for public access, perhaps a resource for those communities themselves rather than for wider society. Considerable care was often taken over their administration, with one Gurdwara hoping to include improved accommodation in a major building project. It stated:

“We have been unable to use the archives for the benefit of our community. We shall be moving to a new site – which is under construction. Then it will be possible to fully access the archives...”

Good governance was also a motivation for keeping archives, particularly in relation to charitable status for one institution:

📖 The organisation is about to gain charity status and we feel the stored archive may be of some interest in the future.📖

4.2.4 Buddhist responses came mostly from small membership groups and local centres from the Western tradition, as there are few formal Buddhist places of worship in the United Kingdom (fewer than 100 in 2006). While the response rate to the questionnaires despatched was high (37%), the majority of organisations which replied did not hold archives. The collections mentioned included a significant amount of material in newer media so these organisations had to face the challenge of preservation of digital and audio-visual material as well as providing suitable access. Dharmachakra Archives, which makes its collections available through the Free Buddhist Audio website, (www.freebuddhistaudio.com) said:

📖 We are doing a good job of embracing the challenges of digital archiving for contemporary material in our field. We now have a well-used community archiving feature that allows Buddhist centres and projects within our community to upload and make available their own archives from anywhere in the world. Having one online home for these varied archives is great – making adequate offline archives of these files is one of the next challenges.📖

4.2.5 Jewish organisations were also among the most prone of the non-Christian institutions contacted to respond, accounting for 13% of all returns. They were also the most likely of the non-Christian faiths to hold archives, with 62% of respondents holding historical records themselves and 17% having entirely

deposited elsewhere, usually in local record offices or the Hartley Library at the University of Southampton. The vast majority of responses came from synagogues where records were often looked after by volunteers. Preserving the history of the Jewish community and ensuring that an often dispersed community can have access to its own records is seen as extremely important. Many synagogues mentioned that they were planning to digitise records or make them available online, often working in partnership with Jewish history and genealogy organisations.

4.2.6 Secularist, humanist and other non-religious organisations did not reply to the questionnaire apart from where their archives were held by collecting repositories or they had established research collections. However, it was felt important to include them in the survey as bodies shaped by their response to religious faith.

4.2.7 Interfaith organisations tended to be quite new and much affected by changes in funding. Several of the respondents mentioned that funding cuts had forced them to move or reduce the size of their premises. This category also included non-religious repositories holding the religious archives for a variety of faiths. As established collecting repositories, these tended to give positive responses in all areas of the questionnaire.

4.2.8 Roman Catholic organisations produced a high response rate (22% of all questionnaires despatched to this denomination were completed, accounting for 30% of the returns across all faiths) with the majority of returns coming from religious orders. Bodies of this kind tend to hold their own records, including personal records of their members, and sometimes the records of other religious houses, schools, hospitals and children's homes. These are considered very important to the life of the community and administered with great care usually by a member of the order, but increasingly professional archivists are being employed to assist. One convent mentioned the archive as 'a source of inspiration' for the sisters. Although these collections are often seen primarily as a resource for the communities themselves, and the requirements of the religious life necessarily place restraints on wider access, many are involved in some form of outreach activity including creating exhibitions and publishing material. Diocesan archives also produced a good response. They tend to be small but organised, usually under the care

of a priest of the diocese but often with professional assistance, and many collect the archives of other Catholic organisations. The response from societies and membership organisations was lower but some of those contacted were very small and had no fixed premises. The rate of deposit with other organisations is lower for Catholic archives than the average, perhaps because of restrictions in Canon Law which require the church authorities to maintain control over them. However some dioceses, for example Hallam, Portsmouth and Lancaster, have interpreted this as allowing for deposit in local record offices.

4.2.9 At a national level, many denominations, groupings or umbrella bodies within Protestant nonconformity run their own archives, often collecting records from local groups and places of worship, or have deposited their records with a major collecting institution such as the John Rylands University Library of Manchester. Where this has not happened, archives are held at a local level by individual chapels or organisations and may eventually be deposited in a local record office. The pattern of deposit may well depend on how far authority has been centralised within a denomination or whether there is still a fair amount of local autonomy.

4.2.10 Anglican organisations have produced one of the highest return rates in terms of questionnaires despatched to them (29%), accounting for 20% of all the returns received, with cathedral libraries and religious orders being particularly keen respondents. 79% of the Anglican bodies who responded had archives of some kind, whether held on the premises or deposited. Historical records of Anglican bodies are more likely to have been deposited, often in secular repositories. Even when not placed in the custody of a record repository, they are more likely to be professionally managed.

4.2.11 The archives of Orthodox churches in the United Kingdom tend to be held by individual churches or cathedrals and are unlikely to have been deposited. One of the problems facing these churches is that, as their United Kingdom presence is relatively small, they do not have the resources to house such material in dedicated accommodation but do not fall within the remit of any major collecting institution.

4.2.12 Interdenominational and non-denominational Christian bodies vary widely in size and complexity and do not fit easily within any church structure. They are still highly likely to hold archives of some kind, but arrangements for their care are more variable ranging from large information management operations for international charities to minute books kept in members' homes. Archives are also slightly less likely to have been deposited unless the particular function of the organisations falls within that of a collecting repository. For instance, many of the institutions carrying out missionary work have deposited at the School of Oriental and African Studies or the University of Birmingham.

4.2.13 The longer a body or institution has been in existence within the United Kingdom, the more likely it is to have accumulated archives, as might be expected. Also, where archives have accrued over more extensive periods of time, the more likely these collections are to have been deposited with collecting institutions. However this leaves a much less satisfactory situation where new religious movements or religious institutions serving more recently established faith communities within Great Britain and Northern Ireland are concerned in terms of the capture of any historical record of their activities.

4.2.14 Some communities may not choose to record their history, culture and events in a form that would be defined as archival in the traditional sense, perhaps preserving artefacts or transmitting their heritage through an oral, visual or musical tradition. The Rastafari Heritage Project, for example, has concentrated on collecting oral histories and photographic evidence and using performance, music and poetry to re-tell stories. These activities often stand alone but are sometimes seen as a part of a more traditional archive collection. Many Roman Catholic religious orders have a display of the personal effects of their founder or prominent members in a heritage room and one synagogue listed a collection of top hats belonging to past officers as part of its archive collections. We welcome the indications that religious bodies of relatively recent establishment are anxious to preserve a variety of material, including archival material, as a reflection of their activities. Of particular note are the appointment of a volunteer academic as archivist at the East London Mosque, and attempts to rescue orphan records with no obvious home carried out by the Centre for Hindu Studies. We hope that

such developments continue to be sustained, and that help and support remain available for communities, bodies and organisations to preserve their heritage in a way appropriate for them.

4.2.15 We also hope that the good governance requirements of the Charities Act 2006 applying to local, regional and national religious institutions which have charitable status will lead to much higher rate of survival for archives and records in the future by underlining the need for organisations to develop policies and procedures for the administration and preservation of their records. There is some evidence that organisations have already been motivated to develop these systems by a desire for openness and transparency. One place of worship saw development of a culture of historical record-keeping as beneficial to itself, the local community and society as a whole. Such internal discipline demonstrated accountability for its existence and growth, including its leadership and decision-making processes. This was particularly important to its own self-esteem and integrity as the body in question emerged from a period of internal turmoil.

4.2.16 Where archives exist, 96% of respondents indicate that they are still accruing as records pass out of current use. Some have indicated that they are seeking to deposit records elsewhere for various reasons. These include immediate pressures, such as a lack of space or funding, or a threat of closure. But they can be the result of longer-term planning, such as a formal agreement to transfer records to another part of the organisation or to deposit them with a collecting institution. Some religious institutions, almost exclusively Jewish and Christian, are actively collecting material from other bodies of their co-religionists, complementing the work of archival repositories in the public sphere established to undertake collecting on a geographical or thematic basis. The scope of this collecting varies from attempts to cover a whole religious tradition, such as the Donald Gee Centre which collects records relating to the Pentecostal movement and the John Rylands University Library of Manchester specialising in the records of Protestant nonconformity in general, to those with a national remit such as the Scottish Catholic Archives, or a local remit, as with the Hull Jewish Archive. This amounts to a public-private partnership tackling the preservation of such material although it by no means covers all the bodies creating archives.

4.2.17 The vast majority of organisations making returns hold archives in paper format with few mentioning the presence of digital or audio-visual records. Where these exist, they are often a small part of a collection, for example, membership records on computer disks or tapes of sermons or addresses. Other than two specialist audio-visual archives run by Buddhist organisations, little awareness of the problems of managing such formats was demonstrated in responses. Only a few organisations made additional comments mentioning the management of digital records as a challenge they faced and they did not seem to have processes in place to do this. As organisations were asked to concentrate on records over 20 years old in their responses, it is possible that many felt their digital records were not relevant. However, with some respondents commenting that accruals had stopped because everything was now in electronic form, this is an area for concern.

4.2.18 A wide variety of material from which statistical information potentially of interest to historians and social scientists can be derived was identified by respondents. Although some of it is well known and explored, such as the London Parish Clerks' Bills of Mortality, other material has not been exploited for research purposes. Many respondents to this question believed that such material could be found within their archives but that it was uncollated or not in a format where it could be made available for research, especially as some records contained sensitive personal information on individuals within organisations or communities. Many did not have the time or resources to tackle the problems involved in making it useable. This was confirmed by a few visits made in following up the survey, which showed that there is much among the archives of religious orders relating to their recruitment, social composition and numerical strength.

4.3. Accommodation

4.3.1 If archives are to survive, appropriate storage accommodation is necessary to house them. Some of the storage provided for religious archives in recent years is among the best in the country. Examples include York Minster Library's new Alcuin Wing housing archives and special collections, Hereford Cathedral Library and Archives and St George's Chapel Archives, Windsor. To these can now be added the new purpose-built archive and library building at Douai Abbey. All

these offer high standards of care. But they remain exceptional, have been assisted by large scale external funding, and do not reflect the diversity of the United Kingdom's religious traditions. At the other end of the scale, historical records are being kept in a metal container where they have been affected by damp and mould, in a garden shed, or in plastic bags.

4.3.2 While 91% of respondents with archives have storage space available for them, 9% of these institutions with such material do not appear to have any form of dedicated storage. Some archives were being kept in the homes of members or employees or on open shelves in offices or libraries and even within the cells of members of a religious order. Only 44% were able to provide all rooms with protection against flood, fire and theft and 39% had no protection at all. In many cases, respondents indicated that they could not ensure an equal degree of protection against all these hazards or that the protection was only what could be expected in any residential or office building rather than tailored to the needs of archival preservation. Of those who provided comments, most said that they could ensure protection against theft but not against fire or flood. Where safeguards were specifically mentioned, this was usually in the form of fire-proof safes or cabinets as fire suppression systems were beyond the means of many of the organisations participating. One case of supposedly fire-proof cabinets bursting open during a blaze was mentioned, and the use of such storage furniture can lead to problems of damp and mould owing to lack of air circulation.

4.3.3 The reality is that most religious archives outside collecting institutions are held in far from ideal accommodation. The number of collections appearing to be seriously at risk because of their storage conditions is relatively small. Among them, 9% of archives had been affected by mould or damp within the last five years and some were identified as in need of urgent intervention because of problems with storage conditions. Although the headline figure may seem low, these are serious problems which can lead to permanent damage or even destruction of the historical records in question. Custodians responsible for the care of archives need to be aware of rapid or extreme fluctuations in temperature and relative humidity which may endanger their survival. Only 27% of archive-holding organisations responding monitor temperature and humidity levels in their storage areas

and only 31% have any form of environmental controls. Where controls are present, comments often indicated that these are ordinary heating systems set to provide a comfortable environment for residents or employees.

4.3.4 While some material will eventually be transferred through deposit to the more suitable conditions usually provided by collecting institutions, problems with storage and environmental conditions are particularly serious for organisations which permanently retain their archives. The latter make up some 48% of respondents. However, it is encouraging to note that a small number of these organisations which replied made it clear that they have taken, or are planning to take, steps to improve accommodation. These range from completely new facilities such as Brentwood Diocesan Archives which opened in 2005 and the Salvation Army International Heritage Centre, which hopes to move to new premises including a reading room and museum in 2011, to simple re-organisations of shelving to increase space. Also, a larger number of organisations have indicated in additional comments that improving storage conditions is a matter of priority, mainly because of a lack of space, but they do not have firm plans at present. Only 62% had expansion space to cater for future accruals, indicating their constant battle in many cases to house growing collections.

4.3.5 Our results do indicate that the improvement of accommodation for religious archives should be, and is viewed as, a matter of the first importance. But, the reality is that the vast majority of these organisations do not have the resources to provide and maintain the sort of conditions that would be found in a major collecting repository or to implement large-scale improvements, such as commissioning air conditioning or fire suppression systems. In many cases, it will be a question of trying to minimise the risks to these collections through actions by their owners or custodians where they remain in private custody. Training could be organised to assist custodians in identifying and managing risks to their archives. This could include provision of templates for, and encouragement to draw up, disaster plans, and subscription to salvage schemes run by specialist firms. Companies of this kind can rescue and treat material damaged by fire, flood, smoke or other hazards. Significant collections could also be protected if their owners or custodians join voluntary consortia run by major public repositories

to assist each other in the event of disasters affecting archival collections where practicable.

4.3.6 There is also a clear need to draw together advice and guidance for the implementation of small-scale and manageable solutions to help bodies who do not have expertise in this area to house their archival material in the best possible conditions. For instance, simple digital equipment to monitor temperature and relative humidity would alert custodians to levels and fluctuations which could place materials in danger. Boxing and packaging using archival-quality materials would mitigate some of the effects of unsatisfactory environmental conditions and may help to avoid expensive conservation bills in the future. This would require a greater outlay but where there are central archives for the national records of religious faiths, it might be possible to provide for bulk purchasing and resale to smaller religious bodies, a service which the Church of England Record Centre has in the past provided for Anglican bodies.

4.4 Access and cataloguing

4.4.1 Among archive holding institutions, 52% offer some degree of public access to their collections. As many others have also deposited material in public repositories, it is clear that there is a surprisingly high degree of access to much of this material provided as a privilege to researchers by the bodies concerned. This is a public benefit which deserves wide recognition. Many respondents view their archives as an important part of their own spirituality and as a tool to support the mission of their faith. They are committed to using archives to reach out to members of their own organisation, of their faith community and society as a whole. A wide range of respondents additionally mentioned some sort of outreach activity including putting on exhibitions, helping with celebrations for anniversaries, publishing editions of archive material, newsletters and articles and taking part in the work of historical societies. Roman Catholic religious orders are especially keen to be involved in this sort of activity, particularly where they have been engaged in the wider community through running schools and parishes. It is noticeable that where an organisation appears to view its archives as an intrinsic part of its identity and mission, the questionnaire answers reflect a corresponding commitment to their care and development.

4.4.2 Nevertheless, the exploitation of archives in a sustainable and controlled way often requires a commitment of time, resources and expertise that many organisations appear unable to make at present. Staffing levels were a concern for many respondents. Notably, 41% of archives are administered by volunteers, 31% by paid administrative staff of the organisation and only 28% by professional archivists, librarians or information managers. Currently, a small number of organisations report their inability to carry out some functions owing to inadequate staffing levels. In most cases, this involves a need to recruit a volunteer to start or complete cataloguing or digitisation projects but, in isolated instances, the person acting as archivist has no time to care for the archive or allow access to researchers. Although few organisations state that lack of funding is a direct threat to their archives, this is implicit in many of the comments made by respondents and indicated by the number of organisations which appear to be under threat of closure, removal (often to unknown premises) or restructuring.

4.4.3 Cataloguing to professional standards is vital if material is to be readily accessible both to its owners and anyone else with a research interest. The listing and exploitation of religious archives presents particular challenges in that they are written or recorded in a variety of languages and often refer to concepts, procedures, traditions and beliefs which are not widely understood outside the faith groups which created them. For instance, 53% of bodies which responded held material written in languages other than English. Often there will need to be some form of mediated access if such specialised material is to be appreciated by a wider audience. For this reason, those responsible for the cataloguing of religious archives will need a detailed knowledge of that particular faith, organisation or community and will in many cases be members of it, often working as volunteers. Most archival cataloguing is now done electronically using proprietary software and there is an increasing danger that privately held religious archives may get left behind, especially as such investment is costly and requires the development of specialist skills. Despite these challenges, there is a willingness on the part of religious organisations to invest time and money in listing their archives where they are able to do so. 75% of respondents holding

historical records have begun some form of cataloguing and 17% of these have fully listed their collections. Additionally, certain organisations commented that they would like to begin listing with some of these mentioning the creation of online catalogues as a priority. Of organisations which had begun some form of cataloguing, half were prepared to send lists to the National Register of Archives or the National Register of Archives (Scotland). The willingness among so many organisations to share information about their archival collections is most welcome.

4.4.4 Some respondents also mention digitisation as a method of improving access to their archives and are able, or would like to be able, to provide copies of their holdings online or on CD. Respondents mention projects at a variety of scales. The Donald Gee Centre is running a project with a commercial partner to digitise selected holdings. Bristol Hebrew Congregation have digitised the majority of their records and made them available through the Jewish Communities and Records UK section of the JewishGen website and several other synagogues appear to be planning or carrying out similar projects. However, some responses on this topic appear vague and mention needing to 'computerise' the records or 'put them on CD'. There may be a lack of appreciation of the potential problems associated with these approaches, where there are no long-term arrangements for the preservation of original records or, indeed, the electronic copies.

4.4.5 There is a need to provide more practical solutions for cataloguing and digitisation and to ensure that training aimed at non-professionals and volunteers is available so that they can apply their specialist knowledge to producing finding aids to a professional standard. Of course, there is a limit to what can be done given the time and financial limitations mentioned. However, in view of the public benefit that many privately-held religious archives provide, or have the potential to provide, where the necessary resources are available, there is a strong case for support of such private collections by grant-awarding bodies. It may be that this also offers another means by which religious institutions can engage more widely with the public and promote an appreciation of their distinctive achievements and roles.

5. Findings: personal papers

5.1 Religious archives drawn exclusively from official sources without the personal dimension would only provide a partial and distorted perspective of the religious, social and cultural history of the United Kingdom. There is a long tradition of drawing on the personal papers of individuals notable for their faith in the interpretation of our social, historical and cultural development. Consequently, in our supplementary survey of the dispositions made by faith leaders as to their own papers we have tried to gauge the likelihood that such source material will continue to be preserved in the future, although for the purposes of what was essentially a pilot project, it was only possible to approach an elite group within different faith traditions.

5.2 The continuity of this tradition is subject to two inter-related challenges. The digital records now being produced by individuals are much more vulnerable and problematic to retain for the duration of a lifetime and many respondents to the survey expressed both concern and a desire for advice as to how best to secure the preservation of their personal digital records including email. One wrote:

“As a keen researcher I have some concern about the amount of correspondence which has just been sent by email or copies held on computer. Advice is needed early in a career not just well into retirement.”

Another commented:

“The conservation, preservation and access to varieties of electronic and digital records presents significant problems. Is it safe to assume that appropriate provision will be made?”

Also, as a consequence of the move towards electronic communication, and accompanying social changes, traditional forms of self-expression such as letters, diaries and notebooks are becoming rarer. A potential gap is opening up in terms of the sources which will be available for future generations of researchers. Further effort will be needed to ensure that the private expression of religious activity, belief and practice is captured and secured for the future.

5.3 Our letter asking whether prominent religious figures had made dispositions about their personal papers was sent out to 690 individuals of whom 237 generously replied. This represents almost 30% of those approached. The returns to the survey inevitably reflect the narrow range of such figures for whom contact details are readily available. These were mainly derived from *Who's Who* 2010 and other publicly available directories.

5.4 A high proportion, 96 respondents (40% of the total who replied), have made, or intend to make, provision for the preservation of their personal papers. However this figure is largely represented by those respondents holding official positions in religious traditions with well-established record-keeping traditions such as Anglicans and Methodists. Further work may well be required to ensure that personal papers survive from other religious traditions where individuals do keep material of a personal nature without there being any obvious long-term homes for them.

5.5 A large number of respondents, 105 (44%), would welcome further general advice from the Religious Archives Group on its website about the preservation and care of personal papers. This demonstrates that there is an appetite for advice, particularly in relation to the preservation and management of digital records.

5.6 Altogether 75 respondents (32%) would welcome general advice within their own religious community. However, many of these respondents also welcomed the suggestion of advice from the Religious Archives Group and this suggests many individuals would take advice from both outside and within their own tradition. Clearly, both routes need to be pursued for maximum effect and to build on the corpus of written advice already produced by some faith groups. Some of these works are noted in the bibliography at the end of this report.

5.7 Another 75 respondents (over 32%) said they would not welcome further initiatives in respect of personal papers, but most of these respondents did not explain why they looked for no further advice. Interestingly, some commented that they did not think they had any personal records of historical significance worthy of preservation.

5.8 It is notable that 112 respondents (47%) made additional comments on the form and this shows the high level of interest attracted by the survey. Another respondent wrote:

“I welcome this initiative and wish that such advice had been available 17 years ago. I am aware of how many potentially important letters and documents have been lost and destroyed.”

Overall, the encouraging level of response to the survey and the interest in further guidance needs to be followed up. There is widespread appetite for guidance (76% of respondents) with particular demand for advice concerning the preservation and management of digital records (now the primary format) and for appraisal criteria to identify significant historical material.

5.9 Many faith leaders and figures appear to make a distinction between the records created in relation to their work, which they regard as institutional and belonging to their organisations, and their own

personal records which relate to their private lives and consequently are often considered by them to be of limited or of no historical interest. One dean of an Anglican cathedral told us:

“I’m not currently aware that I have anything remotely of interest to anyone but myself.”

A number of traditional office-holders also appear to be creating relatively little personal material. This may partly be a reflection of the increasingly managerial character of senior appointments in many religious traditions. Indeed, some of the most interesting material appears to be the creation of broadcasters and opinion-formers such as journalists and academics. It may also reflect the fact that discussion, debate and controversy is increasingly taking place within informal digital fora, including blogs and Twitter feeds. Digital material of this kind is not yet being systematically captured, although partial attempts to do so have begun.

5.10 It is important for advice to be given to record creators early in their career, especially in view of the vulnerability of digital material, and to develop an awareness of the importance of record-keeping as a resource for developing and protecting their own religious ministry. Ideally an information management element should form part of the training of those religious groups with distinct ministries or leaders in the context of spirituality, worship or pastoral care. While 40% of the respondents have made arrangements or intend to do so for disposing their personal papers, which is encouraging, the majority had not done so. Furthermore, there are some cases where an individual’s records have been subdivided by different phases of his or her career and consequently offered to different institutions. This has implications for the archival integrity of personal collections. Records of historical significance have been lost where guidance on appraisal and closure might have made a difference.

6. Case studies

The following examples illustrate the range of provision for religious archives across the United Kingdom. They are intended to show how different communities have tried to tackle the issues involved in caring for their historical records.

Merseyside Jewish Community Archives: using the facilities of a public repository while involving the local community

Liverpool Record Office holds the archives of the Merseyside Jewish Community from the eighteenth century to the present day, comprising some 250 collections. The records are of particular interest as Liverpool had the first organised Jewish community in the north of England, and until the mid-19th century it was the largest provincial Jewish community. They include material relating to welfare, Zionism, education, individual synagogues and the papers of prominent individuals. Catalogues of the material are available online and open up the content to a worldwide audience after a partnership project supported by external funding. Further information can be found by searching on www.communityarchives.org.

The Merseyside Jewish Community Archivist facilitates deposit of such material from local organisations and individuals. He helps to assess and sort them before they are deposited in the Record Office and listed by Record Office staff. This provides a useful model, showing how local communities can celebrate their own history and ensure that their archives are professionally cared for and, subject to any restrictions, made available for research.

The National Library of Wales: a national centre for housing and co-ordinating the care of religious records

The National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth houses possibly the largest archival collection of ecclesiastical records anywhere in Britain. As well as receiving deposits of administrative records of the Church in Wales, particularly the Representative Body, Governing Body and Bench of Bishops, the Library effectively acts as diocesan record office for all six Welsh dioceses, although it is now transferring parochial registers and records to appropriate county record offices. A substantial amount of additional material of Anglican interest is to be found among the Welsh Church Commission Records, the body that dealt with the transfer and disposal of Church property after disestablishment in 1920. The Presbyterian Church of Wales (the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists), like the Church in Wales, has as a matter of policy centralised its archives in the National Library. As far as other Nonconformist denominations are concerned, the Library holds records relating to Baptists, Congregationalists and Wesleyan Methodists, many of these relating to individual churches, meeting houses or chapels. In addition there are some unofficial deposits or donations of Unitarian records. Records have also been received from the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Cardiff and Diocese of Wrexham.

As a consequence of its wide-ranging holdings and national remit within Wales, the National Library is able to play a key role in advising different religious groupings on the care and disposition of their archives and to open up access to them through its cataloguing and conservation work.

The East London Mosque: keeping archives in-house

The origins of the East London Mosque go back exactly a century. In 1910 some notable Muslim figures decided to build a mosque in London and established the London Mosque Fund. Initially, a small room was hired for Friday prayers. In 1940 three houses were purchased in Commercial Road, London E1 and converted into a mosque. It was opened on 1 August 1941. Over the years many distinguished personalities were associated with the London Mosque Fund. Among them was Syed Ameer Ali, the first Indian Privy Counsellor, who was the Chairman of the London Mosque Fund Executive Committee until his death in 1928. The Aga Khan served as life President of the Board of Trustees. Both Abdullah Yusuf Ali and Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall, the famous translators of the Qur'an, were trustees of the Fund. There were also a large number of non-Muslims who realised that there was a pressing need for a Muslim place of worship in London and joined the struggle. These included Lord Lamington (d.1940) who became a Vice-Chairman of the London Mosque Fund. In 1975 the Greater London Council acquired the premises in Commercial Road under a compulsory purchase order and in 1982 work on the new mosque started and by 1985 the new East London Mosque was completed. This large, purpose-built mosque, complete with dome and minarets, soon became a landmark in London's East End. The adjacent new London Muslim Centre opened in June 2004.

The surviving archives include visitors' books, including the names of many distinguished public figures, photographs and other records which are currently being sorted. The visitors' books have been digitised to make them more widely available. The importance of the archives as an asset to assist in the centenary celebrations was realised as preparations were under way in 2009. In 2010, an academic was appointed to oversee these records and to ensure their care and preservation.

Douai Abbey Library and Archive: a new building to serve a monastic community and the wider public

Douai Abbey has developed new purpose-built library and archive accommodation as part of a major re-development programme. It was formally opened in September 2010, after a major public appeal. It houses the community's archives and associated school records, manuscript collection and other English Benedictine material. The National Archives was involved in advising on the new building and overall objectives of the project.

Previously, the important historical collection of books, manuscripts, archives and portraits, which the Abbey has accumulated, lacked suitable accommodation and adequate facilities for the monks and visiting researchers to undertake study and research. The Abbey also hopes that the library will offer other religious communities the opportunity to deposit their archives if necessary, although space for this purpose is limited. The library and archive attached to the English Benedictine Community of St Edmund, now at Douai Abbey, is what today survives from the first monastery established in Paris in 1615 by English exiles, from the monks' second monastery founded after the French Revolution in Douai, northern France, in 1817, and from the third monastery set up in 1903 at Woolhampton, where the monks preserved the name of the town with which they had been associated in France. The present collections illuminate the survival in the face of adversity of a Benedictine community and of the pursuit of learning and the preservation of a rich and varied cultural inheritance. The new library will not only serve the monastery, but will be open to the public and thus become a key resource in the monastery's provision of hospitality for its guests and visitors.

7. Conclusions

7.1 Religious archives, whether or not they are currently accessible for research, are important both to the communities and individuals responsible for their creation and the nation at large. The 2001 census suggested that three quarters of the population espoused some kind of religious belief or affiliation. Even where religious faith is rejected, religious culture, tradition and belief provides a touchstone for current intellectual debate and a sense of identity amongst all the home nations, and we have included collections relating to irreligion and secularism in our survey to complete the picture. Genealogical research is impossible without recourse to religious records particularly before the introduction of civil registration in the 19th century and so, even for those with no religious affiliation, the preservation of religious records is of much wider significance. Their interest extends far beyond the world of academic investigation. There are few areas of society which are not illuminated by such source material from gender studies to the growth of a pluralistic and tolerant society.

7.2 A strong network of national institutions exists which takes in the central records of many faith groups, but it is by no means comprehensive in its collecting. In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, national archives or libraries are able to perform this function, while in England provision is more diverse involving university and specialist repositories to a greater extent. They include important institutions funded by faith bodies themselves, such as Lambeth Palace Library and Friends' House Library. Similarly, while there is a network of local record offices covering the United Kingdom, many more recently established faith groups do not necessarily have links with them or prefer to keep their own archives. Indeed, the network of collecting institutions relies on religious organisations sharing the responsibility of caring for historical records on a partnership basis. The former would be overwhelmed by the potential volume of records to be housed if faith groups were no longer willing to undertake this task, which benefits

the wider community as well as themselves. The role of volunteers here is critical and the returns to our survey underline how much they, and other paid administrative staff, are doing to preserve this important part of our archival heritage.

7.3 The survey has brought us much clearer knowledge of the situation and challenges faced by those religious bodies which responded. A considerable amount of new information has been gathered to add to, or expand, that already to be found in the National Register of Archives (maintained by The National Archives at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/nra). It has underlined the importance and scale of what is being privately-held, but also the difficulty of identifying and engaging with custodians who are not part of existing support networks and may as yet have little understanding of the wider interest in what they may hold or of managing records to ensure their future survival as they pass out of current use. It has underlined, as have previous surveys referred to in the origins and genesis section of this report, that there is much work which needs to be done. By pooling this information with that from previous surveys and published information and the priorities emerging from other national initiatives and programmes, we can construct an overview to inform future action.

7.4 The evidence we have gathered shows that despite the richness of surviving archives ranging from the medieval period to the late 20th century, much is being lost or is at risk. Few surviving collections remaining in the hands of religious institutions benefit from purpose-built or suitably adapted accommodation. Only 44% of respondents are able to provide storage with all rooms protected against fire, flooding and theft, often of a very basic kind, while 39% have no such protection. A tenth of institutions have been affected by mould or damp in the last five years, while only a quarter of custodians monitor environmental conditions and only a third have any sort of climatic controls to reduce the chances of damage to their

historical records. Action of both a strategic and practical nature is needed at both national and local level to preserve this wealth of written records and other material on newer media and to prevent gaps opening up through the loss of digital records, particularly in the case of individuals. There can be no complacency about the survival of this archival heritage, particularly when it struggles for resources within self-funding religious bodies in a difficult economic climate.

7.5 Much effort has been expended by religious bodies themselves to secure this archival inheritance but their voluntary efforts are often under-resourced and unrecognised. Frequently, those struggling to maintain these assets have no access to professional advice and easily understood guides to good practice which would give them a better chance of success. The surveys of both institutional and personal papers reveal a great desire for help in this form either from bodies such as the Religious Archives Group or produced within specific religious traditions for their own benefit. Already there has been considerable progress in this sphere in terms of guidance produced within different faith communities, notably on the preservation of Anglican, Methodist and Quaker records of historical interest, but this useful foundation needs to be built on more extensively. Further guidance for the records of the Church in Wales is in prospect. Reliance on volunteers and the efforts of paid administrative staff represents an important investment of time and effort but support and training is needed to ensure that their efforts have maximum impact and follow best practice. In the context of the promotion of a 'Big Society' which encourages communities to shape their own destinies, religious groups have always been to the fore in terms of self-help, and they should be further empowered through greater opportunities for such non-professional volunteers to participate in relevant training programmes and opportunities. This would help address the desire expressed by many respondents for further help and advice on a practical level.

7.6 Some sixty years ago, the Pilgrim Trust's survey of a range of Anglican records in cathedral, diocesan and other offices in another age of austerity demonstrated how such an exercise could be a catalyst for change. The Trust's survey provided evidence for the need to invest in a large number of cathedral libraries and archives, many of which were fitted out at that time with their current facilities. It was also followed by the deposit of further official material in newly-established local record offices which were designated as diocesan record offices, thereby safeguarding the future of these collections in different ways. A number of other religious groupings have since brokered relationships with repositories, often based in universities or specialist institutions, to provide care for their records or have set up their own in-house arrangements. The challenge now, in 2010, is to try to ensure that the much broader and more diverse religious archives sector which has emerged since the Second World War has sustainable arrangements in place to preserve this priceless legacy. We applaud efforts that have been made to rescue material at risk, such as those of the Hindu Studies Centre at Oxford, but we are well aware that appropriate storage and (where appropriate) access facilities to sustain such efforts or to ensure survival with the bodies that created such records do not come cheaply. We note the need to provide support for dedicated but non-professional custodians (who formed the vast majority of the respondents to our survey) in monitoring and managing collections in less than ideal accommodation. It is also important that collecting strategies are in place to ensure that there is a suitable home for every religious archive which finds itself in need of one.

7.7 Our investigation ranged from collections of global significance, such as the archives of Canterbury Cathedral, to those of local faith communities such as mosques and gurdwaras established in the late 20th century. They demonstrate how great the challenge is in relation to preserving and interpreting collections of considerable diversity owing to the multiplicity of language skills alone which are required, from medieval

Latin and Celtic to Urdu, Thai and Pali. However, there have been a number of innovative schemes to make such material known to a wider audience, some using awards from the Heritage Lottery Fund and other grant-giving bodies. The outreach activities involving Rastafarians in the West Midlands have provided a particularly notable example.

7.8 Not all archival collections can be made available to the general public or even (owing to the particular constraints of some religious institutions) to academic researchers on a regular basis. However, they still need to be catalogued for their custodians to know what is in them in order that their value can be unlocked for the bodies which created the records. This is particularly true of religious communities living apart from the world. In such situations grants from public and charitable bodies including the National Cataloguing Grants Scheme for archives are not normally available to undertake such work because the benefit is private rather than public. However, initiatives within faith communities to catalogue such material with appropriate professional training and support should be commended and encouraged wherever possible. Without such efforts, the contents of the archives will remain unknown and therefore unappreciated by owners and potential users and these important resources continue to be at risk while their intellectual content remains uncharted. Many religious institutions do not currently have the financial resources to undertake computerised cataloguing with all the benefits in terms of greater control over, and security for, their collections and ability to exchange and manipulate information.

7.9 One striking result of the survey was the lack of appreciation in many religious quarters of what an asset archives could be in terms of the core objectives of such organisations including mission, outreach and renewal. Some had been destroyed and the custodians of others were struggling to obtain resources and funding for their activities in the face of financial constraints. Rather than being seen as in competition with other activities such as worship and mission, we believe this material should be regarded as an asset to be exploited by the creators, just as businesses use their archives to promote and enhance their activities and to provide information and input to future initiatives and a positive portrayal of their corporate

identity. The Building on History project, a partnership between the Diocese of London, King's College London, the Open University and Lambeth Palace Library has shown how archival resources can be used to write parish histories, understand the local communities within which Anglican parishes lie and develop mission action plans. Similarly, copies of the historical records of the Church Missionary Society have been used to support the current work of the Society at its Crowther Centre in Oxford. We are also heartened by the interest of the Association of Muslim Researchers in our survey whose members have appreciated the importance of engaging with wider archival agendas in order that each community has the material to celebrate and affirm its own identity within the context of the United Kingdom today.

7.10 A handful of institutions have not realised the potential value of their records and have simply shredded them, apparently without formal appraisal, as space ran out. Good records management, allowing for the orderly destruction of classes of material with no longer-term evidential or other value when no longer required for current business, while selecting material of enduring significance for permanent preservation, is practised by many larger religious bodies. The Church of England has a strong operation in this area. However all religious bodies can improve their efficiency by exercising appropriate control over such material. The records management guidance produced by specific faith groups could usefully be rolled out more widely to promote their archival health.

7.11 Another issue highlighted in the course of our enquiry was the lack of suitable homes for the religious archives of institutions and individuals no longer able to look after this material themselves. Religious activity has not only created social capital but archival capital on a vast scale from historical records of national institutions to local places of worship and religious charities and institutions. Where such records are not covered by the legal controls existing within particular churches or other faith bodies, it is much harder to protect historical material if the creators can no longer care for it. This also applies to individuals who do not have any obvious home for their papers. There are gaps in collecting activity where records do not fall within the geographical scope of local record offices or the interests of university and other specialist repositories.

Currently, for example, no collecting body has a brief to take in the records generated by churches in the Orthodox tradition. The issue is one where national co-ordinating bodies such as the Archives and Records Association, the British Records Association, the Religious Archives Group and The National Archives need to take action.

7.12 Many faith leaders and figures appear to make a distinction between the records created by their work and mission, which they regard as institutional and belonging to their organisations, and any other personal records which relate to their private lives. A significant proportion of those surveyed believe the latter material is of limited or no historical interest. A number of traditional office-holders appear to be creating relatively little personal material and this may reflect the increasingly managerial character of senior appointments. Indeed, some of the most interesting material is apparently being created by broadcasters and opinion-formers such as journalists and academics. There is widespread appetite for advice with 72% of respondents wanting help either from the Religious Archives Group or from their own faith community. We noted a particular demand for advice concerning the preservation and management of digital records (now the primary format) and for appraisal criteria for identifying historically significant material. It is becoming more important for advice to be given to record creators early in their careers in view of the vulnerability of digital material, and to encourage an awareness of the importance of record-keeping as a means of reflecting on, and developing, their own ministry where this is appropriate within their faith traditions.

7.13 The fact that only 40% of respondents have made arrangements or intend to do so for the disposition of their personal papers opens up a potential gap in the future historical record. Furthermore, there are some cases where an individual's records have been sub-divided according to the different phases of their careers and consequently offered to different institutions. This has implications for the archival integrity of personal collections of papers and other related material. Records of historical significance have been lost owing to the lack of guidance and awareness of the possibilities for closure where they

remain sensitive during the lifetime of the creator of an archive or individuals represented within it. It would be unfortunate if the well-documented loss of Nonconformists' personal papers from the 18th to the early 20th centuries were to be replicated on a much wider front.

7.14 In visits associated with the survey, it was also noted that a good deal of material needed passive preservation measures such as boxing and packaging or active remedial conservation. Many religious bodies would benefit from the assessment of their needs using the British Library Preservation Advisory Centre's Assessment Survey, but the cost of undertaking this is likely to be too high for most such institutions. While the National Manuscripts Conservation Trust has assisted many owners of historical records, with some assistance from the Pilgrim Trust, it too has had to restrict its grants to take account of the availability of access and suitable storage to prevent subsequent deterioration.

7.15 If we are to preserve this heritage, it is necessary to engage support and mobilise resources across all faith communities in the United Kingdom with their consent and co-operation. Accordingly, we have drawn up a number of recommendations to address the needs of religious archives as revealed by our survey. They involve matters of storage, listing, access, preservation and conservation, development and digitisation. How these might be implemented will be the subject of further consultation. Our report is not simply intended as another survey of the archival scene, but as an invitation to action which will be sent to leaders of faith groups and other key figures for their consideration.

8. Recommendations

These recommendations are addressed to all those with an interest in religious archives including owners, custodians, academic and other researchers, funding bodies, heritage organisations, policy makers and key figures involved in the wider faith and archival communities.

8.1 Strategic recommendations

8.1.1 Records worthy of preservation have sometimes been destroyed or neglected as they passed out of current use because their owners did not understand their value, or lacked room for their proper storage and did not know whom to call upon for advice. Every effort should be made to encourage their retention and preservation where they have historical, evidential or wider cultural value. Where this is impossible for the body concerned, efforts should be made to find a home either with another better equipped body within the same faith tradition or with a collecting institution which can offer professional standards of care, whichever is more appropriate in the circumstances.

8.1.2 The National Archives should continue to encourage strategies which ensure that the widest possible range of religious material survives in accordance with its existing initiatives in this area (www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/information-management/policies/collection-strategies.htm). Gaps in coverage of the religious sector among archive collecting institutions should be tackled by the relevant collecting bodies. The Historical Manuscripts Commissioner (the Chief Executive of The National Archives), in consultation with the Lord Chancellor's Advisory Council on National Records and Archives, should co-ordinate discussions between relevant bodies to look for solutions commanding support among interested parties. These include owners, users, custodians and advisory bodies within the sector. Collecting policies should seek to be more dynamic to ensure that the full breadth of religious experience is captured and not just the formal or official records of well-established religious bodies and office-holders.

8.1.3 The networks in place to support those working in the sphere of religious archives should be strengthened and fostered. This is a cost-effective way of ensuring that the limited resources which can be deployed in support of private archives have the greatest impact. National and professional bodies within the wider archival community should look at ways in which they can support such networks which are vital in providing self-help and the sharing of best practice among those outside the publicly funded sector.

8.1.4 Progress in digitising the historical records of faith communities should be further investigated, as this can be particularly important in opening up such heritage assets where there are difficulties in allowing physical access to the originals and an alternative to traditional methods of publication. Where there is widespread genealogical interest there may be scope for commercial digitisation deals for pre-20th century records. The National Archives should offer advice to the central bodies of faith groups which request guidance in this area that equally reflects the need to ensure the sustainability of such digital assets.

8.1.5 Those with significant personal papers of religious relevance should be assisted in the management and preservation of this material, particularly in respect of records in digital form whose survival is often problematic and where regular deposits may need to be made before the end of their active service or lives. Different faiths through their representative or governing bodies should be encouraged where appropriate to promote good personal record-keeping as a potential resource for themselves and their communities in terms of witness, mission and action and, in the long term, as a spiritual and cultural asset. Faith groups may wish to consider how this might be incorporated in the training and development of their members.

8.2 Funding

8.2.1 It should be recognised by funding bodies and collecting institutions within the public sector that religious bodies are caring for archival material at their own expense which might otherwise fall as a charge on publicly funded archive repositories when their resources are under heavy pressure. Both are urged therefore to be supportive of privately held archives of a religious origin, in terms of financial assistance (in the case of the former) or advice and encouragement (where repositories are concerned) in order to ensure their long-term survival. While it may not be possible directly to grant-aid the archives of religious bodies to which there is no or little public access, there are often intermediary institutions through which help can be channelled. In particular, the digitisation of material to be placed on faith-based web sites and the financing of guidance, training workshops and advice for dissemination within different faith groups would seem to have clear public advantages.

8.2.2 Where collaborative ventures are formed to provide wider benefits, especially those that involve partnerships between private archives and the public sector, grant-awarding bodies should take into account their strategic utility and wider benefits. Examples include the partnerships established between the University of Southampton and the Jewish community, many of whose institutional and personal archives are deposited there, and the John Rylands University Library of Manchester and Dr Williams' Library, which both provide homes for important Nonconformist historical records in partnership with particular churches. Within individual religious groupings, the consortium for conservation purposes between Lambeth Palace Library, the Church of England Record Centre and Westminster Abbey, is an innovative example of self-help and using expensive facilities to maximum effect.

8.2.3 The National Archives' Funding and Development Manager's ability to encourage and assist the preparation of funding bids from religious organisations should be more widely promoted where public or lottery funding is acceptable to them. Custodians of religious archives should also be encouraged to apply to the National Cataloguing Grants Scheme and the National Manuscripts Conservation Trust for assistance where they can meet the eligibility criteria.

8.3 Advocacy

8.3.1 There should be high-level advocacy to persuade religious bodies and leading individuals within faith communities to value their own historical records as a resource for their mission and activities and encourage them to celebrate their identity and achievements. The *Building on History* project has shown how this can be done by the Diocese of London, in partnership with King's College London and the Open University, in the context of a knowledge-transfer initiative. The celebrations to mark the 350th anniversary of the readmission of the Jews to England in 2005 also show how communities can benefit from a strong sense of pride in their history, along with the exhibition accompanying the re-opening of the Jewish Museum in London. So do the 400th anniversary celebrations for Lambeth Palace Library in 2010, which have drawn a much wider audience to appreciate the treasures and written records held there in one of the oldest libraries in the United Kingdom. But smaller-scale events marking even 25th and 50th anniversaries can be equally important in raising the profile of specific organisations, as the Pilsdon Community, which helps people to rebuild their lives after a crisis, found when celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2008.

8.3.2 The Religious Archives Group should explore how its own website can more effectively provide a portal to religious archives and advice and guidance in relation to them. It should continue to work in partnership with others to find further ways of promoting the historical

records generated by faith communities in the United Kingdom. It is well-placed to lobby for their better care, utilisation and appreciation in conjunction with other archival bodies such as the Archives and Records Association and British Records Association.

8.3.3 The National Archives should, where requested, engage with faith groups in the production of guidance as part of the discharge of its advisory role in relation to private archives.

8.4 Cross-sectoral collaboration

8.4.1 The archival community should work with other bodies, particularly those concerned with the built heritage, to achieve co-operation where it would benefit both sectors. Architectural and photographic records and building accounts of places of worship are essential to the understanding of these structures where they are of historical importance, for example. The previous English Heritage scheme to provide plan chests and packaging for architectural archives in cathedrals is one which might be more widely applicable if funding streams again become available. All religious bodies should be encouraged to consider what provision they are making for their historical records.

8.4.2 Universities with religious studies or theology faculties and libraries with substantial holdings of archives and manuscripts on religious subjects should be encouraged to engage with any further initiatives to underpin and strengthen religious archives in the wake of this survey. This will help to ensure that such collections are valued and appreciated particularly through their use in knowledge transfer and research projects with wide impact. Such engagement would be consistent with government policy, as set out in *Archives for the 21st Century* (2009).

8.5 Good governance through best practice in record-keeping

8.5.1 Guidance should be produced in relation to both institutional and personal papers in line with the needs and aspirations of respondents to the survey, and issued under the auspices of faith groups or the Religious Archives Group itself, whichever is most acceptable, where agreement is forthcoming. This advice should be generic, but be easily adaptable to the culture and organisation of different faith groups, so that it can be widely disseminated.

8.5.2 The archives of the future can only be formed if good record-keeping practices are followed in relation to current records. The systematic management of current material is necessary for the formation of an archival record which can be used to defend legal rights and support the business and other mission and promotional activities of religious organisations, particularly in terms of digital records. Although this survey was concerned only with historical records, the wholesale destruction of older records by certain bodies without apparent regard to retention and appraisal principles could lead to future problems. Encouragement should be given by the Charities Commission (and its sister bodies elsewhere in the United Kingdom) to best practice in this field as a means of meeting the requirements for accountability under the Charities Act 2006 which now applies to almost all religious bodies. We commend the good practice fostered through the establishment of close links between records management and archiving in larger religious bodies.

8.6 Future initiatives and research

8.6.1 An archival culture should also be encouraged within religious groups established in the United Kingdom relatively recently to ensure that their distinctive contribution to national life is not lost. This must ensure that adequate mechanisms are available to record their experiences, particularly as they may be increasingly available only in non-paper, and especially digital formats. The issue requires further investigation which the Religious Archives Group might take forward, particularly in relation to patterns of record-keeping and capturing events and activities within different communities. If such material cannot be easily incorporated in the National Register of Archives, it could be presented on community archives or faith websites.¹¹

8.6.2 The inability to survey the dispositions of many religious leaders with regard to their personal papers beyond the restricted circles covered by published directories points to an obvious area for further action. This is especially important in the light of the positive response of those who did respond. The co-operation of experts with personal contacts in this field will be sought by The National Archives to try to engage with a wider range of religious leaders.

8.6.3 Attempts to raise the profile of religious archives, which have not commanded the same attention as literary and political material in the recent past, should continue. A wide range of tools might be used, ranging from websites to full exhibitions, in whatever form is appropriate to different faith communities.

8.6.4 Case studies of religious record-keeping should be posted on the Religious Archives Group's website to show possible models which different communities may find useful.

8.7 Implementation

8.7.1 Publicly funded repositories are urged to ensure that their holdings of religious records are made fully accessible for learning and the enrichment of society and expanded in line with the religious profile of the communities they serve, especially in the case of local record offices. This would be in line with the policy aims set out in *Archives for the 21st Century* (2009), and its attendant action plan.

8.7.2 There should be wide-ranging consultation with the various interest groups identified in this report to determine how the present recommendations might best be delivered and how they may command support. The Historical Manuscripts Commissioner, taking advice from the relevant sub-committee of the Lord Chancellor's Advisory Council on National Records and Archives, should, if possible, convene these, as with previous strategic initiatives. The Archives and Records Association, British Records Association and Religious Archives Group, among others, should be involved in this process.

8.7.3 The National Archives, the Archives and Records Association, the British Records Association, Religious Archives Group and other bodies and key collecting institutions with a role in relation to this report should be asked to consider and respond formally to it. Responses might then provide the basis of future planning for the support of religious archives.

8.7.4 There should be a progress report by the Religious Archives Group on all the actions it has taken following its conference in 2007 on 'The State of Religious Archives in the UK today'. This report would embrace other initiatives besides the Group's participation in the present survey, including any which might stem directly from the survey.

¹¹ See www.communityarchives.org.uk

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RAS 2010/01

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