

Hidden voices in the archives: pioneering women archivists in early 20th century England

1. *The public voice of the archivist*¹

I have been thinking about the public voice of the archivist, according to Hilary Jenkinson (1948, 31) 'the most selfless devotee of Truth the modern world produces'. Jenkinson told us that the archivist's career 'is one of service. He exists in order to make other people's work possible'. Jenkinson also urged the archivist not 'to import into the collection under his charge what we have been throughout most anxious to keep out of it, an element of his personal judgement' (1937, 149). In other words, archivists should leave their own views aside, should be detached and impartial, should not leave any mark or inscription on the archive, should not be seen and should not be heard. This notion of anonymity is a trope in archival discourse. Archivists dance over the archive imagining that they hardly leave a trace of themselves, of their actions and decisions. Archivists have understood themselves as not apparent in the archive. But in their actions, archivists do leave impressions on the archive; they are at the same time everywhere and nowhere. Can we hear the voice of the archivist? Do archivists document themselves? Or are archivists 'sans-papiers', the undocumented, the persons without identity papers (Derrida, 2005, 55)? Derrida examined the link between archives and identity, naming and existing, silence and presence. He reflected on secrecy and openness, the past leaving its traces in the future through the archive and asked 'what becomes of its archive when the world of paper ... is subordinated to ... new machines for virtualisation? Is there such a thing as a virtual event? A virtual archive?' (2005, 2). Or, one might add, a virtual archivist? Are archivists afraid of being identified and named? The phenomena of archives and the voices of archivists are explored in the literatures of other disciplines (Cvetkovich, 2003, Steedman, 2001). But philosophical, historical, literary and feminist writing overwhelms archival science; archivists are in danger of being drowned out, repressed, excluded and hidden.

I see an analogy between the presence and absence of the archivist in the archive and the voice of women in the public sphere, the right of women to be heard in public discourse. Mary Beard, the classical scholar, (2014, 11) reminds us that in Homer's *Odyssey*, Telemachus exerted his public power over his mother Penelope, telling her to 'go back up into your quarters and take up your own work, the loom and the distaff...speech will be the business of men, all men, and of me most of all; for mine is the power in this household.' Women's voices were not for the public sphere. It is a recurring theme in fairytale, myth and legend. Richard Strauss's opera *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, first performed in 1919, is among other things about women's struggle to find their identity and place in the world. In Hugo von Hofmannsthal's libretto, Barak the Dyer's brothers exclaim, 'Wer achtet ein Weib und Geschrei eines Weibes?' ('Who takes any notice of a woman and the whining of a woman?').

Jane Austen in *Northanger Abbey* (1817) alludes to the irrelevance of history to the domestic experience of women, as being 'the quarrels of popes and kings, with wars and pestilence in every page; the men all so good for nothing, and hardly any women at all'. Mary Spongberg (2002, 57) suggests that in the 19th century 'women's exclusion from the public sphere was reinforced by practices adopted by historians engaged in developing the new discipline of history within the university'. Leopold von Ranke's documentary seminar

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teaching, based on his archival research in Austria, emphasised ‘facts over concepts’, ‘the centrality of politics to the study of history’ (Spongberg, 57-58). And as history became ‘conflated with a masculine quest for identity’, it tended to privilege national consciousness and state archives, or in Austen’s terms ‘popes and kings’. Von Ranke’s teaching moved historical science ‘from the public lecture hall, which was open to all, to the seminar room, a private space available only to men’ (Spongberg, 57). The presence and absence of women in modern historiography has been examined by Bonnie Smith (1984). Women historians of the 19th century, for example Sarah Taylor Austin and Mary Berry, made use of ‘unusual sources such as diaries, travel accounts and memoirs’ (Smith, 1984, 713). As a consequence, ‘women who attempted to write history were rarely considered ‘real’ historians: rather they have been characterised as biographers, historical novelists, political satirists, genealogists, writers of travellers’ tales, collectors of folklore and antiquarians’ (Spongberg, 2002, 1-2). Local history, genealogy, personal, domestic and community interests, characterised by Philippa Levine (1986, 6) as the domain of the amateur in the 19th century, and once perceived as the women’s sphere, are at the heart of the archive in the 21st century. These are the archives which tell the stories of real people.

Having briefly examined the voice of women in history, this chapter will go on to consider the archive and the archivist in the scholarship of humanities disciplines, before illuminating the role of women in the emerging archival profession of the early 20th century. By these means, I will seek to make the voice of the archivist clearer.

2. The archive in scholarship

Disciplines as diverse as history, critical theory and cultural studies, literary studies, art history, dance and visual studies, anthropology, and critical heritage studies have focused on archives and experienced an ‘archival turn’ in theory and research methods. Historians have gradually recognised that archives are not merely sources but are objects of research in their own right, what the anthropologist Ann Laura Stoler characterises as the shift from ‘archives-as-things’ to ‘archiving-as-process’ (Stoler, 2009, 20). Stoler, writing about the colonial archive, examines supposedly neutral archives ‘against the grain’. She draws attention to ‘the force of writing and the feel of documents’ (2009, 1). Historian Philipp Müller (2010, 109-110, 123) has shown how von Ranke sought privileged access to the archives of the Habsburg monarchy, using various bureaucratic and diplomatic strategies as a foreign subject to seek the favour of the sovereign and his officials. Yet, having obtained that access, a mark of his high status as an historian, von Ranke in his private letters ‘gave testimony about both the existence of the manuscripts... and his own sensual experience of their material quality’.

Critical cultural theorists, literary and feminist scholars have engaged in the notion of the archive. Maryanne Dever (2014), Kate Eichhorn (2013) and Arlette Farge (2013) all consider the source of cultural authority, the nature of cultural production and ‘working in the archives’. Dever (2014, 285) focuses on the physicality and materiality of the archive, asserting that the ‘promise of paper’ attracts researchers and that the ‘physical contact with original documents is what has traditionally confirmed our status as privileged researchers and generated that longed-for sense of intimacy’. Dever (2013, 176) reflects that ‘Allusions to the sensual possibilities of the materials with which we work are rare. Indeed, researchers are encouraged to transcribe the words they find in documents and then to let

the possibilities of the page itself fall from view'. As Alice Yaeger Kaplan (1990, 103) remarks, 'conventional academic discourse requires that when you write up the results of your archival work, you tell a story about *what* you found, but not about how you found it....The passion of the archives must finally be used to eradicate all personal stories in the interests of dry archival report, fit for a public'. Dever, Newman and Vickery (2009) interrogate the contemporary practice of archival research. They remind us of the importance of the individual experience and the affect of the archive in life stories. Research methods in literary studies and in biography range from archival sources, discourse and textual analysis and semiotics to embrace visual culture, auto/biography, auto-ethnography and creative writing (Griffin, 2005). In contemporary discursive social culture, the self-revelation of the researcher compels her to go beyond documenting the 'facts' of a biography to attempt to interpret and 'read' the lives of those she studies (Griffin, 33). Historians of women's history such as Sachs (2008, 660) have reflected on the methodological difficulties of archival research where both archivists and historians were constrained in the past by 'a conceptual framework that privileged a very limited spectrum of male political, social and economic activity'. Archives relating to women's lives were not considered worthy of preservation or, if preserved, were confined to the 'w – women' index entry (Sachs, 665).

Many scholars in the humanities and social sciences undertake research in the archive without much reference to archival science scholars and professionals. The different communities do not understand or experience 'the archive' in the same way. In explorations of the affect of the archive, the archivist seldom appears as a material being and so is invisible. Yet, without the agency of the archivist, the 'archival turn' would often not be possible. Archival scholars have begun to reflect on the presence and absence of the archivist and to challenge the traditional notion of impartiality. Catherine Hobbs writes about the power of the personality in writers' archives, 'the unfinished draft of a life lived', and ways in which archivists should reflect 'the psychology of archives', character, storytelling and self-narratives in their treatment (Hobbs, 2006, 110, 117). Twenty years ago, Terry Cook (1997) wrote about memory, archives and archival history, remembering and forgetting. He urged archivists to create a collective archival discourse, or meta-narrative, to mark the shift from being passive, impartial custodians to active shapers of our documentary heritage. As Cook (1997, 18) wrote, the work of activist archivists means that 'the world's citizens can open the doors to personal and societal well-being that comes from experiencing continuity with the past, from a sense of roots, of belonging, of identity'. Brien Brothman (2010), Eric Ketelaar (2001, 2012) and others have written about removing the boundaries of archival context, thinking about the problematic of the archive, and refiguring the archivist in the archive. If the archivist does not speak, then other archival narratives are suppressed, confined to what Gerard Genette (1997) called the 'paratext'. Archivists become footnotes, obscure, shadowy, hidden and elusive, almost invisible, silent, not apparent, and lacking materiality.

Many professions, as they mature, seek to understand themselves through reflection on and investigation of their own histories and of their historical context. Archival science is no exception. Histories have been written of national cultural institutions (Posner, 1964, Harris, 1991, Wilson, 1982-83, Cantwell, 1991), of professional developments (Cox, 1983, Duchein, 1992, Millar, 1998, Cook, 2005), and to a more limited extent of leading individuals (Cox, 2004, Wosh, 2011). Few women in the library and archival fields have been studied in detail:

Ida Leeson, the first woman to be appointed Mitchell Librarian in Sydney, Australia in 1932 (Martin, 2006) and Margaret Cross Norton, head of the Illinois State Archives (Mitchell, 2003), are notable exceptions. Other disciplines have studied the professional contributions and lives of women pioneers. For example, in early 20th century experimental psychology, Valentine (2006, 2009) explores the lives of Beatrice Edgell, Jessie Murray and other pioneering women. Valentine's approach combines the study of a few individuals in depth with shorter studies of a larger number of women: taken together, the lives shine a light on the role of women in the early history of psychology and psychoanalysis in Britain. Her work exemplifies a research method through which an analysis of women's professional lives is set in their educational, cultural, social and family contexts, tracking their social networks and exploring their personalities in an effort to understand their place in the history of their profession (Valentine, 2006, 137-188). Nearer to our own field, Levine's (1986) study of antiquaries, historians and archaeologists in 19th century England makes use of research methods which might be adopted for a new endeavour. Levine analyses the activities which typified the historical profession emerging in the 19th century in order to identify the different communities, government and educational institutions and individuals. She reconstructs the network of lives, social relationships, and individual interests which combined to bring about the shift from amateur to professional history. Collective biography and prosopographical research methods are used by Valentine and by Levine to construct a narrative of an emerging profession. Returning then to the archivist and archival history, this chapter seeks to explain the need for a new area of research in archival science: the role of pioneering women archivists in the development of the archival profession. The chapter will not permit more than an introductory exploration of individual lives but will seek to establish a framework for future research and an examination of some possible research approaches.

3. *Women in the archive*

Archival history in England has tended to be the history of great men and institutional archives, such as the Public Record Office (now The UK National Archives). My own work (Shepherd, 2009) focuses on the national themes of archival history in 19th and 20th century England, examining government commissions and reports, the development of archival institutions, professional infrastructure and university education, providing the larger framework for our history. We know about the first Deputy Keepers of the UK Public Records, Sir Francis Palgrave, Sir Thomas Hardy and Henry Maxwell Lyte (Cantwell, 1991). There is a brief history of the Secretary and Commissioners of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts (Ellis, 1969). We recognise Sir Hilary Jenkinson, 'the father of English archives', author of *A Manual of Archive Administration* in 1922, Deputy Keeper of the Public Records from 1947 to 1954 and first President of the Society of Archivists from 1955 to 1961 (Davies, 1957). We have come across George Herbert Fowler, Professor of Zoology at UCL, who became the founder of the first local record office in Bedfordshire in 1913, author of *The Care of County Muniments* in 1923 (Bell and Stitt, 2002). They are well documented. Margaret Procter (2012) studied Hubert Hall, author of *A Repertory of British Archives*, who worked at the Public Record Office from 1879, ending his career there as an Assistant Keeper in 1921. Hall was trained in the von Ranke tradition and he passed on the documentary approach to history by means of seminar teaching at the London School of Economics. Procter (2012, 175) shows that at the LSE a 'majority of seminar participants were women', in contrast to Sponberg's view of the historical seminar in Germany and the

USA as a male space. Hall's teaching 'encompassed diplomatics and palaeography and administrative history but it also provided the skills needed for employment in the various branches of historical work' (Procter, 2012, 186). Procter (2012, iii) says that Hall, along with 'his PRO contemporaries, Charles Johnson and Charles Crump', trained 'a generation of women historical workers'. Procter (2012, 193-195) suggests that these women were not employed as academic historians in the universities, but that there was a direct line from 'the women who came within [Hall's] ambit as students, collaborators and researchers, whether in his classes at LSE or in the PRO searchrooms, [to] a later generation of women who were clearly identified as archivists'.

Where are the voices of pioneering women in the history of English archives? Dr Irene Churchill of Lambeth Palace Library, trained at Hall's LSE seminars, was Joint Honorary Secretary with Jenkinson of the British Records Association from its foundation in 1932 (Jenkinson and Churchill, 1948). Joan Wake, also taught by Hall at the LSE, a record agent and founder of Northamptonshire Record Society and county archives, was prominent on the Council of the British Records Association in the 1930s and first Vice Chairman of the Society of Local Archivists in 1947 (King, 1974). Ethel Stokes, a record agent and a friend of Wake's, who founded the Records Preservation Section of the British Records Association and was its first archivist (Harris, 1989). Lilian Redstone, also a record agent, was the first archivist for Ipswich and East Suffolk and the author of *Local Records: their nature and care*. She succeeded Stokes as Secretary of the Records Preservation Section in 1944 (Charman, 1959). Kathleen Major was archivist at Lincoln Diocesan record office from 1936 and Secretary of Lincoln Record Society, then Reader in Diplomatic at Oxford University in the 1940s and later Principal of St Hilda's College Oxford (Bullough and Storey, 1971, v-x). Ida Darlington worked for London County Council as an historical researcher on the Survey of London from 1926, was active in the British Records Association and the Society of Archivists, and was eventually appointed Head Archivist and Librarian to the newly merged London and Middlesex Councils in 1965 (Draper, 1970). When F.G. Emmison reminisced about his early years in the profession (he was trained by G.H. Fowler in Bedfordshire from 1926 and was the first county archivist of Essex in 1938) of the 11 pioneering archivists he named, eight were women (Emmison, 1985). Where are their voices? Why, in a strongly feminised profession, do we not know more about them?

Maxine Berg's analysis of the work and personality of Eileen Power (1889-1940), Professor of Economic History at London School of Economics in the 1930s and the best known medieval historian of the inter war years, provides a model (Berg, 1996). Power is of special interest here because she played a part in the history of English archives. After school in Bournemouth and Oxford Girls' High Schools, Power studied history at Cambridge from 1907. She lived at Girton College where she became friends with women involved in feminist and suffragist causes: she later joined the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies. Power won the Gilchrist scholarship to study at the *École nationale des chartes* in Paris in 1910 and then obtained a scholarship to study social and economic history at the LSE from 1911 to 1913. At the LSE, she attended Hubert Hall's research seminars. Power was appointed to a lectureship at the LSE in 1921 and to a chair in 1931. She did innovative work on teaching history in schools and was a pioneering BBC radio broadcaster in the 1930s. In 1937, she married the historian Michael Postan. In 1927, Power became secretary to the Economic History Society, launched by the Anglo-American Historical Conference in 1926. She also became involved in the new Economic History Review journal. In 1932, she

proposed 'the formation of a Committee for the study and preservation of London business archives' which would compile a register of archives and establish a depository at LSE. The Director of the LSE, William Beveridge, convened a meeting, attended by Sir Josiah Stamp (chairman of London, Midland and Scottish Railway), A.E. Stamp (Deputy Keeper of the Public Records), A.V. Judges and Michael Postan (both LSE historians) and Richard Pares (All Souls, Oxford) to discuss a proposal for a new Council, which would promote the preservation of archives of commercial and industrial enterprises useful to the economic historian, compile a register of business records over 100 years old, seek to prevent the destruction of business records by arranging their deposit in public institutions and provide expert advice and publications (Shepherd, 2009, 136-138). The Council for the Preservation of Business Archives was launched in 1934 with 39 foundation members comprising academics, businessmen, archivists and librarians. Irene Shrigley was its first secretary (Mathias, 1984).

These pioneering women archivists should be brought out of the shadows; their stories and voices need to be heard. Eileen Power's life and work has been documented: others deserve similar attention. Understanding the background, social lives and critical professional interventions of pioneering archivists helps to set them in their proper historical and archival place and gives a voice to their stories and thus to our emerging archival consciousness. Women in the early 20th century often faced educational barriers, although the Girls' Public Day School Trust began to offer them school education at a time when many girls were still educated at home by governesses. Few women had the classical education needed for university entrance and in any case few universities admitted women (Spongberg, 2002, 155-162). London University was the first in England to award degrees to women in 1878. When the LSE opened in 1895, women were allowed in to lectures, awarded bursaries and scholarships for study and appointed to academic posts. Lilian Knowles was appointed to the LSE in 1897 and went on to become the first female professor in England. At Oxford, although there were women's colleges and women could attend lectures with men if they were chaperoned, no degrees were awarded to women until 1920. At Cambridge not until 1948. Women had frequently to choose between marriage and employment. Some women joined internationalist organisations such as the League of Nations Union or became suffragists, joining the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies. During World War I, the London Society for Women's Suffrage investigated the employment of older educated women on war work (London School of Economics Women's Library Archive, 2LSW/F/2/07). In 1915, The Association of Women Clerks and Secretaries proposed a scheme for the temporary employment of women as record cataloguers and indexers in county councils (UK National Archives, PRO 44/3). Hubert Hall was concerned that such temporary employment would prejudice permanent jobs for women in records work. He proposed an alternative scheme of advanced historical training leading to permanent jobs for women as 'skilled archivists and assistant archivists' (UK National Archives, PRO 44/3). He estimated that there was work for over 100 such trained and skilled women, perhaps more if local authorities cooperated. Hall suggested a Committee be formed to investigate, to include Lilian Knowles at LSE and Eileen Power, but I was not able to find any record that this ever happened.

4. Pioneering women archivists in England

I want to bring to light some of the individuals whose lives make up our archival history and let their stories speak to us. As a start, I will examine briefly two pioneering English women archivists from the inter war period, Joan Wake and Ethel Stokes: later publications will look in more detail at individual women. The treatment here intends only to explore in outline what it might be possible to study through more extensive research, and to illustrate the approaches that could be adopted. Although their family backgrounds were very different, Wake and Stokes were colleagues, correspondents and friends. Indeed, Wake wrote of Stokes that 'a full-length memoir of this remarkable woman must one day be written' (Wake, 1954, 1). Both were record agents, work that was academic in nature but allowed freedom from formal organisational hierarchy. Both played significant roles in the foundation of English local archives and for this reason alone they are worth revealing. Neither married. Neither has yet been studied systematically, although Joan Wake was included in a family history (Gordon, 1992, 298-335) and work is underway on an edition of her letters and diaries to be published to celebrate the centenary of Northamptonshire Record Society in 2020 (Harries, 2014). Hundreds of boxes of papers from the Wake family including some relating to Ethel Stokes are held at Northamptonshire Record Office and with Northamptonshire Record Society (Northamptonshire County Council, 2014). So far uncatalogued, these papers may in time reveal something of the archival habits of the archivist, the documentary life of the record agent.

Joan Wake, born in 1884, the fifth of six children of Sir Hereward Wake 12th Baronet (she claimed descent from Hereward the Wake), was educated at home with her two sisters, while their three brothers went away to school (Gordon, 1992, 2004; King, 1974). The family seat was at Courteenhall in Northamptonshire. They were well connected, married into the St Aubyn family of Devonport and the Bloomsbury Sitwells (Gordon, 1992, 303), and in the social circle of the suffragists. Joan Wake enjoyed a country childhood riding horses, hunting rabbits and visiting villagers. In 1898, she joined the newly founded Northampton School of Music where she studied the piano. Two years later she became parish organist at Courteenhall, training the church choir and raising money to replace the organ (Gordon, 1992, 299, 302). Wake travelled around Europe, visiting her aunt Amy Ball who lived in Paris in 1902. In 1914, she toured with her mother Kitty and aunt Josephine St Aubyn to Bruges, Budapest, Prague and Vienna, making detailed notes of the architecture, buildings and museums she visited (Gordon, 1992, 302). She began to read widely about art and literature, and wrote essays under the guidance of Professor John Churton Collins, an academic at the University of Birmingham who was involved in the University Extension movement (Gordon, 1992, 303). At the age of 29 she decided to move to London, where she enrolled at the LSE to take a two year part-time course in palaeography, diplomatic and medieval economic history from 1913 to 1915 (Gordon, 1992, 303). She attended Hubert Hall's seminars, developing her skills in palaeography and diplomatic and her knowledge of parish documents, land tenure and manors. She attended lectures by Power on economic history. At the sessional examination in July 1915 she was placed first (Gordon, 1992, 303).

Wake found a practical use for her knowledge when she was asked by Sir Thomas Fermor-Hesketh at Easton Neston, Northamptonshire to examine some deeds, including a 12th century charter, in which, she later recalled, 'a church, a chapel, a mill and two crofts are mentioned, all in this little scrap of parchment under nine inches by four. As I had lived within five miles of all these places for the whole of my life, my interest may well be imagined. I had obviously hit upon an important collection right at the start.' (Gordon, 1992,

303). She cultivated relationships with experts who could help her to develop her skills, such as guidance given in Latin by the Northamptonshire ecclesiastical historian, RM Serjeantson (Gordon, 1992, 305). She became a student and friend of Frank Stenton, Professor of Modern History at University College Reading from 1912 to 1946, after meeting him through her friend Stephen Ward, a member of the faculty of philosophy. Stenton invited her to attend his lectures and documentary seminars at Reading. Here Wake developed her interest in 'this wonderful and exciting business we were up to, this intimate contact with real people in the remote past which I was experiencing' (Gordon, 1992, 305). She came to believe, as Stenton did, that there was no real distinction between local and national history. Stenton was very influential in guiding Wake's future work, writing to her in 1915, 'I do not know of any work at the present time more valuable than the copying of records in private custody. ... What we want is a supply of local monographs, plenty of them, and well distributed.' He introduced her to Canon Foster who had founded Lincoln Record Society in 1910, saying to Wake, 'You must start a Record Society in Northampton.' (Gordon, 1992, 305-306). However, the First World War intervened and Wake was diverted to war work. She served in a Cambridge hospital and then from 1916 to 1919 was the Honorary Secretary of the Northamptonshire District Nursing Association (Gordon, 1992, 306). Travelling the county during the War made Wake aware of the threats to the survival of local records from paper salvage drives and the breakup of country estates, which made archive rescue work essential (Harris, 1989, 3-4, Gordon, 1992, 306).

Wake began her archival work in earnest when she founded the Northamptonshire Record Society. In October 1920, public meetings were held in Peterborough and in Northampton at which Wake, supported by Frank and Doris Stenton and Canon Foster, urged the need to save records from destruction as a 'foundation for future social historians to build upon' (Gordon, 1992, 306). The Society was established, with two Committees (one each for Peterborough and Northampton) and a Council, to collect records, arrange lectures, train students, and prepare records for publication (Gordon, 1992, 306). Wake sought to acquire and preserve local records. In the absence of an official archive service in Northampton, the Record Society acquired records of landed estates, Quarter Sessions, local authorities, solicitors, manors and families. Wake recorded in her diary many visits to major county houses, solicitor's offices and other 'odd corners' to survey and collect records, bringing them back in sacks on a lorry or in a suitcase on her motorbike to the Record Society. There the records 'would be kept in a fire-proof strongroom, produced two or three at a time, and used in the presence of me or my assistant, by properly accredited students' (Gordon, 1992, 307-308). In 1927, Northamptonshire Record Society was designated as a Manorial repository for Northamptonshire and Peterborough by the Master of the Rolls Committee (UK National Archives, HMC 5/1). Records were stored in the library and museum until new storage rooms were opened in County Hall, Northampton in 1930, although these quickly became full (Gordon, 1992, 312). A proposal for premises in the new county council offices due to open in 1940 was indefinitely postponed by the Second World War, and the records were moved out of Northampton for safe-keeping (Gordon, 1992, 313). Wake also trained assistants who went on to be county archivists in their own right, including Mary Grace, who went to Norwich public library and the Castle muniment room in 1931 as the first archivist. Grace wrote to Wake, 'thank you ever so much for all you have helped and taught me, I shall take care to see that all your efforts are not in vain but for the good of the cause', although she comments 'there does not seem to be much conception of THE CAUSE here as far as I

can see yet, nor of a local record office' (letter M Grace to J Wake, 1931, unlisted, Northamptonshire County Council, 2014). The pioneering work of rescue and preservation, along with editing and publication, set precedents for other counties.

After the War, Wake continued to rescue records, travelling thousands of miles in her little Allegro car. 'The car itself was crammed with cartons, attaché cases, a portable typewriter, rolls of postage stamps and her very large handbag. Her driving, which could be erratic, often terrified passengers, especially when she became diverted by what she was saying.' (Gordon, 1992, 316). The records were rehoused at Lamport Hall, owned by Sir Gyles Isham an active member of the Record Society (Gordon, 1992, 317-319). By 1950, ten rooms were full of records, stored in various types of boxes and crates. Wake complained about the difficulty of getting the Hall cleaned, using German prisoners quartered nearby, and when the Hall was unoccupied she felt compelled to ensure its security by sleeping overnight on a temporary bed (Gordon, 1992, 319). The cramped conditions of the office in the 1940s were described by a later County Archivist: 'the Library ... had to serve as both the students research room, offices, cataloguing room and a place for meetings and lectures, ... students ... had to contend with the telephone, typing, dictation, discussion, disturbance by visitors and occasionally even exclusion when meetings were in progress' (King, 1960). Wake began to look for a permanent home for the records. Delapre Abbey near Northampton was unoccupied and in need of restoration when it was purchased by Northampton Council in 1946. A sustained campaign by Wake, working with Northamptonshire Rural Community Council, supported by distinguished historians and county families, including a conference in Whitehall with Harold Macmillan, Minister of Housing and Local Government, letters to *The Times*, and a huge fund-raising effort, led in 1957 to a 99 year lease by the Borough to Northamptonshire Record Society at nominal rent (Gordon, 1992, 327-328). In 1952, a joint archive service for the borough of Northampton and county of Northamptonshire had been established, under the Northamptonshire Archive Committee. Patrick King who was Assistant Secretary of the Record Society from 1948 became Chief Archivist of Northamptonshire, and Wake continued to run the Record Society as Secretary (Shepherd, 2009, 100, Gordon, 1992, 320). In 1959, the Record Office and Record Society moved 40 tons of records to the newly refurbished Delapre Abbey, celebrated with an opening ceremony attended by hundreds of people (Gordon, 1992, 329).

While Wake believed that local archives such as those in Northamptonshire were of great value, she also made a significant contribution to national archival development (Shepherd, 2009, 131-134, 145-146). She spoke at the Anglo-American Conference of Historians and served on its Committee for the Migration of Manuscripts in the 1920s. She was an influential figure in the British Record Society and organised the first Conference of Record Societies at the Archaeological Congress in 1930, which aimed to 'formulate a systematic scheme to deal with the practical questions that are daily arising in connection with rescued documents' and to discuss records preservation and 'acceptable standards' for record repositories. The Committee set up to continue the work, whose members included Fowler, Jenkinson and Wake, led, after some complicated negotiations and significant differences of opinion, to the formation of the British Records Association in 1932. Wake remained an active Council and Committee member of the British Records Association for the next 25 years (Shepherd, 2009, 131-134). She was the first Vice Chairman of the Society of Local Archivists, set up in 1947 as a 'kind of Local Archivists' Committee, the chief object of which would be to hold meetings at which archivists' practical problems could be discussed',

predecessor of the Archives and Records Association (ARA) (Shepherd, 2009, 145-146). Wake also travelled internationally to visit archives and give lectures. In 1925, she visited national and municipal archives in the Netherlands and in Sweden (Gordon, 1992, 307). In 1947, she took the three day flight to Southern Rhodesia to visit her brother Godwin, returning to the UK via Kenya where she visited the Central African archive (Gordon, 1992, 323). In 1957, she embarked on a two month lecture tour of the USA, speaking at the annual meeting of the Medieval Academy of America at Harvard, visiting the Huntington Library in Los Angeles to look at Northampton documents and staying with her cousin Evelyn Sitwell in Virginia and her friend, the medieval scholar, Hope Emily Allen in New York state (Gordon, 1992, 324). Wake was elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries in 1945 and appointed CBE in 1960, but according to Gordon (1992, 334) it was the award of an honorary MA by Oxford University in 1953 which made her finally feel accepted as an historian by the academic world. Her obituary (King, 1974) recorded that she lived until her 90th year and recalled her stocky build, determined jaw, her 'striking personality, at times formidable, her character and her capacity' for work. 'Joan was an untidy worker; her rooms were filled with piles of papers and books both on the desk and the floor. She was a great but impatient user of the telephone. Many a missive was delivered to some errant on one of her famous postcards.' (Gordon, 1992, 309). Although not much interested in her appearance, 'she always carried her best hat in a box on her motorcycle, and later in her small car, for visits to the grander houses' (Gordon, 2004).

Joan Wake wrote a tribute to her friend, Ethel Stokes (1870-1944), in which she described her as 'the prime mover, the chief instigator, in the truest sense the real founder of the biggest movement for English history since the passing of the Public Record Office Act of 1838', establishing a service for the preservation of the local archives around England (Wake, 1954, 1). Stokes was from a much more modest background than Wake. Born in Holloway, London in 1870, she was a student at Notting Hill High School, one of the first founded by the Girls' Public Day Schools Trust, where she was a contemporary of Beatrice Edgell (Valentine, 2006, 7). Family circumstances prevented her from going to university (Wake, 1954, 2). Instead by the 1890s she began work as a record agent, researching and editing records, in the Public Record Office in Chancery Lane, London, at the British Museum and also on parish, ecclesiastical, municipal and estate records. 'A sturdy and plainly dressed figure' with a 'strong and vigorous' personality, Stokes set up business with Mary Louise Cox (1873-1936), daughter of a law stationer (Wake, 1954, 1). Stokes and Cox had rooms at Lincoln Chambers, 75 Chancery Lane, over the road from the Public Record Office, from which they worked and largely lived, cooking on a gas ring in a recess behind a baize curtain (Wake, 1954, 2). Wake (1954, 2) describes the rooms as 'furnished with heavy Victorian furniture and a huge oil-painting of Miss Cox. Books and papers were stacked here and there in orderly piles.' Stokes investigated peerage claims and genealogies, edited historical documents for publication by record societies, and she was involved in research and writing for the Victoria History of the Counties of England, under the guidance of the founding editor, H.A. Doubleday. In fact a significant proportion of the essays in early (pre-1914) volumes of the Victoria County History, especially on unfashionable topics such as social and economic history, were by women. During the First World War, Stokes and Cox, with a group of elderly women, took on women's work; not spinning and weaving but stitching wind-proof waistcoats for the troops (Wake, 1954, 3). Stokes also devoted time to the Paddington Boy Scouts, acting as the Secretary from soon after their foundation in 1917

until her death in 1944. She died as a result of an accident with a lorry, crossing the street on her way from the Public Record Office to a scout meeting in the black-out (Wake, 1954, 7).

However, her place in our story rests on her largely unacknowledged role as founder in 1929 of the Records Preservation Committee, forerunner of the British Records Association (Harris, 1989). The British Record Society had been founded by William Phillimore in 1888 to edit and publish local records. Wake and Stokes were active in the British Record Society in the 1920s as editors and also helping to offer advice on the deposit of local records. Stokes was Secretary of a British Record Society Committee charged in 1928 with obtaining more funding for editorial work; but she had a larger vision for English archives (London Metropolitan Archives, ACC/3162/RPS2/1/1). She wrote a report which proposed 'a nationally useful' society for 'organised work throughout the country', 'to support, consolidate and coordinate the work of local and special societies' as members of a national society, 'to advise owners and custodians of records and historical papers' and 'to secure the establishment of local record offices' so that 'our splendid heritage of records should be preserved and properly valued'. Stokes sent her scheme to many influential people including Lord Hanworth, Master of the Rolls. She secured the support of Professor Frank Stenton (who was also a friend of Wake's), and A.E. Stamp, Deputy Keeper of the PRO. The Times published a letter. Some were not in favour, such as the Librarian of the Institute of Historical Research, Guy Parsloe, who feared a 'waste of energy which must result from overlap' (London Metropolitan Archives, ACC/3162/RPS2/1/2). However, most were enthusiastic, and the momentum was unstoppable (Shepherd, 2009, 131-134). The Carnegie Trust gave a grant. The Records Preservation Committee of the British Record Society was established in 1929 as a 'centre for the reception and distribution of unwanted documents'. William Le Hardy, of record agents Hardy and Page, chaired the supervising Committee and provided a room at 2 Stone Buildings for the sorting and listing of solicitors' records. In 1932, the Records Preservation Committee transferred to the newly founded British Records Association. The 'old committee had continued at work', dispatching 'a great number of consignments of records to the appropriate repositories'. Miss Stokes was elected as Chairman. The move was not trouble free, however, with significant differences of opinion over the handling of the Carnegie Trust grant money, and disagreements about the proper powers of the Records Preservation Section to publicise its work and manage the volunteers. There were resignations. Miss Stokes resigned as Chairman in 1936 'owing to ill health' but when asked to reconsider a few months later, she became Honorary Secretary; Miss Wake resigned too, but after a 'unanimous resolution expressing regret and the hope that she would reconsider', she did (London Metropolitan Archives, ACC/3162/RPS/1/4).

A huge network of over 300 hundred volunteers and workers around the country rescued, registered, sorted and listed, and distributed archives to the localities in the inter war period. Many British Records Association deposits formed the core of embryonic local collections in a period when local archive services were still in formation. Between 1933 and 1939 the Records Preservation Section redistributed 270 archives to local repositories. The British Records Association records tell of tireless advocacy for archives and rescue work, mainly undertaken by Stokes after 4.30 in the afternoon when the Public Record Office closed and she finished her business as a record agent. The work rate steadily increased: 50 dispatches were made between October 1937 and April 1938, 81 in the six months from October 1938 to April 1939. In the final six months of 1939, 38 receipts and 91 dispatches of

records were made (London Metropolitan Archives, ACC/3162/RPS/1/7). The work took its toll on Stokes who persisted with all her obligations throughout the bombings of London, even though her room off Chancery Lane was destroyed and she lost most of her possessions. She was periodically ill and on one occasion collapsed and had to be carried back to her room in Tooks Court. The Records Preservation Section office moved to 8 New Square, where she sometimes slept. Later she helped staff at the Public Record Office who were on fire watching duty all night, and according to Wake (1954, 6), 'for the last eight months of her life she slept on a mattress on the floor underneath a table in the library' at the Public Record Office. By the end of the Second World War, as a result of the combined efforts of the national network of committees of the Records Preservation Section under the guidance of Stokes, records preservation work had achieved a national profile. Stokes had helped to ensure the preservation of archives of great significance to local and national history. After her death, Stokes was succeeded as honorary secretary of the Records Preservation Section by Lilian Redstone, archivist for Ipswich and East Suffolk (Harris, 1989, 11).

5. Conclusion

Much more work needs to be done to address the hidden lives and voices of women archivists in early 20th century England and in other countries, but I have made a start and set out here a framework. In this chapter, I have sought to explain and justify the field of study. As I have argued elsewhere, the provision of professional education for archivists, originally training them in palaeography, diplomatic and archaic languages so that they could be 'hand maids of history', eventually gave way to the establishment of an academic discipline in archives and records management, a distinct discipline with its own qualifications, literature, professional practices and research (Shepherd, 2009, 171-210). The voices and actions of women archivists are a critical part of our collective history. This chapter has argued that the hidden history of pioneering women archivists should be studied: work on some of the individual women mentioned here has already begun and will be published in future. Bringing their lives and stories together over time will help us to understand our collective history. Such understanding gives us access to our past, individually and collectively, and helps us to see our place in the world. We need to hear archivists' voices, from the past and from the present, in order that in the future the archive and the archivist can speak and be seen clearly.

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