



Living Archive Milton Keynes Strategic Plan 2023-25

*Everybody has a story to tell,
The story of life in Milton Keynes
For everyone in Milton Keynes*

OUR MISSION

To record, cherish and celebrate the lives of the people of the City & Borough of Milton Keynes.

OUR AIMS

From its inception, Living Archive has fulfilled its mission by focusing on four fundamental aims:-

- To collect and archive the stories of Milton Keynes' past and present life.
- To share those stories in creative and educational ways.
- To encourage artists in all fields of creativity to use the archive as a source of inspiration for their artistic expression.
- To increase community cohesion and pride-of-place.

Living Archive's goals to achieve these aims in 2023-25 are set out on pages 4-5.

ABOUT LIVING ARCHIVE

In 2024 Living Archive Milton Keynes will celebrate its 40th anniversary. Throughout four decades we have built a national reputation for our creative community placemaking work in the New City. Conceived as an antidote to the assertion that 'new towns have no history' and nurtured by the belief that 'everybody has a story to tell', we have used heritage and the arts as a means of helping to nurture community in a unique and creative way.

We call our approach 'documentary arts' and all our projects have had the same five basic features:

- taking inspiration from people's experiences
- recording memories and researching primary source material
- making the research accessible and usable
- creating an output based on the collected material



and, most importantly of all,

- sharing the results with the community in celebrations that bring people together and engender a shared sense of pride

Our organisational values are such that we have been well placed to celebrate the past in the present, re-purposing Milton Keynes' unique blend of ancient and modern. We believe that through this work, LAMK played a crucial role in the early days, fostering a sense of collective identity and contributing towards new arrivals and original residents having a stronger attachment to the New City – and to each other.

At the heart of what we do is a desire to connect and engage our communities, young and old. We know from past practice that LAMK has the ability to involve citizens through culture – building confidence, encouraging cohesion, improving health and well-being. We know that we are well placed to provide opportunities for creative learning and to support and cultivate creativity and innovation.

RECENT ACHIEVEMENTS

The last few years have been difficult, with the societal disruption of the COVID pandemic on top of a slow emergence from austerity. Yet Living Archive made adaptations and regained ground quickly once lockdown was over. Some significant achievements have been:

- **Homeworld '81.** We interviewed some of the key participants in this ground-breaking housing exhibition and produced a film to commemorate its fortieth anniversary.
- **Lord Lieutenant's retirement.** We produced a book and film to mark the retirement of Sir Henry Aubrey Fletcher in June 2020. Much of the work was done remotely.
- **Lockdown Lives.** More than 80 remote video-interviews were conducted, capturing the experience of this generational crisis across local society.
- **The Milton Keynes Songbook.** Overseen by a band-member, 36 of the best-loved songs written and

performed by the Living Archive Band were collected and scored as a resource for schools and choirs.

- **VE Day 75th Anniversary.** The project was repeatedly delayed by COVID restrictions, but completed after lockdown as a filmed performance of songs and drama.
- **Heritage Open Days.** Living Archive achieved a post-lockdown bounce-back with a record attendance in consecutive years: over 17,000 in 2021 and more than 20,000 in 2022.
- **Willen Hospice 2022.** Living Archive conducted more than 20 video interviews and produced a film shown at MK Gallery's Project Space to mark the Hospice's 40th anniversary.
- **Educating Zerena.** The touching and educational film and exhibition about how Fishermead School pupils learned to help an 'alien' who landed in their playground in 1988 was shown at MK Gallery in October 2022.

CONTEXT – CHALLENGES

Whilst the next two years are unlikely to be as disrupted as the last three, the environment for everyone will be far from trouble-free. The issues that carry the most risk to the Living Archive are expected to be:

- **Less funding.** Funding from central and local government has fallen dramatically and disappeared entirely for support costs. Other funding bodies have reduced actual or real-term funding. Consequently, more organisations are competing for fewer and smaller grants.
- **Funding directed 'out-of-town'.** There has been a growing trend for local government funded projects to be awarded to 'out-of-town' professional bodies which then sub-contract only for unavoidable local expertise.
- **Cost of living crisis.** Attempts to increase alternative funding through commercial activities like entrance-fees for performances and sales of products will be hit by lower disposable incomes.
- **Demographics.** Like the general population, the volunteer and paid staff groups are ageing. Workloads and some key skills will be affected as they reduce commitments or move on.



CONTEXT – OPPORTUNITIES

Living Archive has responded with agility to past setbacks and obstacles and can call upon the hard-to-replicate competencies it has developed:

- **Core skills.** Living Archive has a strong local reputation as the go-to partner for project management, oral history and interview skills in heritage projects.
- **Creative Co-ordinator.** The appointment to this post in November 2022 has significantly increased the ability to reach out to new communities and to work creatively in new contexts.
- **Heritage Open Days.** Living Archive has a national reputation as an organiser of this annual event, which has raised its profile and made valuable new contacts.
- **Blue Lagoon project.** Work with the Council Planning & Environment Department can open new markets in presenting heritage-related visitor information.
- **Senior staff.** The senior paid and volunteer staff have decades of experience in the sector and invaluable networks of contacts.
- **Youth and diversity.** Living Archive's Board has sought with some success to widen its representation by recruiting younger Trustees and those from different backgrounds.
- **The Archive.** Living Archive has a great resource of more than 150,000 digital images, 2,000 hours of oral history, 100 hours of video interviews, and almost 50 docu-dramas. The resource grows as every project creates a record and new donations are received.

BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

Living Archive continues to thrive in a changing environment. Large-scale events have become more difficult, but Living Archive is planning an ambitious celebration for its 40th anniversary. The Living Archive Band is about to publish a second Songbook and is looking for new performers. The work with schools and harder-to-reach communities continues and has been strengthened by the appointment of a Creative Co-ordinator. The same is true for work to support local artists and encourage those new to artistic creation. And Heritage Open Days remains by far the largest freely-accessible heritage event in the area.

All of these things have grown out of past achievements and are themselves the start of new endeavours. The people will change (slowly) and the focus may shift, but the archive will continue to grow and its importance to the 'beingness' of Milton Keynes will increase.

GOALS 2023-25

Living Archive's goals emerge organically from its Mission and Aims. Setting measurable achievements can be difficult due to uncertainty about grant applications and approaches for partnership. With that proviso, the following targets have been agreed by the Board:

Goal 1. To collect and preserve the stories of Milton Keynes life past and present

By 31 March 2024 Living Archive will have:

- Catalogued and published at least four new collections.
- Completed the digitisation of selected images from more than 45,000 negatives in the Bletchley Gazette Collection.

By 31 March 2025 Living Archive will have:

- Catalogued and published at least another four new collections.
- Worked in partnership with the Council Planning & Environment Department to present visitor information at the Blue Lagoon project.

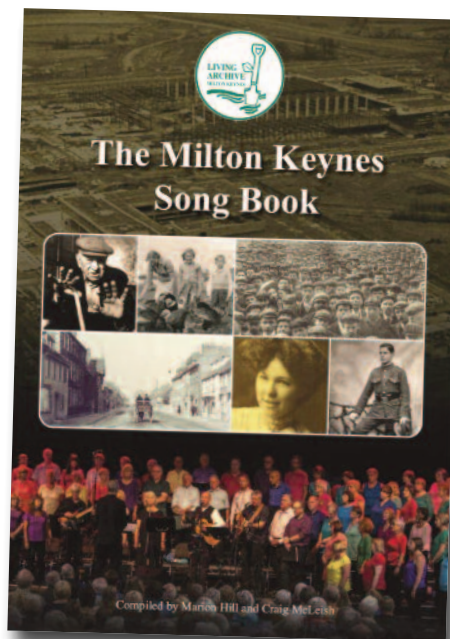
Goal 2. To share these stories in ways that are creative and informative

By 31 March 2024 Living Archive will have:

- Brought to a public audience at least two of the projects being developed by the Creative Co-ordinator.
- Soft-launched Milton Keynes Songbook II and supporting materials.

By 31 March 2025 Living Archive will have:

- Engaged with many partners to develop a large performance/installation to celebrate Living Archive's 40th anniversary in 2024.
- Performed/exhibited to a wide audience the 40th anniversary celebration and recorded it in a lasting form for posterity.



Goal 3. To enable all communities to give a voice to their heritage and experiences

By 31 March 2024 Living Archive will have:

- Revisited the 1985 Pioneer Lives project to capture the experiences of more recent arrivals.
- Worked with AHA-MK and MK Q:Alliance to record the experiences of MK's LGBTQ+ community and facilitated an event to share the results.

By 31 March 2025 Living Archive will have:

- Engaged with all communities to bring their voices into the 40th anniversary celebration in 2024.

Goal 4. To encourage artists to use the Archive to inspire their creativity

By 31 March 2024 Living Archive will have:

- Engaged with community leaders to reach out to local artists.
- Worked with schools to produce creative outputs based on Archive materials.

By 31 March 2025 Living Archive will have:

- Created a track record of facilitating new work by local artists.

Goal 5. To increase community cohesion and pride of place

By 31 March 2024 Living Archive will have:

- Made the 2023 Heritage Open Days a bigger and better series of events than ever before.
- Brought creative groups from many communities together in planning the 40th anniversary celebration in 2024.

By 31 March 2025 Living Archive will have:

- Made the 2024 Heritage Open Days an even bigger and better series of events.
- Created a lasting (virtual or real) monument to the togetherness of communities in Milton Keynes through the 40th anniversary celebration.

Goal 6. To secure sources of non-project funding to expand the base of operations

By 31 March 2024 Living Archive will have:

- Obtained funding for a further year of the Creative Co-ordinator post
- Increased income from the sales of books and CDs and from the Redbubble marketplace.

By 31 March 2025 Living Archive will have:

- Trialled some form of paid-for access to selected collections in the non- public archive.
- Developed a paid-for virtual or real exhibition or performance.

