

# **A sense of sexual community and history across time: Irish Queer and LGBT archives**

Gerard Morgan

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Supervisor: Dr Clare Thornley

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'I declare that this dissertation that I have submitted to Dublin Business School for the award of MSc in Information and Library Management is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated, where it is clearly acknowledged by references. Furthermore, this work has not been submitted for any other degree.'

Signed: Gerard Morgan

Student Number: 10506783

Date: 26<sup>th</sup> August 2020

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## Abstract

This study examines the status of LGBTQ+ archives in Ireland, conducting qualitative semi-structured interviews with 4 people involved in such archives, in various capacities over several years; founding and maintaining archives, negotiating partnerships with state institutions and continuing to consult with these, or working within institutions, where there have been efforts to expand upon collections or initiate projects to increase LGBTQ+ representation. The results illustrate difficulties encountered by community archives, often volunteer-run and lacking resources, and the value of creating networks locally and internationally, to develop practices and establish models for access and preservation. Findings also reveal frictions that can result from community archives entering relationships with institutions, highlighting a need for continued engagement to avoid misrepresentation and misinterpretation, and ensure continued accessibility, while also identifying limitations within institutions themselves. The results were analysed in the context of a literature review which examined the experiences of such archives in other countries. The research expands the knowledge and understanding of the experiences of LGBTQ+ archives in Ireland.

## Introduction

This research seeks to understand the changing place and/or nature of LGBTQ+ archives in Ireland, from their origins as community collections and sometimes private collections, through to the eventual establishment of relationships with more mainstream and state institutions, and in so doing attempts to gain an insight into the factors that brought about those changes and to illuminate the influence these collections themselves may have had in hastening that transition, by speaking to the people who were directly involved along the way, (and in some cases, continue to play a significant role).

Further, this study explores the broader interest taken in LGBTQ+ histories and experiences in Ireland in recent years, a process perhaps accelerated by the Marriage Equality Referendum of 2015, (“on 22 May 2015 a referendum took place in Ireland to amend the Constitution over the legalisation of same-sex marriage; 62.07% of the electorate voted in favour of the amendment.” (*RTÉ Archives*, 2020)), the success of which was arguably in turn influenced by the recognition afforded LGBTQ+ history and heritage in Ireland by the very public acceptance of the Irish Queer Archive (IQA) into a state institution such as the National Library of Ireland (NLI).

### *Background*

The focus of this study is LGBTQ+ archives in the Republic of Ireland. Two such archives are the Irish Queer Archive (Cartlann Aerach na hÉireann) and the Cork LGBT Archive. The foundation stories and histories of these archives share many similarities with several such international archives explored in preparation for this research; for example, the core of the Cork LGBT Archive is made up of the private collection of one man, who has been compiling it since the 1970s (*About · Cork LGBT Archive*, 2020). The archive itself was

founded by one woman, who has also been responsible for developing its digital archive (*Queer activism and building the Cork LGBT Archive, 2020*).

In common with the Hall-Carpenter Archives (HCA) in London, which in an earlier form (as part of the Gay Monitoring and Archive Project, founded by the Campaign for Homosexual Equality, or CHE), was partly based on a press-cuttings service (Donnelly, 2008), the Press Clippings Service of Gay Community News (GCN) also forms a substantial part of the Irish Queer Archive (*Catch up on GCN's In And Out Digital Festival with this round up of past events, 2020*). Likewise, just as the HCA began as a community-based archive in the London Lesbian and Gay Centre but is now based at London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), both IQA and Cork LGBT Archive have established relationships with state institutions, the National Library of Ireland (NLI) in the case of the former, and the Digital Repository of Ireland (DRI) and Cork Public Museum in the case of the latter, in order to pursue longer term preservation and digitization of the contents of their collections, a pattern witnessed in many such archives worldwide, though to different degrees, in part due to continued distrust of such institutions among some community archives, often in relation to concerns regarding misrepresentation, misinterpretation, or issues of access to the content (as expressed by almost all participants in interviews conducted for this study), in part due to funding and other resource issues. (Bettine and Mattock, 2019), (Madden, 2013), (Parris, 2005, citing Thistlethwaite, 1995 & 1998), (Wakimoto *et al.*, 2013)

Founded in 1997, “from pre-existing collections held since 1974 by the Irish Gay Rights Movement, Sexual Liberation Movement and the National LGBT Federation”, (*Irish Queer Archive, 2020*), the Irish Queer Archive (IQA) was donated to the National Library of Ireland (NLI) in 2008, and the transfer of these materials to an institutional home was

considered to be a milestone in the recognition of Irish LGBTQ+ histories as part of a broader Irish history; in the words of Irish gay author Colm Tóibín on the occasion of the donation, the acceptance of the archive was an acknowledgement of "the history of gay women and men" and "the importance of our story as part of the national story." (Kirwan, 2009) (Madden, 2013)

The transfer of the IQA to NLI was the culmination of nearly a decade's worth of ministrations by the IQA Working Group, (convened in 2001 by NLGF, the National Lesbian & Gay Federation, now NXF (Kirwan, 2009)), with the chief aims of locating a more permanent home for the IQA, and safeguarding the materials therein. This working group counted among its number activists, academics, archivists and librarians (Kirwan, 2009).

In 2019 the Cork LGBT Archive was announced as the winner of the first Digital Repository of Ireland (DRI) Community Archives Scheme, granting the archive associate membership free for one year. (*Cork LGBT Archive winners of DRI Community Archives Scheme | Digital Repository Ireland*, 2019) Responding to the news, Cork LGBT Archive commented that "for community archives ... this provides the best option for ensuring the long-term digital preservation of our collections", while highlighting the significance of DRI's decision in recognising the importance of preserving an often previously hidden section of Irish history and heritage, and in doing so reflecting the diversity of that history. For their part, DRI expressed their esteem for the considerable work that had already been put into the Cork LGBT archive, noting it's "social relevance, not only for LGBT community activism but also for other social change movements and Irish history in general," (ibid) while also drawing attention to the notable fact that "it is ready for ingestion, with regard to well-prepared metadata and licences." (ibid) Cork LGBT Archive also entered negotiations with

Cork Public Museum around taking in the archives physical collection, as part of the latter's continued commitment to expanding exhibition and representation of Cork culture and community. (*Cork City Council, 2020*).

Also in 2019, the National Museum of Ireland – Museum of Decorative Arts & History at Collins Barracks announced its participation in Pride celebrations for the first time by unveiling a new series of 'artefacts derived from recent contemporary collecting' alongside a 'Rainbow Revolution' trail consisting of photos and archival video footage 'highlighting key moments in Irish LGBTI+ history'. (*Corporate & Media | Media Releases | National Museum of Ireland, 2019*) National Museum of Ireland (NMI) states that: "This was very much a collaborative community-focused project to start the introduction of LGBTI+ history at the NMI." Building on this foundation, the museum has initiated an "LGBTI+ Living Archive Project", with the aim of creating "a rich permanent oral history record of Irish LGBTI+ history." (*National Museum of Ireland, 2020*)

Archival documentary footage from public service broadcaster RTÉ also featured as part of this exhibit. Paraic Kerrigan, (2019) has researched the role of documentaries in Irish broadcasting, citing two programmes in particular, Tuesday Report (1977) and Access Community Television (1984), both produced by RTÉ, as examples of the documentary forms potential as a 'platform for advocacy', identifying two key episodes on the subject of homosexuality in Ireland as having "attempted to normalise social attitudes towards queer identities."

P.J. McDonagh, (2017) also highlights the importance of the visibility of Irish homosexuals on Irish television, referring to the very first appearance of a gay male couple in 1980. This interview features as part of the 'Rainbow Revolution' trail at Collins Barracks,

as does Edmund Lynch's ongoing documentary project, *A Different Country: LGBT Oral History* (2013). Lynch worked as a sound technician in RTÉ and was one of the founding members of the Irish Gay Rights Movement (IGRM). (Kerrigan, 2019) Lynch was also responsible for putting together a document on 'Gay and Lesbian Programmes and Titles in the RTÉ Visual Archive 1974-2001'. (*Catch up on GCN's In And Out Digital Festival with this round up of past events*, 2020)

### *Interest in LGBTQ+ collections*

2020 marks the fifth anniversary of the Marriage Equality referendum in the Republic of Ireland, the success of which, according to Casey, (2018), "highlighted the underdeveloped historiography of the Irish LGBT movement." Whether the referendum was a driver for renewed investigation or if it simply ignited a previously dormant desire for information on the matter, or awakened a heretofore lack of awareness, it is certainly true that in the wake of the enormous social change that has occurred in this country in recent years, the subject of LGBTQ+ experience in Ireland has become an area of interest.

In February 2020, over 6,000 photographs of the Yes Equality campaign for Marriage Equality were added to the National Library of Ireland's digital archive as part of its 'Digital Pilots' project, "which seeks to expand the way it collects and provides access to stories and enables content like videos and digital documents to be added to its collection." (Bowers, 2020)

The announcement of this donation coincided with the launch of a planned programme of LGBTI+ events due to have begun in May 2020, "highlighting the Library's extensive collections and drawing on its Irish Queer Archive," (*National Library of Ireland*,

2020) prior to the closure of the National Library of Ireland prompted by the outbreak of the coronavirus, Covid-19, preventing such events from going ahead.

Central to this programme was to have been an exhibition of the Christopher Robson Photographic Collection in the National Photographic Archive in Temple Bar. (ibid) The National Library's National Photographic Archive had been presented with the Christopher Robson Photographic Collection in December 2015. The majority of some 2,000 slides comprised images mostly taken at LGBT Pride events between 1992 and 2007. (Johnston, 2015)

This was in addition to the donation of the work of BeLonG To, the national organisation supporting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI+) young people in Ireland, to the National Library following an exhibition of photographs and short films as part of Dublin Pride 2014 at the National Photographic Archive. At the time it was announced that this collection would join the Irish Queer Archive at the National Library of Ireland "as valued documentations of Irish society." (*National Library of Ireland*, 2014)

The National Library of Ireland officially accepted the Irish Queer Archive (IQA) in 2008, (Madden, 2013), containing the "most comprehensive collection of material for the study of homosexuality in Ireland." (NLI Annual Report, 2008). The IQA was an initiative of the National Gay Federation (NGF), (Casey, 2018), itself formed from the remnants of the Irish Gay Rights Movement (IGRM) (Kerrigan, 2019). The library described this acquisition as one of its 'headline additions' of 2008.

Speaking at the announcement of the upcoming LGBTI+ programme of events in February 2020, Director of the National Library Dr Sandra Collins stated that this reflects NLI's "ongoing commitment to diversity and inclusion. They offer us all a moment to reflect

on the road travelled by the LGBTI+ community and society at large since the decriminalisation of homosexuality in 1993". (*National Library of Ireland, 2020*)

### *Rationale for research*

In 'Queering Ireland, in the Archives', Ed Madden (2013) describes the transfer of the Irish Queer Archive (IQA), "a community-based archive of lesbian and gay historical and cultural materials", as both "literal and symbolic", as it marked "the importance of lesbian and gay history to the nation's history". While acknowledging that this transfer "confers legitimacy and authority", however, Madden also expresses concerns about issues of access and suggests that such a transfer, of a formerly community-based archive to an institutional home, calls into question the very "nature and purpose of queer archives." (Ed Madden, 2013)

In response to the recent Covid-19 pandemic, GCN (Gay Community News), a free print magazine, and itself an initiative of the NGF (now NXF), launched an online *In and Out Digital Festival of LGBT+ Creativity*. During a recent 'Town Hall Talks presents the Irish Queer Archive Uncovered', historian Dr Mary McAuliffe and LGBTI+ rights advocate and founder of the IQA Tonie Walsh discussed, among other things, the fact that the IQA at NLI has thus far been semi-catalogued and much of the material remains to be digitised. (*Catch up on GCN's In And Out Digital Festival with this round up of past events, 2020*)

Among recent research in the field of information and library management, there has been exploration of what (if any) policies are in place regarding the provision of content and services to LGBTQ+ patrons in public libraries, and if strategies for such collection development are being created or implemented therein (Goodwin, 2018; Hicks and Kerrigan, 2020). In their paper on 'An intersectional quantitative content analysis of the

LGBTQ+ catalogue in Irish public libraries' (2020), Hicks and Kerrigan also found that studies undertaken primarily in the US and Canada have shown "a decline in LGBTQ+ usage of library resources over time."

As the IQA and Cork LGBT Archive have entered collaborative relationships with more mainstream institutions, and other such institutions seek to establish initiatives of their own in order to highlight a diverse history and heritage which too often previously remained hidden, it seems pertinent to examine the value, significance and place, both past and present, of Queer and LGBT archival resources, both for the LGBTQ+ communities they first sought to serve, and whose experience and existence they sought to describe and bear witness to, and for the wider society.

The aim of this research is to explore the experiences of such archives in Ireland, tracing their evolution through to a consideration of the factors that influenced the forging of partnerships with more mainstream institutions, investigating the practices employed in preserving and making these materials accessible up to the present time, while examining the issues encountered in the establishment of relationships, and the challenges faced in attempting to initiate new projects within such institutions.

As such, the study will ask:

*What is the current status of Queer and LGBT archives in Ireland?*

In exploring the experiences of such archives, the research will seek to examine the following:

- 1. What are the challenges faced by such archives in making their materials accessible while ensuring their long-term preservation, and how have they tackled these?*
- 2. What are the issues that can arise when LGBTQ+ community archives become involved or establish relationships with state institutions, or when state institutions attempt to initiate their own LGBTQ+ related collections?*

## Literature review

### Introduction.

The literature review will provide an exploration of previous research into the area of LGBTQ+ archives, identifying and describing features that are often common to such community archives. This research draws on the definition of community by Flinn *et al.* (2009) as “any manner of people who come together and present themselves as such, and a ‘community archives’ [as] the product of their attempts to document the history of their commonality.” (Caswell *et al.*, 2018; Poole, 2020) Bettine and Mattock (2019) note that a range of terms have been applied to signify a community collection (as distinct from an institutional one): “independent, informal, ethnic, identity-based, community-based, community-led, grassroots and radical”; they themselves characterise community archives “as archival projects initiated, controlled and maintained by the members of a self-defined community.” Further to this, Wakimoto *et al.*, (2013) draw a distinction between “community archives” and those that are “community-based”, declaring that the latter are “also housed within community settings as opposed to mainstream institutional settings.” (Cooper, 2016)

In using the terms 'Queer' and 'LGBT' to describe certain archives, the study follows from the naming practices of such archives in Ireland, including the Irish Queer Archive (IQA) currently based in the National Library of Ireland (NLI), and the Cork LGBT Archive, digitised in 2019. National Museum of Ireland (NMI) has recently initiated its own LGBTI+ Living Archive Project. In other instances, LGBTQ+ is used. Where other terms are used in the literature or by interview participants, they are directly quoted.

A number of key themes were identified in the literature review, highlighting concerns that are relevant to this research; recurring topics regarding queer archives, their nature and purpose, issues of autonomy and control, sustainability, lack of resources and funding, tensions or friction that can arise between community-based archives and more mainstream institutions, and the effect this can have on the establishment and evolution of potentially beneficial partnerships between them.

Attention is drawn to the fact that often, such archives have been borne out of personal collections; indeed, in the case of the Sexual Minorities Archive (SMA) in Western Massachusetts, founder Ben Alwin operates it out of his own house (Watts, 2018), and the core of the Cork LGBT Archive is made up of the private collection of one man, who has been compiling it since the 1970s. (About · Cork LGBT Archive, 2020)

This is one of the recurring themes in the literature review – what Bettine and Mattock (2019) term the ‘archival impulse.’ Several studies refer to the importance of a personal or emotional connection to the materials in community archives, and the drive of an individual collector as “the very embodiment of a grassroots approach to LGBT archives.” (Parris, 2005), (Latimer, 2013), (Watts, 2018) This, they seem to suggest, is as important a factor as any in distinguishing a queer archive. Poole (2020) cites Stevens *et al.* (2010): “Enthusiasm often has to count for as much as experience.”

This ties into the theme of “archives and empowerment” identified by Watts (2018), and that of the idea of queer archives as places of refuge; further to that, the importance of the physical space of the archive is seen as significant by many. (Parris, 2005), (Wakimoto, Bruce and Partridge, 2013). This bears relevance to the Irish situation, as the Irish Queer Archive was once housed in a gay resource centre based in Dublin, prior to its relocation to

the National Library of Ireland. (*Catch up on GCN's In And Out Digital Festival with this round up of past events, 2020*)

The literature review looks at the experiences of such archives, both those who have formed partnerships with other institutions and those who have sought to maintain their autonomy, considering the rationale behind each approach; the circumstances that have resulted in some formerly independent community archives choosing to establish collaborative partnerships, and the conditions that have enabled or encouraged others to reject this option, and the potential benefits and drawbacks of each approach.

*The "nature and purpose of queer archives".*

In 2008, the Irish Queer Archive (Cartlann Aerach na hÉireann), was donated to the National Library of Ireland by the National Lesbian and Gay Federation. In its Annual Report from that year, the library notes that the IQA "contains the most comprehensive collection of material for the study of homosexuality in Ireland," including "a large number of periodicals, reference books, photographs, DVDs, personal journals and correspondence as well as administrative and financial records of the National Lesbian and Gay Federation, Lesbians Organising Together, the Dublin Lesbian and Gay Film Festival, and the Women's Education Research and Resource Centre." (National Library of Ireland Annual Report, 2008) The library describes this acquisition as one of its 'headline additions' of 2008.

The acceptance of the IQA by an institution such as the National Library of Ireland was highly symbolic and perhaps indicative of the social progress being made in the country at that time. Acknowledging the significance of the transfer of these materials to the national repository, marking, as it did, "the importance of lesbian and gay history to the nation's

history”, Madden (2013) expresses concerns about issues of access and inclusion, and wonders about the very “nature and purpose of queer archives.” (Madden, 2013)

The author further questions, “What goes in an archive? What counts as an archive?”, suggesting that queer archives, so often developed outside the mainstream, (Carmichael, 1998; Kirste, 2007; cited by Parris, 2005) or far beyond the walls of an institution, “offer a critique [in and of themselves] of archives and archival practices.” (Madden, 2013)

Latimer (2013) proposes that “the archive is the very process of selecting, ordering, and preserving the past - in short, of making history.” She also suggests that queer archival practices are prone to be driven by “strong feelings.” This is further defined as “the gay archival impulse” in a study from 2019 by Bettine and Mattock. Parris (2005) cites Hunter (2003) in defining the mission of the archival process as follows: “To identify records and papers of enduring value; to preserve them; [and] to make them available to patrons.”

Some studies point to the particular attention paid to popular culture in queer archives (Madden, 2013); Latimer (2013) highlights the fact that apparently nondescript items that might be deemed of little worth or significance by a more traditional archive, can “create, for queers, empathic links to enigmatic pasts.” Watts (2018) suggests that queer archives often comprise ephemera as a consequence of the dearth of other materials available but also (echoing Madden) argues that this can be interpreted as being in direct defiance of perceived notions of what is or isn’t relevant for an archive.

Recalling Madden’s questioning of the “nature and purpose of queer archives,” Gina Watts, in a paper titled ‘Queer Lives in Archives: Intelligibility and Forms of Memory’ (2018), sets out to examine what she terms the “departure of traditional archival theory in queer

archives.” In her investigation, she discerns a theme of such archives as empowering, highlighting the positive impact on people of finding themselves “recognized by the historical record”, arguing that this reinforces their “right to take up space in the world.” (Watts, 2018) She asserts that “not existing in the archive can seem like not existing at all.” (ibid)

*Archives as sanctuary.*

Madden (2013) also touches on the idea of a queer archive as something beyond simply a resource, but rather a refuge, a place where both identity and community can be formed. In a 2019 paper, Bettine and Mattock conduct a case study of the Gerber/Hart library and archives in Chicago, referring to the effort to carve out “a space for building community.” This is an argument that recurs throughout the literature, with some studies suggesting that a mainstream space or institution simply cannot offer that form of ‘safe space’ or ‘sanctuary.’ (Wakimoto, Bruce and Partridge, 2013; Parris, 2005, citing Schwarz, 1992)

Research into a range of community archives by Caswell *et al.* in 2018 found that many visitors viewed the physical space or site as a “home-away-from-home,” and there was a sense that this could be a “transformative space” allowing users to visualise their future. The vision of such a space as ‘home’ may seem appropriate given the cases of queer archives that are run from or maintained in people’s own homes. The paper also points to the “homelike environment” of the Lesbian Herstory Archive (LHA). (Caswell *et al.*, 2018)

Some of these archives did indeed originate as private collections within the walls of people’s own homes, and in certain cases they continue to be operated out of a private residence. (Wakimoto, Bruce and Partridge, 2013; Cooper, 2016; Watts, 2018) Caswell *et al.*,

2018, compare the idea of 'care' for one's home to "archivists' responsibility for records."

The BC (British Columbia) Gay and Lesbian Archives have been held in the home of curator Ron Dutton for some 40 years, even as he has moved residence. (Cooper, 2016) Currently the archives are not online, and Dutton has rejected offers to house the materials in a nearby university, insisting that they must continue to be held within the community. (ibid)

A primary driver for the BC Gay and Lesbian Archives is to cultivate a 'safe space', not simply for users but also for the materials themselves, the "meaningful information" that curator Ron Dutton feared ran the risk of being neglected or outright disregarded by the mainstream. (ibid)

The New York based Lesbian Herstory Archive (LHA) dates back to the 1970s and was also originally based in the home of one of its founders, Joan Nestle. (Watts, 2018) (Caswell *et al.* in 2018, maintain that it successfully sustains this 'homelike environment' in new premises.) Parris (2005) compares this particular community-based archive with that of the Human Sexuality Collection (HSC) at Cornell University, which she notes as exemplifying a more academic approach in its treatment of queer archives. Identifying what she perceives as a strain of mistrust of mainstream archives or institutions among smaller, community-based or grassroots organisations, she wonders why an archive such as the LHA, for which Nestle advocated a lesbian-only archival staff policy, would adopt a policy of separatism, arriving at the conclusion that it may be due, at least in part, to the belief "that these other archives lack the ability to serve both as a refuge and as an archival repository for their users." (Parris, 2005) She cites Carmichael (1998), who declares that "separatism preserves integrity, ensures safety, and exercises the collective will."

*Archives and autonomy.*

In a 2019 paper, 'The gay archival impulse: the founding of the Gerber/Hart library and archives in Chicago', Bettine and Mattock also strive to draw a distinction between academic or institution based archives, and community archives, attempting to define the latter as "archival projects initiated, controlled and maintained by the members of a self-defined community."

They coin the term 'archival impulse', (related perhaps to Latimer's recognition of the 'strong feelings' that can be associated with queer archives), as a driving factor that differentiates the community archives from those initiated by institutions external to the community. The authors acknowledge that the issue of control is a primary part of their ethos, and one of the main objectives of their research is to demonstrate that "community archives can and [they argue] should maintain their autonomy."

In their case studies of three California community-based archives - Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender (GLBT) Historical Society; Lavender Library, Archives, and Cultural Exchange (LLACE) of Sacramento, Inc.; and ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives - Wakimoto *et al.* (2013) also place great emphasis on the fact that these are "created by community members outside of government, academic, and public archives", further highlighting their significance as 'safe spaces.' They also commend these archives for retaining their independence, suggesting that this also allows them to retain their relevance.

This goes back to the mistrust some community-based archives have of public or academic institutions. This can be heightened among LGBTQ+ communities, where there is a suspicion of the commodification of their culture (Madden, 2013), (Parris, 2005, citing Thistlethwaite, 1995 & 1998), or lingering memory of a time when no one wanted their

‘content’, nor their communities. (Wakimoto, Bruce and Partridge, 2013, citing Brown, 2011)

Citing Nestle 1990, and Wolfe 1998, Wakimoto *et al.* (2013) put it starkly: “Often [...] studies noted how members of the queer communities distrusted other institutions, such as public libraries and academic archives, after seeing how their lives had been represented or, in some instances, completely omitted.”

The recurring themes of control and autonomy, separatism and suspicion are understandable in this light. Issues of sustainability and lack of resources are very real, however, and not every community-based archive, queer or otherwise, can depend on donations, nor, like the LHA, is based in a Brooklyn house (albeit purchased after close to a decade of fundraising). (Watts, 2018)

#### *Sustainability and succession.*

In an article by Sue Donnelly entitled ‘Coming out in the Archives: The Hall-Carpenter Archives at the London School of Economics’, published in the *History Workshop Journal*, in 2008, (the same year that the IQA was transferred to the NLI), the author discusses the fact that at one stage in the early 1980s, the materials that form the basis of the HCA (now housed in the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE)) were moved into the flat of one of its co-founders, Julian Meldrum, mirroring the experiences of many similar archives, as they have strived to survive.

Research has shown how often the input of a dynamic individual has played a vital part in the initiation and preservation of such archives. Several studies raise the question of what happens if that “driving force moves away or passes on.” (Flinn *et al.*, 2009, cited by Cooper, 2016; Poole, 2020)

Poole (2020) points to the related issue of the difficulties some community archives have encountered in cultivating “intergenerational engagement.” These factors may also influence decisions to pursue partnerships with, perhaps, other community archives, or to establish a relationship with more mainstream institutions. The author cites Sellie *et al.* (2015) who “argue that community archives are not failures per se if they prove unable to preserve their collections indefinitely.”

Sheffield, (2015) ponders the issue of sustainability in the case of archives that have been founded “by and for social movements”; if the archive records the history of a community under threat, what happens if or when the threat is perceived to have passed?

Cooper (2016) in her study of the BC Gay and Lesbian Archives, which are held in the home of curator and retired professional librarian Ron Dutton, found evidence that some potential donors doubt that such archives have the formal capabilities required, while also highlighting the fact that many other institutions – like perhaps, the National Museum of Ireland in unveiling its ‘Rainbow Revolution’ trail in 2019 – are now moving to integrate LGBTQ+ materials or making attempts to develop their own such collections of archival content, and while there may previously have been a perception or belief that such collections should be run by their communities, for their communities and based within their communities (one that perhaps still prevails in some circles), there are now new factors to consider, not least that there are several information and library and archive professionals who are also members of LGBTQ+ communities and committed to working within these institutions to deliver the care such archival collections and materials deserve while seeking to implement strategies to protect, preserve and present their histories and experiences to patrons.

Cooper does acknowledge however that the implications of “increasing institutionalisation” of such materials raise its own issues, drawing attention to continued tensions and distrust, and concerns that autonomous and independent LGBTQ+ archives may remain in “direct competition.” She points to the arguments made by Kate Eichhorn for the development of an “ethics of partnership” as a potential solution (Cooper, 2016), echoing the suggestion by Parris in 2005, that an answer to the issues faced by many archives, both community and institutional, can be found in collaboration, citing Marston (1990): “Perhaps even partnerships between mainstream and grassroots archives could help benefit the queer community more than would their separate endeavors.”

*Queer & LGBT archives in partnership.*

Issues of accessibility and preservation aren’t necessarily simply about financial resources or funding. Often it is a long-term digital preservation imperative that acts as a driver for community archives to seek to enter partnerships, (as Cork LGBT Archive have done with Digital Repository of Ireland) not solely in response to the expectation of users that materials now be available and accessible online (Cork LGBT Archive worked to develop a digital archive from the start) but also as a means of increasing accessibility and reaching a broader audience.

Since 2017, the collection of the Sexual Minorities Archives (SMA), still physically based in the home of Ben Alwin, has also been available to view and search online at the Digital Transgender Archive (DTA), which collects the materials from a range of institutions to document “the experiences and history of gender nonconforming and trans people.” (Johnston, 2019), (*Sexual Minorities Archives - Digital Transgender Archive*, 2020)

The GLBT Historical Society, which is based in San Francisco and dates back to 1985, (Kelland, 2018, cited by (Ferentinos, 2019)) entered a partnership with the California Digital Newspaper Collection and Internet Archive in order to make its materials digitally accessible. (Johnston, 2019)

While the Lesbian Herstory Archive has rigorously pursued policies that enable it to maintain its autonomy, (Parris, 2005), it too has developed an association with the Pratt Institute to make portions of its collection available digitally, though it is not, as noted by Cooper (2016) “using the formal language of partnership.” Much of its materials, however, remain unavailable in digital format. (Cooper, 2016), (Johnston, 2019)

Nor is the practice of such archives partnering with wider institutions necessarily a recent development: the Hall-Carpenter Archives (HCA), which date to 1982, originated as an independent, community-based archive housed at the London Lesbian and Gay Centre. Like many archives of a similar nature, it too found itself in a temporary home in the flat of one of its co-founders before eventually being transferred to the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) back in 1988. (Donnelly, 2008) Lack of funding was a primary driver in this case, and the required move resulted in the collection being split in three, with the Archives Division of the London School of Economics taking on the “archives and collections of ephemeral material, along with the runs of gay journals and magazines.” (ibid) Like the Irish Queer Archive, this archive in an earlier form (as part of the Gay Monitoring and Archive Project, which was founded by the Campaign for Homosexual Equality, or CHE), was partly based on a press-cuttings service. (ibid)

Donnelly stresses that the development of “an interested and committed audience for the archives is a high priority,” underlining the commitment on behalf of LSE to the HCA.

The author also emphasises the significant use made of this archive, by both overseas and UK-based researchers, citing it as “one of the Archives Division's most popular collections.” (ibid)

What Flinn and Stevens (2009) (cited by Bettine and Mattock, 2019) term “mainstream heritage institutions”, need not be incompatible with community archives, in terms of their objectives and practices, promoting outreach programs, providing safe spaces, nor in making carefully preserved histories accessible to the public. Bettine and Mattock (2019), caution, however, that there is a “need for equitable partnerships and carefully negotiated terms of acquisition when community collections are absorbed into archival institutions.”

#### *Literature conclusion.*

The research points to an increased interest in LGBTQ+ history and experience, often “by institutions that are not specifically LGBTQ-focused.” (Ferentinos, 2019)

Ferentinos suggests that while “efforts to interpret LGBTQ+ history remained almost exclusively the domain of LGBTQ+ community-based organizations,” the foundations have been laid by such groups for other institutions, museums, historical sites and “more broadly focused professional organizations” to build upon this, and makes a case for the value of presenting these histories in sites that are not specifically LGBTI+ or Queer identified spaces, in order to reach audiences that might not otherwise seek out such events or exhibitions, pointing to the opportunity to increase visibility and raise awareness rather than limiting these “special exhibits” to those who choose to visit them.

The author welcomes institutions developing an interest in the area, while stressing the importance of presenting the variety of experience, what she terms the “conflict and difference” within LGBTQ+ communities. (ibid)

The value of digitisation in reaching a far greater audience is also a factor in the continued role of the LGBTQ+ archives as a place of refuge. As significant as the physical space may have been for users, outside of urban centres where these community-based archives were generally situated, many were denied such succour simply due to geographical location. Digital platforms can open a doorway to those who maybe isolated, offering evidence of the existence and experience of others who faced similar struggles and flourished. Seeing themselves reflected maybe enough to help them to affirm that “I exist.” (Caswell *et al.*, 2018; Watts, 2018; Ferentinos, 2019)

## Method

### *Introduction*

The focus of this research is LGBTQ+ archives in Ireland. The research identified two such significant existing archives and a recently initiated archival project: the Irish Queer Archive (IQA), a former community archive which has been held by the National Library of Ireland (NLI) since 2008; the Cork LGBT Archive, which is volunteer-run but has recently developed collaborative relationships with Digital Repository of Ireland (DRI) and Cork Public Museum; and the LGBTI+ Living Archives Project, “a collaborative community-focused project to start the introduction of LGBTI+ history” at the National Museum of Ireland (NMI). (*National Museum of Ireland, 2020*)

Those involved in playing important roles in these three strands were identified as contributing to the continued collection and curation of LGBTQ+ content, and approached for their insight into the current climate for preserving and presenting these materials, and the strategies and structures surrounding the creation of such collections.

### *Participants*

This research utilises purposive sampling in targeting specific interview subjects to gain in-depth history and information on the topic. These subjects were selected on the basis of their knowledge, experience and involvement in areas relevant to the research. (*Denscombe, 2017*)

Key players in the foundation, preservation and curation of LGBTQ+ archives in Ireland were identified. Some participants were involved in the founding of these archives, others came on board at various stages of the development of the archives, bringing skills

and expertise from a variety of backgrounds, from preservation and organisation to strategy, administration and management, playing important roles in negotiating and establishing relationships with state institutions, all in a voluntary capacity; others worked within these institutions which later developed partnerships with the archives (or did both); still others first encountered such materials when doing research themselves and developed a deeper involvement from there, and others were (and are) involved in initiating new such archival projects, often working within state institutions.

A list of key players was compiled, and these were initially contacted via email. Email addresses were available publicly through the participants place of work websites, and they were contacted in this way, though each of the participants also has a presence on social media. Certain people that were felt to be of particular significance, owing to their having played a specific role, or having been in a position to provide a unique perspective, were followed up with; in one case a follow-up phone call was made to a potential participant who early on expressed enthusiasm for the project, and provided a contact phone number. In total, four of those contacted responded and agreed to be interviewed for the research. Two of the respondents work in state institutions, while one works in academia. All have worked and maintain some degree of involvement with LGBTQ+ archives in Ireland, either in a professional capacity, or having provided their professional experience as archivists, librarians, and historians in a voluntary or advisory capacity at various stages.

### *Design*

#### *Research philosophy.*

Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019) break down the research process into a series of stages, or what they term 'layers', beginning with a research philosophy. The authors

state that all research needs to be underpinned by a particular philosophy, and this will depend on both the goals and objectives of the research itself, the assumptions and beliefs of the researcher, and how these assumptions can in turn have an influence on the research process.

They identify three types of assumptions:

- Ontological, which relate to the realities a researcher may encounter during the research process
- Epistemological, which is associated with human knowledge
- Axiological, which describes how the researchers own values can have an impact

This research can be considered subjectivist, given that it is based on the social constructionist belief that people are “creative interpreters of events who ... make sense of their own worlds.” (Denscombe, 2017) The research investigates the current status of LGBTQ+ archives in Ireland, considering the impact of historical and socio-cultural factors. As it explores multiple subjectivities through the literature review and interviews with key players, an interpretivist philosophy has been adopted. Saunders *et al.*, 2019, state that: “Interpretivism originally developed as a critique of positivism, but from a subjectivist perspective.” Interpretivism stresses the fact that humans “create meanings,” and the goal of this type of research is to deepen our understanding of how people experience and respond to their social environments. (ibid)

As a consequence, it is necessary for the researcher to be aware of their own values and bias and to consider the implications of this in conducting this research. As such, this

researcher declares a personal interest: books both historical and biographical provided a first introduction to a world of LGBTQ+ life and history and assisted in my finding a place and establishing a foundation in the world. It was a revelation to my younger self to discover that there were LGBTQ+ lives being lived throughout history, across decades and centuries and more so, that there was evidence of this: it felt like a personal history and I was struck by the importance and value of this information being preserved and retained. Watts (2018) cites Stone and Cantrell (2015) in declaring that in such archives people can “find themselves, be recognized by the historical record, and claim their right to take up space in the world.”

#### *Research approach.*

The next stage, or ‘layer’, as outlined by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019), is the research approach. This research takes an inductive approach, as it involves in-depth interviews with key players and other activists involved in the area, and it is small in scale. (Saunders *et al.*, 2019)

The inductive approach pays special attention to context, and in conducting these interviews, the research hopes to arrive at an understanding of the influencing factors that led to the current situation, and, through analysis of the data collected, identify potential future directions such archives could explore.

This approach takes into account the impact of such factors as socio-cultural context, historical and geographical impact and the human element. It allows for the fact that different people can experience different social realities at different times and in different places, and that there is no one concrete reality that applies to all. However, certain realities maybe common to certain “groups, cultures and societies.” (Denscombe, 2017)

### *Research strategy.*

Qualitative data was collected through a series of semi-structured interviews. Qualitative research involves the “study of individuals”, (McDonald 2014). The aim of these “purposeful conversations” (Saunders et al., 2019) is to develop an understanding of the experiences of LGBTQ+ archives in Ireland, through shifting social contexts and the establishment and evolution of relationships with state institutions, what challenges these collaborations created, and their impact on the preservation and accessibility of such archival materials in Ireland, through the personal stories and perspectives of the participants.

It was necessary to identify key players involved in the founding, preservation and curation of such archives in Ireland, and those who took part in, or were familiar with, the process of deciding how best to continue to preserve these materials, whether it be to transfer these to an institutional home, or to attempt to retain a greater degree of autonomy, or those who may have been in a position to move to initiate related events and exhibitions and achieve greater representation within such institutions, establishing archival collections of their own through community engagement and collaboration, and to determine what the influencing factors in taking those decisions were, e.g., questions relating to resources and funding, access and inclusion, preservation and promotion.

### *Materials/Apparatus*

In this case research interviews were identified as the most practical and direct way of developing an understanding of the issues. Saunders *et al.* (2019) describe the research interview as “a purposeful conversation.” Interviews were semi-structured as there were certain issues common to the general area of research that needed to be addressed, but

others related to specific people or their experiences. Denscombe (2017) advises that space be allowed for the interviewee to expand on the issues raised by the researcher, and that they be encouraged to elaborate on the topic. A list of interview questions was drafted, and these were tailored to interviewees, depending on their experiences of working with these archives or materials. *(These question lists can be found in Appendix A.)*

### *Procedure*

Consent and Information forms were drawn up and sent to candidates for interview. Interview questions were developed by the researcher. A set of core questions around the themes identified in the literature review relating to the experiences of other such archives were put to all respondents, in order to compare experiences and draw shared conclusions. Questions were adapted based on the interviewees role or position, and also altered as new data emerged, during the interview process itself and through continuous research.

Three interviews were conducted via Zoom, due to issues relating to both Covid-19 and the participants location. These were also recorded in Zoom. Participants were made aware when the recording process was about to begin. One interview took place face-to-face and was recorded (audio only) on both phone and laptop, using a built-in app. The interviews were semi-structured. The first participant had asked that a list of questions be sent in advance in order to prepare, and provided preliminary written answers which were then used as the basis for a purposeful conversation, and the topics raised in the written questions and answers were elaborated and expanded upon during the interview. This proved a success, and a list of questions was sent in advance to all subsequent participants, along with an Information & Consent Form. The interviews were transcribed using Descript software, and cleaned up to prepare for thematic analysis.

## *Ethics*

Participants were sent Consent and Information forms in advance to make them aware of the nature and aims of the study, outlining the topic for discussion, the proposed interview process and anticipated time commitment, and participants rights. They were informed that it was to be completed as part of a Master's program. Participants had the right to withdraw their involvement at any time, and to have their data destroyed. *(A copy of the Information and Consent form is included in Appendix B and C.)*

Participants were given assurances that their anonymity would be preserved, unless they chose to consent otherwise. In the event, none of the participants requested not to be named. However transcripts were cleaned of all references to the participants names, and the research identifies each of the interviewees by an assigned code.

Participants were also provided with a list of questions in advance of the interviews taking place, and advised that these discussions would be recorded. Data recordings and transcripts were secured in password protected cloud storage. Integrity and responsibility was maintained at all times, and accuracy has been ensured in the analysis and reporting of data and findings.

## *Data analysis*

Saunders *et al.* (2019) cite Denzin and Lincoln (2018) in stating that "qualitative research is associated with an interpretive philosophy." The data collected needs to be analysed, interpreted and made sense of. As this research employs a subjectivist approach, it is necessary to take account of the culture and context in which the interview subject or participant operates, and how that potentially influences their outlook.

Saunders *et al.* (2019), compare the process of qualitative data analysis to putting together a jigsaw. As the data has been collected through research interviews, these needed to be transcribed. This process assisted in the researcher becoming familiar with the data, sifting through it in order to identify various themes and patterns that emerged.

Following Braun & Clarke (2006), a process of thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. Codes were applied to certain recurring topics, or those that were thought to be of potential interest, particularly any information related to the research questions. Quotes were extracted from the data and entered into a table alongside these codes, to support any findings of apparent significance. Saunders *et al.* (2019) highlight the importance of allowing the voices of participants to be heard. Extracted quotes from across all four interviews that covered common concerns related to the subject were grouped, building to both form a more detailed picture and gain a broader overview of the matter discussed, and assisting in identifying themes for the findings of the research. As this research is underpinned by an interpretive philosophy, following an inductive approach, it was essential that the researcher appreciate the range and diversity of perspectives and experiences when analysing the data.

As these themes were identified they were named, forming sections for the results chapter.

## Results

### *Introduction*

The aim of this research is to examine the current status of LGBTQ+ Archives in Ireland. In exploring the experiences of such archives, through a series of semi-structured interviews with those who have worked closely with them in a variety of capacities, the research inquires into the specific challenges faced by such archives, particularly in terms of making their materials accessible while ensuring their long-term preservation, and explores the various ways in which they have tackled these issues, through engagement with broader communities of similar archives in order to draw on others experience, establishing mutually beneficial relationships, and in turn passing on their own practices, paying particular attention to solutions sought regarding digitization, presentation and exhibition.

The research also looks into the issues that can arise when LGBTQ+ community archives become involved or establish relationships with state institutions, considering the factors that result in such partnerships being pursued, and examining the ways in which each party can stand to benefit. Further, the research looks at the example of a state institutions attempt to initiate their own LGBTQ+ related representation.

This chapter presents the findings from the interviews held. While none of the respondents expressed a wish to have their identity hidden, in the interests of protecting their anonymity, each participant has been assigned a code.

P1	Former member of IQA Working Group; employed in large state institution; maintains involvement with & responsibility for LGBTQ+ collections
P2	Former member of IQA Working Group; academic who consults with NLI on IQA in capacity as NXF (National LGBT Federation) Board Member
P3	Cork LGBT Archive

P4	Employee of large state institution supportive of further LGBTQ+ representation in state institutions
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Following Braun & Clarke (2010), the interview transcripts were subjected to a process of thematic analysis, as the data was studied repeatedly in order to identify recurring references or topics, specifically in relation to the research questions. Certain words and phrases were assigned as ‘codes’, e.g., ‘goals’, ‘challenges’, ‘conviction’, ‘negotiations & conditions’, ‘network’, community engagement’, ‘place of LGBT history in Irish history’, ‘community mistrust’, etc., and quotes were extracted from the data as examples of these codes. These codes and quotes were entered into a table, and extracts from across all participant interviews were compared and gradually combined to construct threads that built up to form themes around three distinct experiences among LGBTQ+ archives in Ireland at present: that of the former community archive within the state institution; the community archive that has attempted to retain its community status through building networks with other similar archives internationally & within Ireland, while also forming collaborative relationships with state institutions; and that of a state institution working toward establishing its own LGBTQ+ archival collection. An exploration of these three experiences combined to serve to illustrate the challenges that such archives can encounter, in the past and the present, and potential future factors to consider. (*see Figure 1: coding table sample extract below.*)

Potential Theme: The community archive in/goes to the state institution

**"The community archive goes to the national library" (Theme 2)**

Code	Theme	Data extract
Goals, commitments	Community archive in national institution (theme 2)	P2: "the NLI are working with a not for profit organization who [...] digitize queer archives and the archives of sexualities around the world." P1: "we are in discussions with [...] to have the collection entirely catalogued and digitised within the next few years"
Challenges, Resources, lack of, (even within institutions)		P1: "we could never afford, ever afford to do the work ourselves, that needs to be done on the collection."  <i>Even though they made that commitment (see below)</i>
Negotiations, Conditions, commitments		P2: "we discussed accessibility and cataloguing it properly." P1: "The contract involved cataloguing or at least partially cataloguing the collection."

(Figure 1: coding table sample extract)

The results chapter begins with a discussion around a shared ideal identified in interview.

*1: A shared ideal? Goals, skills and expertise: a vision of a serious archive*

During a recent discussion as part of an online *In and Out Digital Festival of LGBT+ Creativity* organised by Gay Community News (GCN), Irish Queer Archive (IQA) founder Tonie Walsh expressed as an ideal, his original wish to have seen "the IQA housed [...] somewhere with its own lecture theatre, performance and exhibition space, café, conservation facilities...." (*Catch up on GCN's In And Out Digital Festival with this round up of past events, 2020*)

This idea of dedicated LGBTQ+ physical space, one that could "bring the culture alive," where there would be "performances and music and art," but also a "museum element, ... collecting, ... an archive and a central repository," (P4), was one voiced by all participants, albeit with varying levels of support for such a venture. P4 admitted holding conflicted views: "I'm completely on the fence because I can see both sides of the

argument," while others expectations were perhaps tempered by an awareness of the realities of founding, funding and operating such a space. P1 recalls:

*"that's what we had been hoping, 10 to 15 years ago, you know, that there would be a central, say 20 years ago, a central repository."*

but acknowledges:

*"there is one thing about funding physical structure, you also need to have people who are able to ... manage a repository like that."*

Many of those who have been involved with LGBTQ+ archives in Ireland certainly possessed the requisite skills: when the IQA Working group was appointed in 2001 by the NLGF (National Lesbian and Gay Federation), its members "consisted of academics, archivists, librarians and others interested in the preservation of Irish lesbian and gay heritage," (Kirwan, 2009). Regarding the content of the IQA at the time, P1 addresses issues of representation:

*"I always say LGB+ history, because... It's time related. It doesn't do much on the QI+++ end of things, because it's of a particular time and, for gay history and lesbian history, and bisexual history, but particularly lesbian and gay history, it's an excellent archive."*

P2 states that members were "brought ... on board ... as users of archives ourselves." Members of the group were invited to join, at least in part due to their skills and expertise (P1), and gave their time on a voluntary basis (Kirwan, 2009), believing they could bring those strengths to bear for the benefit of the working group and the IQA.

P1: *"I could use my strengths in administration and strategic planning."*

P2: *"I was asked as a historian to bring my expertise to that."*

The working group had the relevant repository experience among its membership, and there was also a conviction that this was a serious archive, a "national archive" (P2). P2 states: "we constituted ourself a serious professional body." The IQA looked to the experience of other such archives in other countries, studying how they were set up and how they operated, viewing their vision statements and visiting their physical bases. P2 recalls:

*"I think the big, the main dream was a dedicated, queer archive space on its own.*

*Something akin to what they have in Amsterdam."*

In some cases this harked back to the mistrust of institutional repositories among community archives found in the literature review, stemming from a fear of misinterpretation, or seeing their materials lost or undervalued. On this matter, P3 reflects:

*"I think there's still issues around [state institutions] not necessarily understanding the material that they're dealing with ... I don't think you can just hand it over to an institution that doesn't know what they're dealing with ... it has [...] to be a collaboration."*

Participants also voiced concerns for items that can often have strong associations with LGBTQ+ communities, with P4 citing the example of AIDS memorial quilts, and expressing reservations that these may not receive the attention they deserve within more mainstream institutions, arguing that for LGBTQ+ communities, material culture such as this represent 'iconic pieces' and deserve to be showcased as 'a central piece', within a

dedicated LGBTQ+ space, whereas there is a likelihood they maybe 'lost' among all of the other displays in, for example, a more mainstream museum (P4).

For others this desire for a dedicated space was rooted in regret at conceding control of content for which they held the 'strong feelings' identified by Latimer (2013) as a prime motivator in the founding and maintaining of queer archives, and for which they felt not simply an emotional or personal attachment, but also a sense of responsibility. P2 admits that in donating the IQA to the National Library of Ireland (NLI):

*"the biggest single hardship for us was letting go of control."*

Given the range of experience among respondents in working within state institutions and their involvement with traditional archives, however, any desire for a dedicated LGBTQ+ space was balanced by a sense of satisfaction at seeing such histories recognised by a national repository as part of a broader Irish history, where there was a general feeling that they would at least be securely preserved. P2: "we knew it needed to be somewhere safe and we were devoted and dedicated to that, to securing it."

P1 states that the primary goals of the IQA Working Group were to find a permanent home for the collection, but also somewhere it would be accessible to LGBTQ+ communities, and to the wider public. Lack of resources and a secure fixed space for the IQA resulted in a sense of anxiety around its continued sustainability and preservation. P1 recounts:

*"we'd continuously moved the IQA from 'pillar to post' in short term rental spaces, whilst trying to find a permanent home for it."*

*“we spent so much time seeing if there was money to pay the rent for stuff to be put in boxes, in a lockup and it was perilous.”*

A home for the Irish Queer Archive in the National Library of Ireland appeared to present the possibility of addressing a number of the concerns the working group had, including offering a somewhat similar resource to that of the idea of community archives as being for the community, by the community, in the community. P1 states:

*“we needed somewhere where it could be community accessible. So the idea of the library would be that unlike a university library, the national library is accessible to everybody, once you have a readers ticket, whereas a university, you have to have [...] a day pass or you have to be an academic in order [to access], and we didn't want that ... because it's [a] community based archive formed by and donated to, by members of the broader LGBT communities...”*

Recognition for the significance of the collection was also a factor. P2 adds:

*“the strongest argument other than securing [it] was that here would be the histories of the queer community in Ireland, LGBTQ+ in our national repository” [alongside] “all of those social, cultural, political, archives [that are] there.”*

Finding a secure, permanent home was a necessary but complicated matter, and there was no guarantee that somewhere like the National Library would take it on. P2 wondered: “Would they see it as a serious archive? Would they see LGBTQ histories as something worthy of having within their institution?” And there were other factors limiting the range of options available to the IQA Working Group. P1 recalls that: “the overall climate was against taking in such a collection then.”

National Library of Ireland accepted the donation of the Irish Queer Archive by the National Lesbian and Gay Federation in 2008. The transfer of such materials had its roots in practical concerns but the move was also highly symbolic. P1 asserts that: “accepting the donation gave a legitimacy to Irish LGB+ identity and heritage, in a way no other national institution had ever done previously in Ireland.” Further to this, P1 argues that: “the move was radical then, and unprecedented.”

While there was some difference of opinion among participants regarding the place of LGBTQ+ archives within state institutions due to potential issues of accessibility and misinterpretation, P4 also had misgivings about the possible segregation of such history from the broader national history in a dedicated LGBTQ+ space, expressing concern that it could then become something that only members of LGBTQ+ communities make use of: “the conflict though is that then it just becomes a thing out there on its own, and it's not integrated into these cultural institutions.” P2 reflects:

*“I'd still have loved to have [...] got the standalone archive.”*

P1 however, counters that:

*“you can't just have a mausoleum. You need it funded, you need it accessible. You need the projects such as digitizing, cataloguing, proper storage conditions. You need those funded and you need deliverables.”*

Overall, there was general consensus among participants about the ability of the institution to protect and preserve these collections, while agreement was also sought in negotiations between IQA and NLI that the content would be catalogued and made accessible. Participants held a high degree of esteem for the idea of such materials being

recognised and represented in the national record, expressing a sense of pride in having this history acknowledged as part of a broader Irish history. P1 argues that:

*“once something is in the likes of a national institution, whether it's the national library or the national museum or wherever, you have a right to access it, in terms of requesting to view it. Now you won't sometimes be able to see it because it's in outside storage, but if there's enough clamour, it will have to be dealt with. So I think it's better.”*

## *2: The community archive in the state institution: accessibility and consultation*

In discussing the experience of donating the IQA to the NLI, participants expressed relief that the archive would now be 'safe', but there remained a question over “how accessible would it be?” (P2)

Making the materials accessible and cataloguing the collection 'properly' were among the conditions sought during negotiations surrounding the donation of the IQA to NLI, and part of contractual commitments made at that time (P1; P2). However, most of the collection remains in offsite storage, still uncatalogued (P1). Funding and other resource restraints, such a common feature in discussion around community archives, are not entirely eradicated within the institution itself. P1 states that the library “could never afford, ever afford to do the work ourselves, that needs to be done on the collection.”

P2 reports that the National Library of Ireland are currently working on proposals with a not-for-profit organisation who digitise queer archives and archives of sexualities, to complete the full cataloguing and digitisation of the Irish Queer Archive. These discussions are confirmed by P1.

The size of the IQA has played some part in this delay. P1 estimates that “the IQA consisted originally of 20m<sup>3</sup> of material” at the time of transfer to NLI, while P2 reports that “it’s even bigger now than it was then”, due to continued donation to the archive. Another condition sought at the time of transfer was that the IQA would be treated as a ‘living archive’, and promoted as such. P2 defines a ‘living archive’ as something “that people can continue to add to ... and that is what it is to this day.” A further factor was timing. P2 laments: “the Celtic tiger up and died. Funding was cut to the bone.” Some participants speculate, however, that this may have rendered the timing of the transfer somewhat fortuitous, too. As P2 puts it:

*“I don't know if [NLI] would have taken [it on], if they'd [have] had the capacity to take such a big archive, [post financial crash] there might have been the will, but not the capacity to take such a big archive.”*

The material content of the collection itself was also an issue. P1 relates that the collection contains “...badges and T-shirts and banners and flags and whistles...”, which the National Library would not normally handle. P4 muses that “there's a lot of the material that the library will say ... they don't really take care of that kind of thing ... [they] don't deal with textiles ... they don't deal with non-paper.” This is confirmed by P1, who states that: “The NLI doesn't collect material culture. The NLI's statutory obligation is to collect the documentary record of Ireland.” Given this, it is perhaps unsurprising that the part of the IQA that has been catalogued was mostly the manuscript items. (P1)

P1 argues that once the collection has been digitised, this material will be accessible, and people will be able to view it. While acknowledging that there is a lot of ephemera (“you can't really consult with that”), P2 concurs: “that would be digitised and [...] on a

digitised archive [...] you can see that then. And, you know ... from the last few referenda that the merch[andise] or the material culture is so important to visibility and to activism.” A further factor is that the IQA was taken on as a complete collection: “part of the agreement is that it wouldn't be broken up.” (P2)

P2 acknowledges that there was awareness at the time of the transfer that getting it fully catalogued and open “in as much as it can be to the public was going to cost a lot of money”, but “the overwhelming support at that stage was for the long-term care” (P1). As reported above, recognition for the significance of the IQA was also a factor, fuelled by a belief on the part of the IQA Working Group in the importance of the materials and their place in the national repository and as part of national history. P2 declares that the National Library of Ireland is “the place where people go to consult with major archives and this would be another major archive” and considers that the acceptance of the IQA there symbolised “the importance of our narratives, our histories, our stories in the national story.” However there also had to be an acceptance that “on the NLI side, they had to say, [...] once this comes in, it is our archive. And that is true. It is their archive.” (P2). P1 puts it simply: “[NLI] own, legally, [they] own copyright.”

As related previously, securing a permanent home for the archive was a primary goal of the IQA Working Group, however there were concerns that this should not be at the cost of accessibility, and that it should remain a community resource in as much as was possible through the facility of continued consultation within the National Library. P2 states that: “We were worried that it might be secure, but nobody would ever see it for 50 or a hundred years”, and goes onto confirm that, in fact, “some of it hasn't been seen since it went in.” This has been a source of friction for some.

P4 recounts their experience soliciting donations for a temporary exhibition of LGBTQ+ related collections in another state institution: “I didn't realise how contentious it was for people until I really started going to other collectors who were then saying ‘well I was gonna deposit it ... but, now that I can't get access to that stuff, why would I put my collection in there?’” This has also influenced the decisions of other similar archives in Ireland considering entering corresponding collaborative partnerships with such institutions: “it was also kind of learning a bit from the experience of the Irish Queer Archive in terms of difficulties that people have had, issues of access in getting their own materials that they've put in there...” (P3) P2 acknowledges this dissatisfaction: “It can't be used in the way it should be used as yet, and that's been problematic and that's been bone of contention over the years.” Notwithstanding this, P1 reports that: “Donations [are] being added to the IQA continuously,” indicating that not everyone is resistant to donating, despite contentiousness in certain circles at much of the material remaining uncatalogued and undigitized. In donating the IQA to the NLI, one concern was uppermost: “it had to be somewhere safe . It just really did. And that was it.” (P2)

That is not to say that community concerns were not addressed. P1 expands upon this:

*“what the working group was very concerned about was that there be full and proper consultation with the people who had invested in the IQA in terms of donations, and in terms of maybe academics with a particular interest , but particularly because it is a community-based archive, with the communities, the history of our communities, plural, is actually in this archive.”*

As such, a widespread consultation process took place, which involved engaging with communities in various locations across Ireland, and considering the potential concerns of donors to the IQA, with the result that “the overall wish was for this move to proceed.” (P1)

There were also protracted discussions and ‘many meetings’ to be had with the National Library itself, as reported by P2: “we had difficult negotiations and some hard conversations” ... “we didn't do it easily and we didn't do it quickly” ... “we spent a long time in negotiations.”

The conviction remains among those involved that the NLI are serious about trying to get the IQA fully catalogued and making the materials fully accessible, and a consultation process continues through the appointment of P2 to the board of the NXF (National LGBT Federation), with the specific purpose of being a “conduit between the NLI and the NXF ... to consult with them on the digitization process” (P2). P2 elaborates: “NLI is quite aware that they are not the experts, totally on this, that they do need to consult with those people, in the community or archivists or historians who know this material, who used this material or who lived this life.” P1 points to the fact that certain donors may have donated with a specific purpose, and once the IQA is digitised, then “it goes global,” and it is therefore necessary that such issues as they may have be addressed. The commitment is to ensuring that this a collaborative relationship. Further to this has been the setting up of a Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) committee in the NLI, to promote a sense of engagement and make an effort to be more inclusive. P1 stresses that “with any donation when you change, say, an audience or a purpose, you should consult as a matter of course, you should consult with the donor.” As part of the incoming NLI revised Acquisitions Policy, it is recommended that

in building the NLI collections the approach with communities should be 'nothing about us, without us.' (P1)

There were plans for the NLI to host a major exhibition focusing on its collections that are LGBTQ+ related this year, and drawing on materials in the IQA. However this has currently been put on hold due to restrictions around Covid-19. The exhibition would have marked 5 years since the passing of the Marriage Equality Referendum in 2015, but was also prompted in part due a 'growing demand 'for access to the IQA' (P1), particularly among younger people and those using BeLonGTo (the national organisation supporting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI+) young people in Ireland, who have also donated their digital archive to NLI). P2 states that: "there's 40 years plus of campaigning that's happened to get to [this] point. So what the BeLonGTo users are really keen to know is, well, what happened forty years ago?"

Commenting on what they have perceived as an increased use of the IQA by scholars in recent years, P2 suggests:

*"once the research starts, once you have a repository or an archive or a space, or even when you know that the community is accepting these stories and is interested in these stories, I think more and more people will start writing about it, whether it's because you're looking for your histories or just interested historians and researchers, no matter their sexuality, wanting to write an interesting piece of history, and that history will grow and grow and grow and be developed ... not just LGBTQ histories, but social histories, women's histories, all sorts of different histories."*

P2 further argues that: “the IQA being in the National Library, even if it wasn't highly accessible, meant that now, there was material that people could get their teeth into and write articles about”, concluding that: “The histories are beginning to be written.”

### *3: The community archive experience outside the institution: networking and digitisation*

In attempting to research and write a history of their own, tracing the evolution of the lesbian community in Cork in the decades leading up to the 21st century, the originator of the Cork LGBT Archive unearthed a private collection begun in the 1970s, mirroring the practices of such collectors identified in the literature review. P3 recounts:

*“[he] had the foresight to start collecting things. So he started to put things into boxes, from the '70s and '80s onwards and he kept those boxes in his basement. He had absolutely no idea what was going to happen with them, [...], he imagined that when he died, somebody would find them and do something with them.”*

In taking on the task of attempting to physically sort the materials and place some order on the collection, P3 admits that this was very much a case of learning on the job:

*“I'm not a trained archivist, I'm not a trained librarian and my digital skills were very limited . So there was an incredibly steep learning curve.”*

From the beginning, however, there was vision and conviction (P3: “at that point I had this fantasy list of all the things that I could maybe do with it, that seemed unachievable. And I think the nice thing is that a lot of those have happened”), and a belief that the materials contained therein were of such significance, that if these could be showcased, even in a minor way, once viewed by a wider audience support for such a project would be forthcoming. Securing funding for acid free boxes and availing of

temporary storage space provided by a sympathetic supporter proved turning points in the evolution of the archive; improvisation involving a borrowed colour printer and photographic paper enabled an early exhibition to take place (P3: “very much shoestring stuff ... literally stuck on the walls in a community arts centre”) and participation in National Heritage Week garnered the archive a hidden history award from the Heritage Council. P3 reiterates the practical and ‘symbolic’ significance of such acknowledgment for the archive:

*“to have even that piece of funding from the heritage council was symbolic of the recognition that this is an important part of our heritage , as well as the practical thing of having the proper storage boxes.”*

More than that, this “was the first time that people could come to a community centre and walk through the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, of the history of the LGBT community in Cork.” (P3)

While the achievement of this early goal was a significant milestone for Cork LGBT Archive, the challenge was “that all of this was happening essentially with one person on a voluntary basis with no funding ... learning on the job. One of the things I realised was that the world had changed since I had originally been doing history work and that I needed to upscale in terms of digital skills.” (P3)

Taking up a digital humanities course in an attempt to actively acquire the necessary skills to digitise & catalogue the content, P3 built on the impetus provided by the Heritage Council award by establishing contact with the Cork City Council heritage office and further funding was forthcoming, facilitating the creation of six pull up banners and enabling the exhibition to become portable, taking it to other locations in Cork, and beyond, to Belfast

and eventually to ALMS, the Archives, Libraries, Museums and Special Collections

Conferences in both London and Berlin. P3 relates that:

*“I was kind of motivated by the fact that when I started doing this work, there was nobody in Ireland doing what I was doing ... in terms of trying to create kind of a digital archive and do the kinds of things I was doing, nobody was doing that in Ireland... So I started to search for the community. I started to search for other people that I could learn from.”*

Echoing the earlier experiences of the IQA, Cork LGBT Archive sought to make contact with other such archives internationally, and draw on their example and experience, particularly in relation to digitisation practices. Among these was Outhistory, “an LGBT digital archive in the States,” (P3), and the Lesbian Herstory Archive (LHA); there was also a meeting with the Dean at Pratt Institute School of Information, [who] “have linked in with the Lesbian Herstory Archive ... teaching ... students about digitising material and creating digital archives. So they take a collection from the Lesbian Herstory Archives that they work on ... it is mutually beneficial because the students get to work on an actual collection, but they're creating something which then is a digital archive of material.” (P3)

Further important connections were established at the ALMS conferences in London (2016), and later Berlin (2019). P3 relates:

*“I gave a paper at the ALMS conference in London, and I was talking about ... having this ... material and wanting to do all these things, but not really knowing how to go about it ... developing the digital archive and, you know, trying to figure out how to do that in a way that was low cost and low tech ... that was a kind of a long and complex process.”*

Eventually settling on Omeka, “a free, flexible, and open source web-publishing platform for the display of library, museum, archives, and scholarly collections and exhibitions,” (Omeka, 2020) and opting to host the archive with Reclaim Hosting, “because they provided a very low cost service space with really, really good support ... they were very open to the idea of that also being used by community organisations, and ... they were providing this incredible level of support for very, very low cost,” P3 had a goal of “trying to develop a model, that was low cost, low tech ... there was a lot that was open source and that was easy for people to figure out how to use it ... a model that then could also be replicated and used by other community organisations who wanted to kind of record and preserve their history.”

Building on relationships established at the ALMS conference, the Cork LGBT Archive was able to make good on this aim by travelling to Budapest to deliver workshops on creating a queer digital archive to Labrisz and to Háttér, LGBTQ+ associations based there, while in turn availing of “some official archivist” support from other contacts made in the UK (P3). P3 reports that: “I made concerted efforts to find my community and learn from them and to share experiences and having a community, people that I could call on and say, I'm having this problem. What do you do with it?”, acknowledging that it “is very difficult to maintain this kind of work on a long basis when you're doing it on your own, on a voluntary basis with no funding. So I suppose having those queer connections have been really important, you know, for me.”

Having established support networks globally, Cork LGBT Archive also looked to share their experiences locally, striking up relationships with the Irish Trans Archive and the Irish Left Archive. Another goal is “to try and work with current queer organisations to get

them in the habit of recording our history as we're making it. So I did a training session earlier this year with Cork queer organisations to train them on adding material into the archive themselves.” (P3)

P3 asserts that “everything that I do tries to create ways for people to engage with [the archive] in different ways and in ways that work for them.” The original ‘fantasy list’ for the materials included building on the physical collection to establish an exhibition, and the creation of a digital archive. While attending a digital preservation conference in London, however, P3 came to the conclusion that “I didn't have the resources, physical, financial or technical to ensure that long-term digital preservation.”

When the Digital Repository of Ireland (DRI) ran a community archives award scheme for the first time in 2019, Cork LGBT Archive entered, and won, which meant that they could then begin putting material into the DRI. Once again, P3 cites the recognition afforded the archive as a factor, arguing that it was a good move, logically, because DRI are the National Digital Repository, symbolically in terms of making sure that LGBTQ+ history is part of that National Digital Repository, and practically in that they could ensure the long-term digital preservation of the materials. P3 elaborates on further benefits:

*“from the DRI they feed information into Europeana, which is the European repository and it just means in terms of the materials going out there, it's amazing, in terms of visibility and access and long term preservation. And I think adding the collection to the Europeana motivated them to do some more LGBT exhibitions and there's talk about kind of furthering that a little bit, as it goes on.”*

The ultimate goal of digitising the materials was to make them accessible, and acceptance into DRI enabled preservation. Another concern, however, was for the

continued preservation of the physical collection, which, like the IQA before it, did not have a permanent storage space. Through previously established connections with Cork City Council Heritage Office, Cork LGBT Archive learned that Cork Public Museum were aware of their collection and willing to open a discussion around taking it in. While acknowledging that “Cork Public Museum has been trying to move beyond its traditional way of seeing Cork culture and community and expanding that”, P3 admits to having concerns and “negotiated that I will continue to have full access to the material and that I could still work with it in whatever way we deemed was appropriate , and that they will continue and finish the process of cataloguing the collection”, much as IQA had done with NLI previously. There is an awareness, however, that “they don't have a specific kind of funding stream to finish the cataloguing so it's still unfinished and the pandemic has slowed everything down”, but, again echoing one of the primary concerns of the IQA in donating its materials to NLI, “at least it's safe, and there is that commitment to continuing to work on it, and to then have the exhibition in the future as part of the museum.”

Recalling their attempts to achieve their original aims in establishing the Cork LGBT Archive, P3 points out that part of the motivation for trying to digitise the materials so quickly was to showcase them in order to secure further support, and reveals that the Heritage Council confirm that initial funding was forthcoming because “I showed them the [original storage space in a] basement. I showed them what it had been and I showed them what I was trying to do with it, where I was trying to go with it so it was very easy for people to see what it was you were trying to do.” Similarly, when Cork LGBT Archive was announced as the winner of the first Digital Repository of Ireland (DRI) Community Archives Scheme, they were commended for the fact that “it is ready for ingestion, with regard to

well-prepared metadata and licences.” (*Cork LGBT Archive winners of DRI Community Archives Scheme | Digital Repository Ireland, 2019*)

Amplifying the theme of ‘strong feelings’ Latimer (2013) associates with queer archives, P3 reflects that “these kinds of projects happen as works of passion and madness,” but expresses frustration that “it’s such a fragile funding situation”, declaring that: “it takes somebody to want to do it, and to have that motivation and the passion to do it, and I don’t think it should just be like that. I think that there needs to be more support and funding and staffing to make these things happen. So I suppose I’d worry about long-term sustainability.”

#### *4: The experience of initiating an archive within the institution: collaboration and preservation*

When seeking a permanent, secure space for the Cork LGBT Archives physical materials, partly as a means of tackling the challenge of longer term sustainability, P3 admits that: “we were really, really, really reticent about giving the collection to an institution”, reiterating the mistrust that can still remain among community archives. Negotiations with the Cork Public Museum took place and conditions were sought, including (as with IQA at NLI), “that they will continue and finish the process of cataloguing the collection”, and that more material can be added to the archive. P3 acknowledges that: “they don’t have limitless storage.” That the discussions were taking place at all, however, P3 suggests is reflective of wider changes in Irish society:

*“in our discussion with the museum, they talked about the changing environments in Ireland ... that they felt that the marriage equality referendum created an environment where they could do stuff that maybe in the past would have been more challenging.”*

This point is also taken up by P4, who states that: “pre that vote [marriage equality], it was considered way too political. It was considered total activism and ... having an agenda, and all that kind of stuff”; musing that: “the museum has this very traditional, very conservative kind of identity anyway.” P1 declares that: “Ireland is in a unique position because we're the only country in the world that's actually legislated for same sex marriage through plebiscite”, arguing that the outcome of the Marriage Equality Referendum signalled that there had been a very definite sea change in Irish attitudes, and suggesting that indications that this change was underway can perhaps potentially be traced back to the public acceptance of the IQA by NLI, citing the passing into law of Civil Partnership shortly thereafter: “it did kind of give legitimacy, to a history and to a cause, to a purpose, to the politics.”

Participants argue that the change in Irish cultural attitudes that the marriage equality referendum outcome revealed, “this big social shift in Irish thinking” (P4), was also reflected within cultural institutions, where LGBTQ+ staff felt a greater sense of confidence in stepping forward and saying: ‘this is a part of history that we should be talking about.’ (P4)

P3 reflects that: “for [...] museums, [Marriage Equality] created an environment of equality where they felt that they were able to say to their powers that be, this is something that we want to work on,” recollecting that in: “the 1980s when the lesbian line and the Cork gay information line were trying to get adverts in the local papers [they] were being told that they couldn't because it was illegal”, a situation that contrasts strikingly with comments by P4 on the current climate: “It's ... state legislation that this is equality, it's

there in our law. And I think that's the huge shift that happened in terms of the museum, was that it moved out of that kind of grassroots on the fringe conversation."

Under the heading, 'Major Projects', the National Museum of Ireland's (NMI) website reports the key role of the Registration Department in "the acquisition and preparation of digital content for inclusion in 2019's Rainbow Revolution. At the centre of the project is an amazing collection of audio/visual recordings of more than 200 activists and members of the Irish LGBTI+ community, recorded by Mr Edmund Lynch." (*National Museum of Ireland, 2020*) These interviews and other archival footage, were shown on screens at the National Museum of Ireland – Museum of Decorative Arts & History at Collins Barracks as part of Rainbow Revolution.

P4 relates that being introduced to Edmund Lynch and becoming aware of his Oral History Project sparked the idea for a possible route to greater representation for LGBTQ+ history within the museum. Echoing sentiments expressed by P3 in entering negotiations with Cork Public Museum about taking on the physical materials of Cork LGBT Archive ("this was new for the museum as well, you know?"), and aware of the challenges presented by the fact that the museum has many different priorities ("for us to do a dedicated exhibition does mean something else doesn't go up. It does mean that ... you're pitting archaeology against modern art history against LGBT history, against women's history. And which do you prioritise? And at what point does one get funding over another?"(P4)), itself a factor in the continued delays in cataloguing and digitising IQA materials at NLI acknowledged by P1: ("I suppose the way that the keeper of collections looks at it, it's one of many collections"), P4 opted to focus on the archival element, specifically by initiating the LGBTI+ Living Archive Project, building on the foundation provided by Edmund Lynch's oral history project, with

the aim of recording interviews with “people from across the entire LGBTI+ community ... to create a rich permanent oral history record of Irish LGBTI+ history.” (*National Museum of Ireland*, 2020).

P4 argues that this “was a better way to do it because when you start looking at material culture for a relatively hidden community, it can be very hard to find,” further elaborating:

*“As a museum, we don't traditionally do oral history projects. And the argument for that was ... there's not a lot of material culture out there. And if there is, it's kind of hard to get at the moment ... or we're not aware of it. So ... how do you have a full and complete state record of the history when there's such a limited resource ... wouldn't it be great if we did an oral history and we put that oral history into the permanent record and the museum?”*

When it was announced in early 2019 that the Dublin Pride party would take place that year in the grounds of Collins Barracks, the Decorative Arts & History branch of the National Museum of Ireland, plans to proceed with the project were accelerated, and an exhibition somewhat hastily conceived around LGBTQ+ items donated to the museum under the umbrella of ‘contemporary collecting’, another relatively recent initiative, alongside screens showing interviews from the oral history project, and other digitised material. P4 explains: “we need[ed] to do something that is really accessible, that just gives people this introduction, that [...] any age can come in, scroll through it, ... they can take what they want from it. They can sit and watch everything, or they could just dip in and out and try and have as much media, different types of media representation as possible, so if you prefer film, if

you prefer listening to audio, if you prefer still images. So we tried to get a representation from the archives that exist out there.”

Voicing concerns that the limited ‘contemporary collection’ at NMI might appear somewhat ‘tokenistic’, P4 concedes that “What I would've liked to do with the luxury of time is create more content ourselves in terms of the digital, more newer interviews, which we are doing now, and maybe build the collection a little bit more and put more of a narrative around some objects”, while also admitting that, sometimes: “you just have to be an opportunist with all these things.”

The museum opted to use this opportunity to engage with LGBTQ+ communities and approach other LGBTQ+ archives, in order to attempt to foster more collaborative relationships, while publicising the launch of their own first foray into collecting LGBTQ+ content, primarily in the form of oral histories. P4 recounts taking the decision to “look at everything that exists and use it also as a platform to highlight all of these [...] collections that already exist, and then say that this is going to be our first conversation around it ... we want this to be an introduction.”

The Rainbow Revolution at NMI made use of the contents from other LGBTQ+ archives that already existed, facilitating access to some of their content, and encouraging people to explore further by highlighting and publicising these materials; the exhibition “included digitised material from the Irish Queer Archive, the Irish Trans Archive, the Cork LGBT Archive, RTÉ Archive film footage and contributions from many Irish photographers, artists and activists.” (*National Museum of Ireland*, 2020) P4 recalls asking: “how do we get the community to trust us?”, recounting:

*“I ... made a statement ... at the start I approached all these people and just said, I'm not expecting you to give us anything or to trust us. What I want to do is ... I want to show you what we can do. So let me just do the exhibition first. Give me copies of your content. I'm not asking you to donate anything yet. And let me show [you] what we can do just with a really small amount of time and a small amount of money.”*

P4 stresses the importance of engaging in consultation with LGBTQ+ communities and the exhibition having been a ‘collaboration piece,’ including with other archives. In initiating the LGBTI+ Living Archive project collecting oral histories, there were other considerations. P4 states:

*“I [...] feel like it was an opportunity to use our privilege [...] because the museum has a particular sort of statutory mandate, and our mandate is we are called a place of deposit for archive, which means we're the only cultural institution or museum in Ireland that has the same status as the national archives.”*

The NMI website states that: “The Archive of the National Museum of Ireland (NMIAS) is designated as a place of deposit under the National Archives Act, 1986 and is responsible for preserving and providing access to its historical papers, collections records and relevant collections of private archives acquired by the Museum.” (*National Museum of Ireland, 2020*)

P4 further explains: “So for example, if we're creating a state archive of LGBT history, that is permanently recorded and has to, in perpetuity, always be cared for by the state. The state always has to care for it and always has to be able to give it a platform. And the one thing that the National Archives Act says is that, you have to make this material accessible to

the public. It can't just be locked away in a store. It has to be there for the people of Ireland.”

Welcoming recent efforts by such institutions to provide greater representation for LGBTQ+ histories, as part of wider Irish history, P1 states: “it’s great...to see the other national cultural institutions [...] awaken to their statutory responsibilities of collecting the national record in the format appropriate to their institution”, while also cautioning that: “you have to have strategies, you have to have policies and unless you have a diversity and inclusion policy to bed things down with, it's like a plebiscite or referendum, unless you have something like that, you actually have no structure for maybe creating a collection or a reason for doing something.”

P4 shares these concerns, also echoing the worry about long-term sustainability expressed by P3:

*“my slight worry here, just in terms of right now, because this is such an early days project, [...] whatever comes in gets protected, it's just whether there'll be drive to build it. And that would be the concern right now. And that's why I think we just need to kind of embed it a little bit more,”* while adding the assurance that: *“We've got that set up as an archival project. There's an official commitment to it.”*

Reinforcing this, NMI introduced training and support for staff around its new LGBTQ+ related content, directly addressing concerns among such communities that these materials may be misinterpreted or misrepresented. Further, P4 confirms that there are plans to expand the project nationwide: “there are 12 local authority museums in Ireland ... we're sending 12 screens [showing the oral histories footage] out to the local authority museums ... [we] are going to do a [...] series of training and support [...] sessions with the

curators from those places and help them decide what they're going to do around it ... we're going to talk to them about programming they might want to do, or if they have anything in their collection ... what I'm hoping they'll be able to do is they can generate some content locally.”

P4 does concede, however, that there does need to be a definite strategy and policy and reveals that they are looking to the examples of other institutions who “have put into their policy specifically [that] they collect LGBT material.”

Reflecting on the efforts that have been made to establish networks, engage with communities and ensure continued preservation and accessibility to their recently initiated projects, and once again echoing concerns about long-term sustainability voiced by other participants, P4 concludes: “we don't really know if we're doing it in the right way or the wrong way.”

## Discussion

### *Introduction*

The primary aim of this research was to examine the current status of LGBTQ+ archives in Ireland, tracing their evolution in as far as is possible in order to understand the challenges faced by such archives in Ireland, and how those responsible for them have engaged with the issues they have encountered and sought to overcome them, through the establishment of links or networks with other similar archives internationally, or through eventually entering into collaborative relationships with state institutions in Ireland.

The research further investigates the issues such archives have confronted in making their materials accessible, both within institutions and without, and considers persistent concerns related to the preservation of their collections, often a primary factor in community archives choosing to transfer their materials to a state institution, while also looking at the potential conflicts which can arise as a consequence of these relationships, which have generally remained collaborative.

### *Summary of findings*

In order to answer the primary research question, the findings first presented an ideal idea held by all participants (to varying degrees) of a dedicated LGBTQ+ space, before going onto explore in greater detail the current status and realities encountered through three distinct experiences of LGBTQ+ archives in Ireland, that of the former community archive now housed within an institution, that of the community archives efforts to digitise, preserve and make accessible its materials through multiple methods, and that of the archive initiated from within the institution itself, albeit using pre-existing archives as a platform for launch. In so doing, the research strives to answer the sub-questions relating to

the challenges faced by community archives regarding accessibility and preservation, and the issues that can arise in working with or within state institutions. While these have been examined as three separate experiences, there are many commonalities. All three were originally born outside of the institution, to a degree; the LGBTQI+ Living Archive Project collecting LGBTQI+ oral histories is a recent initiative of the National Museum of Ireland itself, however it was inspired by Edmund Lynch's pre-existing Oral History Project, which formed the basis of the NMI's recent Rainbow Revolution exhibition, comprising screens showing Lynch's own interviews alongside digitised material from other archives and public service broadcaster RTÉ Archive film footage (Lynch had been a co-founder of the National Gay Federation (NGF), of which the IQA was an initiative (McDonagh, 2019), (Casey, 2018)); and all three archives work with (or within) institutions in some capacity.

As such, the analysis offers an overview of issues raised by these collaborative partnerships undertaken by the archives studied.

### *Queer & LGBT Archives in Partnership*

#### *Resources and recognition.*

The move for LGBTQ+ archives to establish relationships with state institutions is not unique to Ireland, but also familiar to such archives internationally. As in Ireland, a primary motivation can be the need for a permanent, secure home for physical materials. P3 shares their relief and sense of triumph at Cork LGBT Archive receiving early funding for acid-free storage boxes, while P1 offers a description of the experience the IQA Working Group had in keeping their own materials safe: "we spent so much time seeing if there was money to pay the rent for stuff to be put in boxes, in a lockup... it was perilous."

P1 reveals an equally significant aim in transferring the IQA to NLI, however, stating that the goal was to secure “a permanent home for a collection we believed was of national importance, coupled with the NLI agreeing to making the collection accessible to the LGB+ communities, and the wider public.” There was a strong conviction among the IQA Working Group that the IQA was a national record, of national relevance, and therefore belonged in the national repository. This may in part have been due to the make-up of the working group, comprising as it did academics, archivists and librarians, (Kirwan, 2009), but may also have reflected a confidence in the place of LGBTQ+ history in the national history, bolstered by decades of activism, of which IQA was both borne and serves as a record.

#### *Networking and digitisation.*

In Cork, P3 expresses their frustration at “knowing that there was this rich history there and knowing that it was unknown and invisible and was going to be lost.” Here, too, it was not enough that the materials be collected; the literature research identifies a pattern of personal collections often forming the foundations of queer archives (Wakimoto *et al.*, 2013; Watts, 2018), but from the start, there was a drive that Cork LGBT Archive move beyond solely collecting and reach as broad an audience as possible in order to achieve visibility. The archive worked to achieve this by any means available, putting on exhibitions, publishing a book (‘Queer Republic of Cork’), and acquiring the skills to develop a digital archive. P3 argues that “as people began to know what the work was, and as you showcase more and more, it's easier for people to see, yes, this is something of value and something that we want to engage in ... that's why I was creating the digital archive so quickly so I could showcase things.”

This drive to digitise resulted in the archive reaching out to establish networks both at home, with the Heritage Council and Cork City Council (P3, too, cites the importance of recognition for the Cork LGBT Archive by these bodies, in being awarded grants and funding), and with the Digital Repository of Ireland (DRI) to ensure longer term digital preservation of the collection; and abroad, where P3 sought to find a community from which to learn and develop best practice and share experience, building a network of support. Citing Marston (1998), Parris (2005) asserts that: "Queer history is created by networks of people." Linking with a diverse range of other LGBTQ+ archives enabled Cork LGBT Archive to avail of supports from both institutional and community-based archives, and to share their own experiences. Recalling an encounter with members of rukus!, an archive project dedicated to Black LGBT+ histories and culture, at an ALMS (Archives, Libraries, Museums and Special Collections) conference in London in 2016, P3 recounts their words of encouragement: "we were where you were a couple of years ago, you're going to get there."

#### *Challenges for community.*

Launched in London in 2005, with a mission "to collect, preserve, exhibit, and otherwise make available ... to the public historical, cultural, and artistic materials related to the Black lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities in the United Kingdom", (X, Campbell and Stevens, 2009) rukus! were also initially resistant to the idea of "being institutionalized by any kind of organization" (ibid), but have since deposited their collections in London Metropolitan Archives (LMA). The decision was not taken lightly however, with careful consideration given to where their materials should go. Co-founder Ajamu X argued that: "The Hall-Carpenter [Archives] doesn't have a history of dealing with

Black material. The Black Cultural Archives doesn't have a history of dealing with gay material." (ibid). LMA dealt with both.

Similarly, the IQA Working Group sought a home for their archive where it would be safe, but also where there would be regard for its significance as a record of 'national importance', and crucially where it would be accessible; where it could continue to be a community resource. As P1 explains: "we needed somewhere where it could be community accessible. So the idea of the library would be that unlike a university library, the national library is accessible to everybody ... because [IQA is a] community based archive formed by and donated to, by members of the broader LGBT communities."

That so much of the contents of the archive remain to be catalogued and digitised within NLI, and are stored offsite and therefore inaccessible, has been a "bone of contention over the years" (P2), and further fuels fears among LGBTQ+ communities about the place of their materials within such institutions, rekindling suspicions about turning "over control of our history and memory to a system still [perceived by some as being] structured to work against us" (Thistlethwaite, 1995, cited by Parris (2005).

Recalling efforts to initiate the Rainbow Revolution exhibition at National Museum of Ireland, P4 remembers meeting with members of LGBTQ+ communities and other LGBTQ+ archives to solicit support for the venture and encourage collectors to provide 'copies of [their] content'. "There was quite a lot of time of me building up relationships with various different people and making sure that they realised they could trust us." One visitor to the museum and potential donor confided, however: "I don't feel like this is a place I belong," while response to the exhibition wasn't wholeheartedly positive, with members of the bisexual community expressing disappointment at lack of representation (P4), indicating the

importance of continued engagement and community consultation on issues of representation.

Participants who have been involved with LGBTQ+ archives within the community express conflicted feelings regarding the relationships they have entered into with state institutions, and there is perhaps a sense of resignation in discussing the decisions taken to do so:

*“it had to be somewhere safe. It just really did. And that was it.” (P2)*

*“it got to the point where I lost the space to work on it and store it that I'd had [...], very suddenly needing to get out of there ... and ... it had to go somewhere.” (P3)*

Bettine and Mattock (2019) identify a tendency to view “partnership and absorption by mainstream heritage institutions [...] as an inevitability for many community archives that lack resources in terms of funding, budget and community support”; they argue against a narrative that suggests such community archives need to be ‘saved’ by institutions. Examining issues of succession and sustainability in community archives, however, Poole (2020), cites Sellie *et al.* (2015) who “argue that community archives are not failures per se if they prove unable to preserve their collections indefinitely.”

#### *Place of LGBTQ+ archives.*

There can be other reasons for wishing to see such materials represented in the state institution. One participant asserts: “I'm representative [...] of at least 10% of the population [...] and more, of the taxpayers. And so I reckon [...] I am a stakeholder actually in the national collection, as held by the national library. So I believe my voice is equally important.”

Participants share a conviction that the place of LGBTQ+ history in Irish history should be recognised by the state, and therefore should be represented in state institutions. The literature review reveals a range of attitudes regarding queer archives, however, including the notion that they can and perhaps should have a different purpose to traditional archives, what Madden (2013) refers to as the 'nature and purpose of queer archives', asking "What counts as an archive?" Latimer (2013) defines "the archive [as] the very process of selecting, ordering, and preserving the past", but argues "that the piecing together of cultural memory is not a neutral pursuit." Watts (2018) identifies the empowering aspect that queer archives can have for LGBTQ+ individuals, and asserts that: "Archives represent material history: the idea that a person can find their families, or those whose lives mirrored theirs, in an acid-free box, and in doing so, find themselves, be recognized by the historical record, and claim their right to take up space in the world." Watts cites an interview by Rawson (2015) with Ben Alwin of the Sexual Minorities Archive (SMA) in Western Massachusetts, who states: "I tell volunteers who work here, when they label one subject file and they catalog one book, it's a political act ... Everything that we can do to erase the erasure and to give voice where there was silence, that's what we're doing with this archival work every day." Further, the literature review also points to the idea of LGBTQ+ archives, particularly the physical space they occupy, as a 'refuge' or 'sanctuary' (Parris, 2005; Wakimoto et al., 2013); can an institutional space replicate this?

Another argument made by participants is that the marriage Equality referendum of 2015 signified a change in the culture and society that reached right into the institution. The result gave tacit permission to now tell these stories, it is implied, or at least to acknowledge them. P1 relates that "the overall climate was against taking in such a collection" when the Irish Queer Archive (IQA) Working Group required a more permanent home for its physical

collection and sought to open discussions with cultural institutions during the first decade of the 21st century. Now, however, P3 states that: “in our discussion with the museum, they talked about the changing environments in Ireland as well, that they felt that the marriage equality referendum created an environment where they could do stuff that maybe in the past would have been more challenging”, while P4 comments: “whether it was conscious or unconscious, that point gave people who are part of the community and are in cultural institutions a little more confidence to actually step forward and say, well, this is a part of history that we should be talking about.” How does this affect the status of the queer archive? Regarding the sustainability of archives that have been founded “by and for social movements”, Sheffield (2015), ponders if the archive records the history of a community under threat, what happens if or when the threat is perceived to have passed? Can such archives continue to document or record efforts for further rights, such as those for Trans communities, from within the institution?

Another factor to consider in donating such archives to institutions is that of succession. If a dedicated individual has been a driving force in sustaining the archive, who will continue that work if or when that person moves on? (Poole, 2020) In such cases, is the archive better within an institution, where it is preserved and can be accessed? P1 muses: “once something is in the likes of a national institution, whether it's the national library or the national museum or wherever, you have a right to access it, in terms of requesting to view it. Now you won't sometimes be able to see it because it's in outside storage, but if there's enough clamour, it will have to be dealt with. So I think it's better.”

*Commitments and consultation.*

Bettine and Mattock (2019) state that “when community collections are absorbed into archival institutions, [...] contemporary discourse stresses the need for equitable partnerships and carefully negotiated terms of acquisition” and this is what LGBTQ+ archives in Ireland have sought. That these haven’t yet been fully delivered on has in part been due to external factors (such as the 2008 financial crash, resulting in cuts to funding (P2)), and in part due to issues of ‘priorities’ within the institutions themselves (P1: “I suppose the way that the keeper of collections looks at it, it’s one of many collections.”) These issues point to the fact that the lack of resources in terms of funding and budget common to community archives identified by Bettine and Mattock (2019), are not necessarily resolved by a move to the institution.

In her article on the Hall-Carpenter Archives at the London School of Economics (2008) Sue Donnelly emphasises the commitment of the LSE to the HCA, describing the development of “an interested and committed audience for the archives [as] a high priority.” NLI had hoped to illustrate its own commitment to IQA and its other LGBTQ+ collections with a planned programme of LGBTI+ events due to have begun in May 2020, but these had to be postponed due to Covid-19. There are commitments in place once more to complete cataloguing and digitisation of the IQA at NLI, but the Covid-19 pandemic has raised further concerns regarding cuts to resources.

On the relationship between Cork LGBT Archive and Digital Repository of Ireland, P3 comments that: “I feel very much still in control of that process and that it’s been a very positive collaboration again with the DRI.” In discussions around donating the physical collection to Cork Public Museum, P3 further reflects: “we talked about our concerns and,

you know, negotiated that I will continue to have full access to the material and that I could still work with it in whatever way we deemed was appropriate”, adding that “the commitments that they made met our concerns so we agreed let it go there” while stressing that, “it has to continue to be a collaboration. So it's not just that we gave it to them and shut the door. It was that the agreement we had was that I would continue to work on the collection and with them.”

Poole (2020) also recommends that institutions engage in continued consultation with communities, citing Allard and Ferris (2015) : “Trusting relationships with communities emerge from practices that have very little to do with archiving. Instead, they develop through shared goals, mutually agreed upon benefits for all parties, and a demonstrated support of community activism.”

P3 states that their experience with the Cork LGBT Archive has led them to self-reflect on the process, and discusses the idea of "queering the archives and [...] challenging ... how we do archival work and who can do archival work and what is an archive", arguing that "what I'm doing, isn't just a practical thing, but it's also very much the political thing, that it is activism," describing themselves as a "queer archival activist", and concluding that: "it is political, it is archival activism. And I think it's important to remember that as well, you know, that we are fundamentally trying to change the world."

#### *Strengths and weaknesses, and scope for future research*

One of the limitations of the research is the small sample size. Efforts were made to contact a number of people who had involvement with Queer and LGBT archives in Ireland, and the study was fortunate to receive responses from individuals who had played or continued to play a variety of roles relating to such archives, including those who worked

with community archives within the community, and those who worked within state institutions, plus those who were involved in several different capacities at different times, either in bringing their skills and expertise to bear as a volunteer to support the work of the archives, or as members of the board of not-for-profit companies to continue to consult with state institutions on how best to care for materials they may have taken ownership of, or as staff within institutions with responsibility for such collections. There was also insight into starting up such an archive, based on a pre-existing collection, and the challenges encountered in organising, storing, digitising and making accessible these materials through a variety of methods and utilising a number of support networks.

While there were just four respondents in total, they covered a considerable cross-section of experience between them, which was helpful for the study. Many were involved in state institutions, or repositories, or libraries, or worked with archives or as historians and in academia, and were therefore accustomed to the internal institutional issues or ‘problems’ encountered in cataloguing and accessing materials. P1 states:

*“I have to negotiate certain things that I need for the sections that I manage, the people I manage, so there are multiple aspects to this, but that's the difference between a national cultural institution ... and a county archive or a county museum, maybe, and a local repository that's maybe under somebody's bed or maybe it might be a voluntary heritage group”,*

while P4 adds:

*“...there are so many priorities in [a national museum] about what should we talk about? What should we focus on?”*

These participants were generally supportive of such institutions – while they may not have enjoyed having to deal with internal “political situation[s]” (“These are realities that you work within.” (P1)), they very much believed in the role of the institution, and the place of the LGBTQ+ archives within it. This was not simply because the materials may be safer there; they believed in the capacity for the institution to care for these archives, and also in its ability to provide access to their contents.

*“...one thing that the National Archive Act says is that, you have to make this material accessible to the public. It can't just be locked away in a store. It has to be there for the people of Ireland.” (P4)*

*“once something is in the likes of a national institution, whether it's the national library or the national museum or wherever, you have a right to access it, in terms of requesting to view it. Now you won't sometimes be able to see it because it's in outside storage, but if there's enough clamour, it will have to be dealt with.” (P1)*

A broader range of participants may have provided a more diverse range of views on this matter, or at least highlighted other conflicts e.g., those who had considerably more experience of working with the community archive while it was still very much part of the community, may have had an alternative tale to tell. Those who worked with Queer and LGBT archives prior to decriminalisation in 1993 perhaps would have provided a different outlook, those who had donated to the archive who now found they could not access their materials in offsite storage might have had another point of view; there may have been some donors who disagreed with the move, or others still who had greater reason to distrust the role of the institution in safeguarding and presenting their materials.

For future research, those involved with more nascent archives, such as the Irish Trans Archive, could provide insight into the experience of setting up an archive in the aftermath of both the Marriage Equality referendum and the Gender Recognition Bill. (efforts were made to contact the Irish Trans Archive for this research but the study was not successful in securing interview participation prior to deadline.) The research focusses on the experience of LGBT and Queer archives in the Republic of Ireland. In a 2019 article entitled “Homosexuality Is Not a Problem - It Doesn't Do You Any Harm and Can Be Lots of Fun”, Patrick McDonagh notes a “strong commitment to work on these issues [the establishment of human rights for the sexually oppressed] on a cross-border basis”; there is scope therefore to investigate similar experience in Northern Ireland, particularly in light of the establishment of the Northern Ireland LGBT Heritage Project, which “aims to interview older LGBT persons in Northern Ireland to preserve their stories, and to collect artefacts from local LGBT history” (*LGBT History NI*, 2020), having recently received funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund. Given that both this and the recently initiated LGBTI+ Living Archive Project at National Museum of Ireland have a focus on LGBTQ+ oral histories, this too seems an area worthy of closer investigation.

### *Conclusion*

While the literature review uncovered research documenting the traditional mistrust of state institutions among LGBTQ+ communities, (not solely) when it comes to preserving, recording and making accessible their histories, often due to suspicions regarding misinterpretation and neglect, and further identified strong commitment to such archives retaining their autonomy whilst arguing against the ‘inevitability’ of the community archive entering into relationships with state institutions, (particularly in the U.S.) primarily due lack of resources such as funding and storage space, this research reveals a near defiant

expectation that LGBTQ+ histories take up their rightful place in national repositories, as national records of national relevance in Ireland. This is balanced by an almost nostalgic desire to have seen a dedicated LGBTQ+ cultural space developed, but there is acknowledgement too that this may segregate Irish LGBTQ+ history from the broader, national history. Participants highlight the importance of putting policies in place when developing any LGBTQ+ related collections within institutions, so that it isn't solely to gain "them a bit of kudos for a [...] couple of years", as one participant put it, while another discussed the importance of 'embedding' the idea of LGBTQ+ histories as being part of a broader national history within cultural spaces. On Cork Public Museum's commitment to putting on a permanent exhibition around its LGBT Archive, P3 states: "I don't think that the museum is going to become a queer space but I think that [...] especially when the permanent exhibition is there, it will be a space that contains [...] the LGBT [exhibition] so it becomes more integrated in that wider [...] cultural history [...] and heritage."

Concerns regarding issues of succession when it comes to maintaining and sustaining such archives also play a part when it comes to deciding if they will be more secure, and, in time, it is hoped, more accessible within state institutions, particularly in the absence of the dedicated LGBTQ+ space. P2 asserts: "we all acknowledged that [IQA] was too big for one person and we needed a safe space for it."

One of the casualties of the Covid-19 pandemic was a planned Outing the Past festival for Dublin, which was to have taken place across three venues (National Gallery of Ireland, National Museum of Ireland and Kilmainham Gaol), building on connections established during the collating of LGBTQ+ collections for Rainbow Revolution at NMI. Further to this, a network has been established in order to foster greater collaboration and

engagement among such institutions regarding their LGBTQ+ content, to explore possibilities for further, future associations, while also seeking to engage with communities both within and outside of state institutions. The move to establish a presence for the LGBTQ+ oral histories on screens in local authority museums throughout the country also points to a commitment on the part of institutions to make such materials accessible and visible on a national level.

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## Appendix

### *A: Interview questions*

#### *Questions for Participant\_1*

- How did you come to be involved with the Irish Queer Archives working group?
- Did you come on board once the decision had been made to transfer the materials to the National Library of Ireland or did your involvement predate that?
- What factors led to the decision to transfer the archive to NLI, e.g., preservation, sustainability, funding, resources (or lack thereof), space, expertise, publicity, outreach, exhibition, accessibility, etc. or others?
- Were there negotiations with any other institutions? Was anywhere else considered as a potential 'home' for these archives?
- What were the primary factors that resulted in NLI being chosen as a suitable destination for IQA?
- What were the expectations or anticipated outcomes of such a move?
- The potential for friction to arise between more mainstream institutions and community-based archives has been identified in research undertaken in other countries. Were there any such reservations about the transfer of IQA to NLI?
- Were there any kind of guarantees sought or given regarding this during discussions with NLI at the time of the donation?
- It has been suggested in other studies that a solution to issues faced by many archives can be found in collaboration, and that "partnerships between mainstream and grassroots archives could help benefit the queer community more than would their separate endeavors." Do you think the IQA has benefitted from its relationship with NLI (and vice versa)? In what way(s)?
- Could you talk about the place of the IQA within the NLI?
  - Who has responsibility for those materials there now?
  - The goal is to have it continue to be a 'living archive' – how is that goal achieved?
  - Is there an acquisitions policy?
  - Do materials continue to be donated or deposited?
- The IQA at NLI has thus far been semi-catalogued and much of the material remains to be digitised. What are the challenges faced in cataloguing these materials and what kind of plans are currently in place to attempt to achieve full digitisation?
- In its annual report of 2008, the National Library of Ireland described the Irish Queer Archive as one of its 'headline additions' of that year, referring to IQA as the "most comprehensive collection of material for the study of homosexuality in Ireland."

- What, in your opinion, is the function of a Queer archive?
- What is its primary purpose?
- Do you think preservation of these archives assisted in affecting social and cultural change?
- A recent study of LGBT collection building and policy in Irish public libraries found that gay white men were most catered for and most used the library but that it is not much used among this group (they also cite research primarily from the US and Canada that has shown “a decline in LGBTQ+ usage of library resources over time.”)
  - What of archive usage?
  - Who do you think a queer archive is for - the community it ‘serves’ and whose history it documents and preserves?
  - Do (or can) they make use of it?
- The National Library’s National Photographic Archive contains among its holdings the Christopher Robson Photographic Collection and this was to be a central part of a planned programme of events scheduled to begin in May of this year, “highlighting the Library’s extensive collections and drawing on its Irish Queer Archive.”
  - Do you think events such as these are the best way to exhibit these materials to the public or is there scope to present or include them as part of a wider overview of Irish history and society?
  - What other kinds of opportunities are there for the NLI to exploit these kinds of collections?
- The work of BeLonGTo, the national organisation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered (LGBT) young people in Ireland has also been donated to NLI. These materials have been ‘born digitally’; what are the challenges in preserving and presenting these kinds of materials?
- How does the practice of uploading images to digital spaces, for example, rather than preserving physical photographs and perhaps later donating them to archives such as NPA impact future preservation practices, do you think?
- How do you feel about the current dispersal of LGBTQ+ materials in other locations e.g. the National Museum at Collins Barrack ‘Rainbow Revolution’ trail has a substantial collection of such materials now too, including archival interview footage?
  - Do you think this dilutes the IQA, or other collections NLI holds?
  - Or do you think it helps to bring those materials to a broader audience, and that this is of greater benefit to everybody concerned?
- Many thanks for your time.

### *Questions for Participant\_2*

- How did you come to be involved with the Irish Queer Archives working group?
- Did your involvement with the IQA predate this or was this your first connection to it?
- The IQA was founded in 1997 and the working group established in 1999. What were the factors that led to this group being set up?
- What were the motivations behind the decision to transfer the archive to NLI, e.g., preservation, sustainability, funding, resources (or lack thereof), space, expertise, publicity, outreach, exhibition, accessibility, etc. or others?
- Were there negotiations with any other institutions? Was anywhere else considered as a potential 'home' for these archives?
- What were the primary factors that resulted in NLI being chosen as a suitable destination for IQA?
- What were the expectations or anticipated outcomes of such a move?
- The potential for friction to arise between more mainstream institutions and community-based archives has been identified in research undertaken in other countries. Were there any such reservations about the transfer of IQA to NLI?
- Were there any kind of guarantees sought or given regarding this during discussions with NLI at the time of the donation?
- It has been suggested in other studies that a solution to issues faced by many archives can be found in collaboration, and that "partnerships between mainstream and grassroots archives could help benefit the queer community more than would their separate endeavors." Do you think the IQA has benefitted from its relationship with NLI (and vice versa)? In what way(s)?
- Could you talk about the place of the IQA within the NLI?
  - Who has responsibility for those materials there now?
  - Is there continued consultation with NXF?
  - How would you define that relationship? What, if any, input does NXF have?
  - The goal is to have IQA continue to be a 'living archive' – how is that goal achieved?
- In its annual report of 2008, the National Library of Ireland described the Irish Queer Archive as one of its 'headline additions' of that year, referring to IQA as the "most comprehensive collection of material for the study of homosexuality in Ireland."
  - What, in your opinion, is the function of a Queer archive?
  - What is its primary purpose?
- Do you think preservation of these archives assisted in affecting social and cultural change?
- A major LGBTI+ programme of events scheduled to have begun at the National Library in May of this year, intended at "highlighting the Library's extensive

collections and drawing on its Irish Queer Archive”, has now been postponed (due to Covid-19).

- Given that the IQA at NLI has thus far been semi-catalogued and much of the material remains to be digitised, do you think events such as these are the best way to exhibit or make these materials accessible to the public?
- Is there scope to present or include these materials as part of a wider overview of Irish history and society?
- How do you feel about the current dispersal of LGBTQ+ materials in other locations e.g. the National Museum at Collins Barracks ‘Rainbow Revolution’ trail has a substantial collection of such materials now too, including archival interview footage?
  - Do you think this dilutes the IQA?
  - Or do you think it helps to bring those materials to a broader audience, and that this is of greater benefit to everybody concerned?
  - Is there scope for joint ventures between such venues, or an exchange of sorts?
  - Might some parts of the IQA collection at NLI be more suited to National Museum, or vice versa?
- Research has indicated that Queer archives often have their origins as personal passion projects – what one paper refers to as the ‘archival impulse’ – and others have suggested that queer archival practices are prone to be driven by “strong feelings”; how important do you think that is, and do you think it is something that can be maintained or sustained within more mainstream institutions?
  - A recent study of community-based archives also highlighted the issue of ‘succession’; if, as sometimes happens, a lone figure takes responsibility for the care of such collections or maintenance of such materials, who then carries this on, or sustains it? Are more mainstream institutions best placed to do this, do you think, especially in terms of providing the resources to ensure continued accessibility, preservation and digitisation?
  - In a changed social and cultural context, where many of these institutions have now enacted diversity and inclusivity policies, is it possible that those who might once have operated as solitary collectors can now work as insiders, as it were, to preserve LGBTQ+ identities and histories within these institutions?
- Finally, during your recent Town Hall Talk on the IQA Uncovered, [...] discusses ‘Rainbow societies’ or LGBT communities, who may have felt they were missing a hereditary lineage, prompting a curiosity about those who have gone before us, who put out ‘signposts’ for us; you allude to this yourself in the recent Pride 2020 Supplement in the Irish Times when you talk about seeking out our foremothers and forefathers – I wonder if you could elaborate on this, in relation to my earlier

questions about the purpose of a queer archive, and how they might affect or influence social and cultural change?

- Many thanks for your time.

### *Questions for Participant\_3*

- What were the origins of the Cork LGBT Archive?
- Can you discuss how you came to be involved in its creation and curation?
- The Arthur Leahy collection is at the core of the Cork LGBT Archive. How did you first become aware of this collection and did it form the initial basis of the archive or had you begun collecting materials at this point yourself?
- How did you source content for the collection? Were there other collectors who also chose to donate?
- How and where were the materials stored? What kind of challenges did you face in collecting and preserving the archive? Were the materials accessible to researchers?
- Research has indicated that Queer or LGBT archives often have their origins as personal passion projects – what one paper refers to as the ‘gay archival impulse’ – and others have suggested that queer archival practices are prone to be driven by “strong feelings”; in your recent discussion with [...] about the archive, you mention that “[...] had the foresight to start sticking things in a basement, he had no idea what would happen to them.” Was that drive to preserve an identity and history behind the initial preserving of these records, on both your parts?
- In that same discussion with [...], you also talked about linking up with other international archives and attending Archives, Libraries, Museums and Special Collections (ALMS) Conferences, and the significance of this not just as a learning experience but also as a ‘sustaining’ one.
  - Can you discuss the kinds of supports international networks like this can provide, and in what way these connections have contributed to the continued construction of the Cork LGBT Archive?
  - How important is it to have such an international network?
- How did the process of digitising the Cork LGBT Archives begin? Can you share your experience of that, both before and after the involvement of the Digital Repository of Ireland (DRI)? Did the relationship with DRI lead to the archive being on Europeana?
- It has been suggested in other studies that a solution to issues faced by many archives can be found in collaboration, and that “partnerships between mainstream and grassroots archives could help benefit the queer community more than would their separate endeavors.” The archive is physically held in Cork City Museum, is that correct? How did the relationship between Cork LGBT Archive and Cork City Museum come about? In what ways can Cork City Museum and Cork LGBT Archive both benefit from this relationship, do you think?
- The potential for friction to arise between more mainstream institutions and community-based archives has also been identified in research undertaken in other countries; there is evidence of mistrust of state or academic institutions, and studies

suggest that this can be heightened among LGBT communities, where there is a suspicion of the commodification of their culture or lingering memory of a time when no one wanted their 'content', and concern that these kinds of materials won't receive the same care as they would within their communities. Were there any such reservations about the transfer of the physical archive to Cork City Museum?

- A recent study of community-based archives also highlighted the issue of 'succession'; if, as sometimes happens, a lone figure takes responsibility for the care of such collections or maintenance of such materials, who then carries this on, or sustains it? Are more mainstream institutions well placed to do this, do you think, especially in terms of providing the resources to ensure continued accessibility, preservation and digitisation?
  - Is there a new generation of Queer Archival Activists to take this on?
  - In a changed social and cultural context, where some institutions have enacted diversity and inclusivity policies, is it possible that those who might once have operated as solitary collectors can now work as insiders, as it were, to preserve LGBTQ+ identities and histories within these institutions?
- What are the plans for the archives in Cork City Museum? What are your own hopes or anticipated outcomes for the materials there? Do you continue to consult with the museum regarding this?
- Do you think this should be part of the museum's responsibility as a national cultural institution as it is, to collect and make these kinds of materials available for the national record?
  - Can exhibitions of such materials in a national institution such as the museum help to bring these histories and heritage to a broader audience by presenting and including them as part of a wider overview of Irish history and society, in a way that perhaps more niche 'special events' or sites that are specifically LGBTQI+ identified spaces would not?
  - What, in your view, is the future for curation, preservation and exhibition of Queer and LGBT related materials in Ireland?
    - Do you think preservation of these archives assisted in affecting social and cultural change in Ireland?

Many thanks for your time.

### *Questions for Participant\_4*

- Can you talk about the background of the Rainbow Revolution Trail at National Museum at Collins Barracks, and how it came about?
- Was this a project that you were involved with from the very start, or was it something that was initiated by the museum and you then came on board?
- The exhibition was produced in collaboration with key LGBTI+ historians and archivists. Can you discuss who else was involved and how they came to take part? How much of an input did they have and what was the nature of their relationship with the museum? Is the goal that the collection can expand, and if so will there be continued consultation with this group?
- Given that the National Library of Ireland (and the National Photographic Archive) hold a large collection of LGBTQI+ materials, such as the Irish Queer Archive, the Christopher Robson Photographic Collection, photographs of the Yes Equality campaign for Marriage Equality, and the work of BeLonGTo, the national organisation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered (LGBT) young people in Ireland, and that the Cork LGBT Archive is also in the process of being digitised, how did you go about sourcing materials for the Rainbow Revolution Trail? What was the policy for collecting LGBTQI+ related content for the Museum of Decorative Arts & History at Collins Barracks? Were there specific kinds of materials you sought out or particular elements you wanted to highlight?
- How did you come to secure the archival documentary footage as part of the exhibition? Were there any difficulties in gaining access to the RTÉ archives or exploring those materials? Were you able to source any such footage from the Irish Film Archive?
- Research undertaken in other countries has identified the potential for friction between community-based archives or collections and more mainstream institutions; there is evidence of mistrust of state or academic institutions, and studies suggest this can be heightened among LGBT communities, where there is a suspicion of the commodification of their culture or lingering memory of a time when no one wanted their 'content', and concern that these kinds of materials won't receive the same care as they would within their communities. As this exhibition was an initiative of the institution itself, was this a factor at all, in seeking donations or support from LGBTQI+ communities?
- As a result of this mistrust, some community-based or grassroots organisations have pursued deliberate policies of separatism, yet other studies have suggested that partnerships with mainstream institutions could in fact "help benefit the queer community more than would their separate endeavors." What do you think are the benefits for both LGBTQI+ communities and the National Museum from exhibitions such as the Rainbow Revolution Trail?
- Do you think exhibitions such as these help to bring these histories and heritage to a broader audience by presenting and including them as part of a wider overview of

Irish history and society, in a way that perhaps more niche ‘special events’ or sites that are specifically LGBTQI+ identified spaces would not?

- Several studies point to the significance of the physical space of community-based archives or collections of LGBTQI+ materials, and their importance in providing a place of refuge or sanctuary for visitors or users. Do you think it’s possible for institutions like the National Museum to provide that kind of space?
- A 2013 study of three community archives in California argues that in retaining their autonomy, they can “continue to respond to the needs of LGBT communities they serve”. Do you think somewhere like the National Museum has a responsibility to respond to whatever those communities needs may be with its related exhibitions, or is it fulfilling its responsibilities by collecting and documenting these histories for the national record?
- Research into Queer archives has indicated that such collections often have their origins as personal passion projects – what one paper refers to as the ‘archival impulse’ – and others have suggested that queer archival practices are prone to be driven by “strong feelings”; traditionally this is something that would have happened outside of the mainstream.
  - In a changed social and cultural context, do you think that this is something that can be maintained or sustained within more mainstream institutions? Is it possible that those who might once have operated as solitary collectors can now work as insiders, as it were, to preserve LGBTQI+ identities and histories within these institutions?
  - A recent study of community-based archives also highlighted the issue of ‘succession’; if, as sometimes happens, a lone figure takes responsibility for the care of such collections or maintenance of such materials, who then carries this on, or sustains it? Within institutions, how important is it that there are diversity and inclusion policies in place, and clearly defined strategies regarding the collecting of LGBTQI+ materials, to ensure they continue to be cared for and preserved?
  - Are more mainstream institutions best placed to take on issues of succession and sustainability relating to such collections, do you think, especially in terms of providing the resources to ensure continued accessibility, preservation and digitisation?
  - You mentioned in our email correspondence that this is a subject of huge personal and professional interest to you. How does it feel for you personally, to be able to be involved as perhaps both insider and outsider, having responsibility for a personal passion project within a mainstream institution?
- What is the longer term strategy for the Rainbow Revolution Trail? Is the hope to expand it through a policy of continued contemporary collecting? What would you like to see it achieve?
- Given the current dispersal of LGBTQI+ materials in various venues or online, do you think there is scope for joint ventures between such venues, or an exchange of

sorts? Do these separate institutions maintain relationships at all? I see several institutions are involved with the Outing the Past Festival.

- Do you ever foresee the equivalent of a LGBTQI+ 'museum' in Ireland, or a central location to house such materials?
- Can you tell me more about the LGBTQIAP+ Living Archive Project?
- Many thanks for your time.

## *B: Information sheet for participants*

### **PROJECT TITLE**

A sense of sexual community and history across time: Irish Queer and LGBT archives

You are being asked to take part in a research study on LGBT and Queer Archives in Ireland, exploring the origins and histories of such archives, how they were initiated and how they came to be preserved and maintained, what the challenges were in creating and curating such collections in the cultural and social context of the time, and what effect that had on the drive or motivation to keep a record of such materials; how, as that context changed, these community-based archives eventually came to form partnerships with more mainstream institutions, what the background to that was, what challenges these collaborations themselves created, and what was their impact, both in terms of what was anticipated or hoped for, and the actual outcome, and how these relationships have evolved since.

My name is Gerard Morgan and I am a student at DBS, on the MSc in Information & Library Management. My dissertation topic is Queer and LGBT archives in Ireland. My supervisor is Dr Clare Thornley.

### **WHAT WILL HAPPEN**

In this study, you will be asked to take part in a semi-structured interview or 'purposeful conversation' to elaborate on your role and share your experiences of working with such materials in Ireland. I would like to get an overview of the policies and practices, both past and present, around the preservation and curation of such materials in Ireland. I am keen to investigate the history of Queer and LGBT archives in Ireland, what their origins were and who was involved in setting them up and maintaining them, and how they came to form relationships with more mainstream institutions. I wish to examine the current availability of LGBT and Queer archival materials in Ireland, e.g., the Irish Queer Archive at the National Library of Ireland, the recent digitisation of the Cork LGBT Archive, the Rainbow Revolution trail at the National Museum of Ireland - Museum of Decorative Arts & History at Collins Barracks, and recent donations to the National Photographic Archive, in terms of accessibility and exhibition, and to explore what you think is the future for exhibition and curation of such archives.

### **TIME COMMITMENT**

I would be delighted and grateful if you could allow me from 40 minutes up to an hour of your time for interview. In the current climate this would need to be arranged online, via Zoom or Skype or other similar software that would be suitable for you. I will be happy to maintain follow up communication if you are amenable to this and welcome any advice, guidance or information that you may be in a position to offer on the subject.

**PARTICIPANTS' RIGHTS**

You may decide to stop being a part of the research study at any time without explanation required from you. You have the right to ask that any data you have supplied to that point be withdrawn / destroyed.

You have the right to omit or refuse to answer or respond to any question that is asked of you.

You have the right to have your questions about the procedures answered (unless answering these questions would interfere with the study's outcome). If you have any questions as a result of reading this information sheet, you should ask the researcher before the study begins.

**CONFIDENTIALITY/ANONYMITY**

The data I collect will not contain any personal information about you except that which you allow. It would be preferable to be able to name those who are involved in order to validate that involvement, and the research itself. Participants identities will be anonymised if that is what they wish. The purpose of the research is for my dissertation, and it is an area of personal interest to me too. All data will be stored securely in the cloud and managed by DBS IT. All data will be destroyed after the study has been completed and assessed.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION**

I or / and Dr Clare Thornley will be glad to answer your questions about this. You may contact my supervisor at [clare.thornley@dbs.ie](mailto:clare.thornley@dbs.ie)

*C: Informed consent form***PROJECT TITLE:**

A sense of sexual community and history across time: Irish Queer and LGBT archives

**PROJECT SUMMARY:**

A research study of the current status of LGBT and queer archives in Ireland, investigating their origins and histories, and examining policies and practices over changing social and cultural contexts up to the present time, exploring the establishment of partnerships with more mainstream institutions and the continued evolution of such relationships.

By signing below, you are agreeing that: (1) you have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet, (2) questions about your participation in this study have been answered satisfactorily, (3) you are aware of the potential risks (if any), and (4) you are taking part in this research study voluntarily (without coercion).

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Participant's signature

Gerard Morgan

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Student Name (Printed)

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Participant's Name (Printed)

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Student Name signature

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Date