

*The Private Wardrobe Office*

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ESTABLISHING PROFESSIONAL STEWARDSHIP FOR THE PRIVATE WARDROBE

Documentation | Evidence | Preservation | Continuity

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# GN 005 — Building a Collection Archive

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# Introduction

An archive is not a storage space for garments that are no longer worn. It is a curated component of the wardrobe collection, established to preserve objects of lasting significance while maintaining their accessibility, provenance and place within the collection.

Building a collection archive is a deliberate process that supports continuity across generations, safeguarding garments and accessories that retain historical, personal, financial or artistic value.

## Understanding the Purpose of an Archive

A collection archive preserves objects that continue to hold value beyond their immediate use.

An archive may include garments retained for their:

- Historical significance
- Personal or family importance
- Exceptional craftsmanship
- Bespoke or couture construction
- Investment value
- Rarity
- Design significance
- Cultural relevance

Archive status reflects an object's enduring importance rather than its frequency of wear.

## Determining What Should Be Archived

The decision to archive should be guided by the significance of the object rather than available storage space.

Questions to consider include:

- Does the object represent exceptional craftsmanship?
- Does it document an important period in the owner's life?
- Would it be difficult or impossible to replace?
- Does it contribute to the history of the collection?
- Does it retain financial, cultural or sentimental value?

Objects may enter the archive while remaining available for future use.

## Organising the Archive

A successful archive is organised according to a consistent structure that supports retrieval, preservation and long-term management.

Organisation may include:

- Collection category
- Designer or maker
- Chronology
- Material type
- Preservation classification
- Storage location

The organisational framework should remain consistent with the wider collection inventory.

## Preservation Considerations

Archive storage should provide conditions that support the long-term preservation of garments and accessories.

Key considerations include:
- Stable environmental conditions
- Appropriate physical support
- Archival-quality storage materials
- Protection from light and dust
- Minimal handling
- Adequate spacing between objects

Preservation methods should always reflect the construction and material characteristics of each object.

## Documentation

Every archived object should remain fully documented within the collection record.

Documentation should include:
- Unique Identification Number
- Archive designation date
- Storage location
- Condition record
- Preservation classification
- Acquisition information
- Conservation history
- Photographic record

Complete documentation ensures that the archive remains accessible and manageable over time.

## Reviewing the Archive

An archive should be reviewed periodically to ensure that it continues to support the objectives of the collection.
Reviews should consider:
- Physical condition
- Storage suitability
- Documentation accuracy
- Retrieval history
- Opportunities for reinstatement
- Emerging conservation requirements

Regular review helps maintain the archive as an active and well-governed component of the collection.

## The Archive as a Living Collection

An archive is not intended to isolate garments from the collection. Rather, it preserves them within a controlled environment while maintaining their relationship to the active wardrobe.
Objects may be reinstated for wear, exhibition or special occasions where appropriate, provided that their preservation requirements continue to be respected.
The archive should therefore be regarded as a resource for future generations and future chapters of the collection, rather than a repository for obsolete garments.

## Conclusion

A well-managed archive reflects a considered approach to ownership. By identifying significant objects, preserving them under appropriate conditions and maintaining comprehensive documentation, the archive becomes an enduring record of the collection's evolution.
Building a collection archive is ultimately an investment in continuity. It protects not only garments and accessories, but also the craftsmanship, memories and provenance they embody, ensuring that they remain part of the collection's story for years to come.