

# National Fairground and Circus Archive

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## **1. Introduction**

The National Fairground and Circus Archive (NFCA) is based at the heart of the University of Sheffield Library. The Archive was born out of the PhD research and lifetime commitment and passion of Professor Vanessa Toulmin, Director of the NFCA from its inception and was inaugurated in 1994 by the Vice-Chancellor of the University with the support of the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain and the Fairground Association of Great Britain.

The Archive is a unique collection of photographic, printed, manuscript and audiovisual material covering every aspect of the travelling fair, circus and allied entertainments as well as the culture, business and life of travelling showpeople from the 1600's to the present day.

The NFCA is a primary source of research and teaching material providing physical and intellectual access to a wealth of popular culture and social history and represents an important part of the cultural heritage of the nation.

## **2. Mission Statement**

The mission of the NFCA is to collect, preserve, research, develop and interpret material which is of special interest to the history of travelling showpeople, travelling fairs, circus and the allied entertainments in the United Kingdom and to document the place of its collections in the contemporary life, history and heritage of Sheffield, its region and the Nation as well as to promote the NFCA's international reputation as a centre of excellence in research and scholarship.

This will be achieved by:

- Safeguarding and making accessible the history and development of popular entertainment through the research, interpretation, curatorship, exhibition, digitization, loan and preservation of our collections.
- Celebrating the role and life of the Showmen and women within the fairground and allied entertainment industries.
- Providing a unique repository for this important part of history.
- Providing an international centre for the research, interpretation and discovery of this material.
- Fomenting the activity and supporting the promotion of current practitioners in the fairground and allied entertainment industry through the management of public events, collaborative projects and festivals.
- Writing articles and publishing books on our areas of expertise and sharing resources, information and research with selected specialist journals, organisations and publications to promote advocacy, attract donations, raise awareness and understanding of the sector and increase access to our collections.

### 3. Historical Context

The network of travelling fairs was an essential component of nineteenth century popular culture. The origins of these festivities were either Charter fairs linked to a trading past, religious celebrations or Statute fairs based on the 1351 Statute of Labours.

The fair was a venue for a variety of shows, exhibits and goods. At the beginning of the nineteenth century attractions such as theatrical booths, waxworks and side shows began to dominate the fairground landscape while the middle of the century saw the emergence of the menageries, circuses, ghost shows and waxworks.

The showmen of the time were at the forefront of innovations in popular entertainment turning the fairground into a hub for mechanical development, discovery and progress where people could experience new technological advancements for the first time and see things otherwise out of their reach.

By the 1850s the trading element in fairs throughout the country started to be replaced by entertainment. During that period many of the famous names of the first part of the nineteenth century moved out of the travelling fair and into new ventures such as circus.

The Victorian era became the golden age of popular entertainment. By the middle of the Victorian era travelling circuses had become large commercial concerns. The acts performed in the ring became increasingly innovative and complex presenting large casts of performers, a myriad of animal acts, production numbers and sideshows which made circus one of the most popular forms of entertainment at the end of the century.

An event also occurred in the 1860s that laid the foundations for the modern travelling amusement business and revolutionised the fair; the introduction of steam-powered and mechanised roundabouts. Mechanisation changed the emphasis from the shows to the rides and gave the showmen complete freedom to keep in step with the technological advancements of the time. This period became the golden age of the travelling fair with 200 fairs taking place in the United Kingdom every weekend between Easter and autumn.

Between 1896 and 1914 the advent of moving pictures became the craze in travelling entertainment and the showmen of the day were instrumental in making this new media available to the masses up and down the country, and in some cases were responsible for the production of some of the earliest film documentary material in existence.

Variety and Music Hall become one of the most dominant forms of popular entertainment before the onset of cinema and television with many performers moving from the fairground sideshow and circus to the variety bill.

Another successful form of entertainment was Pleasure Gardens and Zoological Gardens which became increasingly popular in the UK and Europe through the nineteenth century. The Gardens were a commercial venture within parkland settings in a largely urban context offering a range of entertainments from the display of exotic animals to a variety of exhibitions, fireworks and dramatic enactments.

In the middle of the nineteenth century the fashion for large scale celebratory expositions was born after the success of the Great Exhibition of 1851. World Fairs and Expositions were inspired by the tradition of gatherings to show, market, sell and entertain the masses and were traditionally accompanied by Pleasure Gardens which fulfilled the role of the fairground.

The tradition of seaside entertainment also has a strong association with the travelling fair. Blackpool Pleasure Beach, inaugurated in 1896, became the most renowned seaside entertainment resort in the UK and its development at the turn of the twentieth century is one of the great success stories of British popular entertainment history.

The late twentieth century in England saw the Theme Park era develop with the introduction of Alton Towers by John Broome in 1980, which pushed the amusement industry into a new phase of thrilling, bigger and more high-tech white-knuckle rides.

## **4. Collecting Remit**

### **4.1 Historical Time Frame**

The fair is understood in the context of popular entertainment, leisure history and the evolution of showmanship and travelling show-people as a defined community that presents this entertainment. The NFCA focuses on the collecting of material relating to the fairground and the allied entertainments including material that documents the spread of popular entertainment across venues, acts and exhibition cultures from the seventeenth century onwards. In addition circus material is collected from its inception to present day.

### **4.2 Geographical Location**

The core of the NFCA collection embodies the history of the travelling popular entertainment industry in the United Kingdom, represented not only by British but also by international companies, showmen and artistes working and trading in the United Kingdom. The work and life of well-known international artistes and

performers and the history of specific foreign sites and events is also represented in the Archive in order to present a complete history of specialist subjects such as Magic, Circus, Theme Parks and World Fairs. This worldwide geographical umbrella is intrinsic to the travelling nature and global spread of popular entertainment. A key aspect is the transatlantic trade between the U.K. and the U.S.

### **4.3 Subject matter**

The collection covers the travelling fairground and all the entertainments that developed alongside or in conjunction with the fairground such as Circus, Variety and Music Hall, Magic, Sideshows, Boxing Booths, Speciality Acts, Early Film, Pleasure Gardens and Zoological Gardens, Amusement Parks and Theme Parks, Menageries and Performing Animals, Optical Illusion, Travelling Exhibitions, Seaside Entertainment and World's Fairs and Expositions.

The NFCA collects material that tells the overall history of each and every area of collecting while also focusing in the collecting of specific sections, people, business and acts which form these histories.

Archives from allied entertainments relating to the fair are collected only for the period whilst associated with the fairground as follows:

#### **4.3.1 Fairs and Fairgrounds**

The Travelling fairground is at the heart of the NFCA and was the collection that started the Archive. The NFCA acknowledges that fairs and fairgrounds have existed for at least eight centuries in the British Islands, but prioritises particular periods of time for its collecting, see section 4.1.

The NFCA collects material related to the travelling fairground in all the formats described in section 4.8. The NFCA aims at building a comprehensive collection of archival material representing every fairground held in the United Kingdom from the nineteenth century to the present day as well as material related to individual acts occurring within these fairs and specific components of the fairs as follows:

##### **4.3.1.1 Transportation**

The NFCA collects material related to all aspects of the transportation of fairground and circus equipment and assets as well as living wagons for fairgrounds and circus companies operating in the UK. The NFCA collects records documenting vehicles including photographs, drawings, sketches and film as well as specialist publications on the subject, see section 4.8.3.3 for listing of publications.

The NFCA also collects archival material on this subject created by fairground preservation movements including archival material directly related to the fairground as well as research and written material produced by these movements. The Harry Lee Collections is a clear example of this type of collecting.

#### 4.3.1.2 Architectural Landscape

The NFCA collects records of all architectural constructions used for the housing of fairground entertainment and performance such as tents, booths, fairground organs, museums, sideshows and waxworks, including the records of the frontage and elements of decoration and advertisement used for their promotion and embellishment. This includes photographs, illustrations, artist impressions, film, blueprints, designs and plans.

#### 4.3.1.3 Fairground Rides and Fairground Art

As a major component of the fairground history and experience the NFCA has a main collecting interest in fairground rides. Thus it collects records of all fairground rides from manual to steam and mechanized rides from their first appearance in the fairground to the present day.

The NFCA collects material which reflects the evolution of the fairground ride through art work and graphic design from its inception to the present day, ranging from wood carvings and hand painted designs to the use of illumination and digital design. Occasionally, the NFCA will consider collecting individual examples of 3D material as an interpretative aid.

#### 4.3.1.4 Showpeople

The history and role of the show-families and individual showmen and women working on the fairground, circus and the allied industries is key to the understanding of the history and evolution of the fairground.

The NFCA collects material that reflects all aspects of their lives and business from personal diaries, scrapbooks and family photographs to business records and trade and advertising material, see section 4.8, mainly from the Victorian era onwards. Prime examples of this type of collection are the Shufflebottom Family and the Smart Family Collections.

#### 4.3.1.5 Sideshows and Travelling Exhibitions

Shows were one of the main forms of attraction within the field of popular entertainment in the Victorian era. Everything and anything was exhibited under the banner of education and entertainment including, displays of the body beautiful or grotesque, painted panoramic scenes, scientific discoveries, zoological specimens and tricks of magic and illusion. Travelling fairs and show booths were the mainstay of the sideshow attraction for many hundreds of years

although enterprising showmen and their acts also appeared in museums of curiosities, drawing rooms, penny gaffs, music halls and even royal palaces.

The NFCA collects sideshow material and has accumulated a large collection relating to the history of sideshows, including the Paul Bradshaw Collection of performance photographs covering the UK and USA history from 1900 to the present day.

#### 4.3.1.6 Travelling Cinematograph Shows

The NFCA early film collection covers three essential areas: exhibition, film-making and the transition to cinema from 1896 until the movement of cinema to purpose built venues in 1914. The NFCA has substantial holdings of programmes, posters, handbills and photographs relating to the history of cinematography and the pre-cinema exhibition era with regards to its use by itinerant showmen on the fairground, in music halls and in travelling exhibitions, as well as some of the earliest films made in the UK and USA of which a prime example is the George Williams Collection.

The NFCA will continue to actively collect all material relating directly or indirectly to both pre 1914 cinema and the pre-cinema entertainment era in the United Kingdom.

Additionally, we collect international posters from modern fairground and circus themed films.

#### 4.3.1.7 Magic and Illusion

Magic and illusion evolved as a form of entertainment in its own right to form a major part of the fairground shows throughout the nineteenth century. The NFCA collects material relating to the origins of magic as a form of entertainment while connected to the travelling fair, as well as aspects of the history of its technical development and the formation of specialist magic societies in the UK.

Magic as a performance genre can be traced back hundreds of years, but it was within the entertainment environment of the nineteenth century that it developed and flourished. By the end of the Victorian era it had developed a language and spectacle of its own either residing within an act on a variety bill or presented in a stand-alone show in venues such as the Egyptian Hall or the Royal Polytechnic.

#### 4.3.1.8 Travelling Boxing Booths

Boxing shows flourished on the fairground from the Restoration period until the late 1960s and have a rich history in the travelling fairground. In their heyday the boxing booth was the cradle for many great British boxing hopes, where aspiring

professionals honed their skills and gained experience and well-established pros trained, passed on their knowledge to the next generation and showcased their skills across towns and cities while picking up professional fights.

The NFCA aims at collecting material that reflects the place of the boxing booth in the history of boxing in the UK as well as the history of boxing as a travelling entertainment and to tell the stories of the boxing figures that started their careers in the fairground.

#### 4.3.1.9 Fairground Organ Preservation Society (FOPS)

The Fairground Organ Preservation Society has been dedicated to the promotion of all forms of interest and the appreciation and preservation of the fairground organ and other related mechanical instruments and their music since its inception in 1957.

The NFCA collects their paper archive including all information about the running of the Society, their finances, membership and constitution and their publications as well as any other information on the preservation and history of organs and mechanical instruments used in fairgrounds and their music, gathered or created by its members through research.

#### 4.3.2 Circus

Circus was born in London in 1768, developing out of Phillip Astley's equestrian shows and became one of the most successful forms of popular entertainment of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Circus has very close connections with the fairground with many show families moving across from one business to the other. The role of the showman, which has its roots in the travelling fairground, is key to circus and to bringing together the aspects of fairground and other forms of entertainment into the spectacle of circus.

Acts found in the Victorian circus included aerial performances, equestrian riding, acrobatics, juggling and clowning. The combination of showing wild animals in the menagerie tradition with tricks and routines led to the rise of the animal circus incorporating lion taming and elephant acts with feats of horsemanship.

The NFCA collects circus material from its inception to the present day, including all aspects of traditional and contemporary circus, from British companies and performers as well as international companies and performers working in the UK.

The NFCA has developed a major collection of material on circus. Its holdings include Circus Friends Association of Great Britain (CFA) Library and Archive,

which together form the largest collection of circus related material in the United Kingdom. The CFA continues increasing our circus book holdings through regular deposits into the collection, thus we do not actively purchase circus books, but we do accept this type of material through other donors. Further donations of Archive material are also expected and we work in collaboration to avoid duplication.

#### 4.3.2.1 Wild West

The Wild West show was a key aspect of Victorian circus, imported into the UK from America by William F. Cody aka Buffalo Bill in 1887. The Wild West show in the United Kingdom enjoyed a long lasting success, being incorporated into fairground, circus and menagerie shows until its final decline in the 1960s.

The NFCA collects all material related to this genre within the circus and fairground with a special focus on William F. Cody as a performer and while on tour in the UK and his influence on British Wild West shows, as well as British Wild West shows and troupes.

#### 4.3.2.2 Menageries

The showing of animals in the travelling fairground and later in the circus has a long history. The travelling menagerie was, alongside portable theatres and waxworks, the great fairground attraction of the nineteenth century and its tradition carried on until the 1960s. The travelling menagerie reflects the increasing wealth and influence of fairground showmen in the nineteenth century, interest generated by new knowledge in the natural sciences and the public's fascination with the exotic and the dangerous.

The NFCA holds images of menageries and related animal exhibition material from 1885 to the present day as well as other materials such as books, catalogues, handbills and posters and continues to collect this type of material within the Fairground, Circus, Zoological Garden and World Fair context.

#### 4.3.2.3 Circus Performers

See section 4.3.1.4

### **4.3.3 Variety and Music Hall**

Variety and Music Hall consist of interchangeable bills of performance, presenting a myriad of different acts from a range of entertainment genres, covering speciality acts, comedy, skits, singing and dancing, circus skills, burlesque and performing animals.

The NFCA aims at holding a comprehensive representation of variety venues and acts across every geographical location in the UK for every season from the 1800s up to the decline of variety in the 1960s, through the collecting of performers and

company business archives as well as posters, handbills, programmes and ephemera and particularly seeks to collect nineteenth century portable theatre archives.

#### **4.3.4 Pleasure Gardens, Zoological Gardens**

Pleasure Gardens flourished in Britain in the eighteenth century and are considered by some historians as the forerunner of modern amusement parks. The entertainments on offer included theatre shows, firework displays, dancing and drinking booths and theatrical entertainment within a parkland setting.

Zoological Gardens were collections of exotic animals often situated within former Pleasure Gardens. The origins of these attractions can be found in the great courtly menageries from the twelfth century onwards where a passion for collecting exotic animals was a favourite courtly pastime in Europe. By the eighteenth century, travelling beast shows or menageries were exhibited on fairgrounds with Bostock and Wombwell's Royal Menagerie established from the late 1780s onwards.

Both Pleasure and Zoological Gardens were a financial venture, charging an entrance fee and combining the concept of offering an educational and scientific experience together with entertainment.

#### **4.3.5 Seaside Entertainment, Amusement Parks and Theme Parks**

Amusement parks and Theme parks play an important part in popular culture and the history of recreation and have an interconnected history with showmen, the fairground and World's Fairs and Expositions.

The NFCA holds over 1000 maps, plans and charts of British Amusement Parks dating back to 1908 including rare material relating to Battersea Park as well as manufacturers' trade literature and photographic and audio-visual material. The NFCA will continue to collect this type of material from its inception to the present day with an especial interest in seaside amusement parks and entertainment.

#### **4.3.6 Early Film and Optical Illusion**

The NFCA collects material related to the production of film in the UK as well as influential international films which had an impact in the British entertainment industry between the late nineteenth century and 1914, including samples of films as well as any archival related to early film making and makers.

#### **4.3.7 World's Fairs and Expositions**

World's Fairs and Expositions have their roots on the tradition of celebratory gatherings to show, market, sell and entertain the masses and have traditionally been accompanied by Pleasure Gardens which fulfilled the role of the fairground.

The NFCA sees the exposition as a celebration of emerging technologies presented in an entertaining and thrilling context with a crossover into fairground rides.

The NFCA area of collecting for this discipline starts with the Great Exhibition of 1851 and it expands to Expo '74.

#### **4.3.8 Americana**

In recent years Americana has emerged in the collections as a subject in its own right. Our collections mainly focus on acts that travelled the UK and which in many ways had a profound impact on the culture, practice and economy of the sector, including Minstrel, medical and esoteric shows.

#### **4.3.9 Living Archive**

The NFCA is a living archive, actively involved in the contemporary popular entertainment industry, forging and maintaining close links with organizations and performers and contributing to the production and promotion of shows and festivals. This generates a contemporary archive of exhibition, performance and event material comprising posters, handbills, pamphlets, programmes and business records in close relation to the NFCA and which we are committed to collecting.

The NFCA also collects self-generated collections that mark events or exhibitions significant to its history, such as anniversary materials as well as material created as part of collaborations with other organisations or groups whether exhibitions, research, filming or any other projects that may help define and tell the story of the NFCA in the future.

### **4.4 The NFCA does not collect**

#### **4.4.1 Gypsy and Travelling Groups History**

The NFCA does not collect material related to Gypsy history or other travelling groups.

#### **4.4.2 Post 1914 Cinema**

The NFCA does not collect cinematic material from 1914 onwards when cinema developed an independent and autonomous existence away from the fairground. Nor does it collect television archives.

#### **4.4.3 Modern and Contemporary Magic**

The NFCA only collects nineteenth and early twentieth century magic material, later material should be referred to the Centre for Magical Arts or another appropriate repository.

#### 4.4.4 Exceptions to Audio Material: Fields Sound Recordings and Fairground Music

The NFCA does not collect field recordings of fairground sounds and music or recordings of fairground music, except for early organ music which has been donated as part of larger archive collections.

#### 4.4.5 General Transport and Agricultural Material

The NFCA does not collect any material on general transport (i.e. transport not directly linked to fairgrounds and circuses) or agricultural machinery.

#### 4.4.6 3D Objects

The NFCA does not usually collect 3 dimensional material, although some exceptions are made on a one to one assessment basis, details on these exceptions can be found on sections 4.5.5.2, 4.5.5.3 and 4.3.1.3 of this document. The NFCA does not collect fairground rides in any physical format whether mechanical or decorative, fairground transport, models or prizes.

#### 4.4.7 Dissociated Material and Surrogate Copies

The NFCA will not normally collect objects for their aesthetic value alone, i.e. objects which have become dissociated from their relevant data and do not provide information on their production, age, location, provenance or event unless there is enough reason to believe that this data can be unveiled through research. The NFCA does not collect scans, facsimile or photocopies of material in substitution of original items, unless the originals have ceased to exist or the surrogate copies are part of a body of research or process of business.

### **4.5 Format**

The NFCA collects the subject matters described in section 4.3 in all the following formats.

#### **4.5.1 Photographs and Digital Images**

A large section of the evolution of the fairground and the allied entertainments has traditionally been recorded in photographic format. The NFCA collects photographic material which records rides, transport, buildings and people at and from the fairground, the circus and the allied entertainments. These visual records are of interest to the NFCA primarily when they hold key information on venues and events, locations, historical periods, business practices and identification and recording of individuals, their lives and acts.

This type of material is often acquired through donations from fairground enthusiasts either as individual items or more often as bulk donations of a lifetime of work. Fairground enthusiasts are both a primary and secondary source of visual material as they produce their own photographic and video records and collect material produced by others.

Photographic material is also collected through the direct documentation of contemporary fairs carried out by NFCA staff.

The NFCA collects photographic material in all formats whether is printed, negatives, slides or digital.

#### **4.5.2 Audio and Visual material**

Audio and Visual material is separated into the following categories:

- Early film produced and shown for and at the fairground for the purpose of entertainment
- Home made footage produced by show families, performers, fairground enthusiasts and individuals
- Audio visual material produced through the recording of oral histories and interviews with performers and showpeople
- Documentary film on the topics of fairgrounds, circus, show families, performers and the NFCA or its collections
- Radio broadcasts of interviews with Professor Vanessa Toulmin

The NFCA collects early projected material from bioscope shows, ghost shows, phantasmagoria and panoramas produced between 1896 and 1914 as well as modern and contemporary film of fairgrounds, fairground transport and circuses.

The NFCA has a special interest in collecting amateur film and video produced by show families and performers, which document their life and business in the fairground, circus and the allied entertainments. The NFCA also collects material which records the experience of the fairground and circus from an outsider viewpoint filmed by fairground enthusiasts and other amateurs or professionals.

The NFCA also collects fairground and fairground transport footage, early home-movie footage and broadcast programs such as interviews or documentaries with or about showpeople, their families, their business, individual performers, fairground, circus and any area of the allied entertainments history.

Additionally, the NFCA collects early recordings of organ music on tape and vinyl which have been received as part of a larger archive in order to preserve the integrity of donated collections.

The NFCA collects 8mm, 16mm, 35mm, VHS, DVD, BETA, digital film, cassette tapes, vinyl and digital audio recordings.

Key examples on this area of collecting are the George Williams collection of early films, the Smart Family film collection and the Hull Fair oral history project.

### **4.5.3 Printed material**

Printed material forms the bulk of the collection and has always had a very close relationship with all aspects of the fairground and popular entertainment. The NFCA collects the following formats.

#### **4.5.3.1 Posters, Handbills, Programmes, Proclamations and Advertising Material**

The fairground and entertainment industry have a rich visual tradition transmitted through poster, handbills and programmes, creating both its own dedicated form of artwork and visual identity and providing a window to other aspects of the popular and visual culture of the period. Graphic design is key to the identity of the fairground and encapsulates its history through the use of images and words as well as revealing important information on the working lives of the performers, venues and other business information.

#### **4.5.3.2 Books and Pamphlets**

Books and pamphlets written on any of the subjects covered in section 4.3. Including material produced to document or promote the subject, trade literature and material written retrospectively to either critically analyse or recall the subject and auction catalogues. Also books covering aspects of artwork inspired by the fairground, circus or any of the allied entertainments as well as their history.

We will acquire collections through purchases, donations, collaborative work, direct publication and research.

The NFCA's library includes over 900 volumes donated by the Circus Friend's Association and includes the collection of Lady Eleanor Smith. The CFA is committed to maintaining the quality of this collection, ensuring its growth and establishing it as the primary, national collection of books on circus.

#### **4.5.3.3 Magazines and Periodicals**

We actively collect specialist magazines and periodicals related to the collecting subject areas described in section 4.3, mainly through subscription but also through donation. These include:

#### **Fairs and Fairgrounds:**

ATE News  
Carousel  
Carnival (formerly Carousel)  
Carousel Art  
Carters Supporters Club  
Ephemerist

Film History  
First Drop  
Gibeciere  
Jottings/Platform Fairground Society  
Juegos y Circos  
Kintop  
Kirmes and Park Revue  
La Defense Des Forains Belges  
Living Pictures  
Lo Spettacolo Viaggiante  
Music Hall Studies  
Magic Lantern Society  
Mainly About Animals  
Mechanical Memories  
Merry-go-Round  
Merry-go-Roundup  
New Majic Lantern  
Newslin-efecot, education  
Nineteenth Century Theatre  
Old Theatres  
Park World  
Picture House  
Strange Attractions  
Sheffield Cinema Society  
Shocked and Amazed  
Three on the Floor  
The Tober  
The Fairground Mercury  
The Mask  
The Moving Image  
Vaudeville Times  
Waxworks International  
**Circus:**  
Acrobatics  
Arts de la Piste  
Backyard US  
Bandwagon  
Bretagne Circus  
Circus Association of Great Britain and Ireland  
Cir Kulara  
Circo Italiano  
Circo Spain  
Die Cicuszeitung  
Circus Gids Nederland

Circus News  
Circus Parade  
Circus Report  
Circus Week  
Circus Zeitung  
CircusModellbau  
Civa  
Cirque Swiss  
Clowns  
Clowns in Times  
De Piste  
El Ambidestro-Spanish Acrobat  
Fanfcare  
Het Circus  
Hospital Clown Newsletter  
In Cammino  
Jugglers World  
Journal Fuer  
Kaskade  
King Pole  
Le Cirque dans l'univers  
Menage  
Organ Show Business  
Planet Circus  
Pro Circus Magazine  
Southern Sawdust  
Spectacle  
The Catch-Juggling  
The Joey  
The New Calliope  
The Sawdust King  
The White Tops  
Total Theatre  
Unter Hattingskunst  
World Acrobatic

**Magic:**

Demon Telegraph  
Abra Cadabra  
Magigram  
Supreme Magician

**Steam Engines:**

Iron Man

Iron Wheel  
Key Frame Fops 1964- present  
Model Engineer  
National Traction Engine Club Newsletter  
Old Glory  
Road Locomotive Society Journal  
Sheffield and District Steam Society  
Steam – Leeds and District Traction Engine Club  
Steaming  
The Thames Valley Traction Engine Club Newsletter  
Vintage Chat  
Vintage Commercial  
Vintage Steam

**Others:**

Key Frame  
Model Engineer  
Philip Swindlehurst Collection

All the circus journals are obtained as donations via the Circus Friends Association who also manage the sourcing of new journals and magic journals are received via the Centre for Magical Arts.

Additionally, the NFCA holds copies of the 'World's Fair' newspaper in its entirety from 1909 to the present day and continues to acquire current issues. Other key newspapers from the nineteenth century we seek to collect are 'The Era' and 'The Showman'.

Other magazines and subscriptions are deposited in the Archive through donations and purchases, with the majority being part of Named Collection archives.

4.5.3.4 Calendars and Almanacs

The NFCA collects calendars and almanacs on the topic of the fairground and circus as a general subject or specially produced to mark special events and anniversaries of key organisations such as the Showmen's Guild, The Fairground Association of Great Britain or the NFCA.

4.5.3.5 Postcards

The NFCA collects postcards as photographic images as described in section 4.8.1 as well as on their own right as mementoes of the fairground and seaside entertainment resorts as well as part of personal or family archives.

#### **4.5.4 Personal and Business Records**

The NFCA collects whole archives and individual records that relate to show people and their businesses in any of the areas of collecting described in this document, coming directly from the source as well as archives formed by collectors, including diaries, notebooks, manuscripts, newspaper cuttings, scrapbooks, business records, monographs, articles, stationery, obituaries, births, deaths and marriage certificates and any other paper base material they may contain.

The NFCA also collects bodies of rigorous quality research on any of its collecting areas either conducted by experts, researchers, research students or staff.

#### **4.5.5 Others**

##### **4.5.5.1 Maps, Plans and Blueprints**

The NFCA collects maps, plans and blueprints of Pleasure Gardens, Zoological Gardens, fairground and circus layouts and constructions whether existing or proposed as well as ride, transport and living wagon designs of travelling fairgrounds, and rides and layouts of Amusement Parks and Theme Parks in the UK.

##### **4.5.5.2 Original artwork**

The NFCA collects original artwork inspired by its collecting themes or by its collections as well as drawings, paintings and sketches made by show people for recreational or documentary purposes or for show people for the promotion of their businesses, attractions and acts. The NFCA normally will collect this type of material in 2D but will occasionally consider 3D objects as specified on section 4.4.6 and 4.5.5.3 of this document.

##### **4.5.5.3 Miscellaneous**

The NFCA holds a small amount of personal items, mementos and souvenirs including medals, ride tickets and ribbons, fortune cards, carrier bags, scarves, handkerchiefs and costume related to or commemorating fairground and circus events or with strong links to family, businesses and performers collections.

The NFCA does not usually seek to collect costume or 3D objects but will make an exception on a case by case basis when the objects are of special interest, attached to important Named Collections or are considered to be valuable tools to research or interpret the history of a particular subject area.

## **5. Acquisition Procedures**

NFCA are pleased to accept donations and bequests of material provided that they fall within the scope of this policy, and on the understanding that:

- all gifts and bequests of material become the property of the University of Sheffield
- copyright and data protection issues are clarified if not standard
- the Library reserves the right to dispose of items as outlined in section 9

In evaluating a prospective acquisition, the Library also considers the associated costs of processing, cataloguing, storage, conservation, preservation, digitisation, promotion and display, and the provision of long-term access. The offer of funds and resources to support long-term preservation and engagement is actively encouraged.

Acquisitions to the collections may also be made by purchase, exchange, allocation, subscription, self-generation or transfer.

A rich source of collections are show families and performers, who mainly produce unique personal and business records and the fairground enthusiasts and preservation movements, who produce both original material in the shape of photographs, film and manuscripts as well as a variety of printed material and journals. Additionally, the Archive produces its own material through exhibitions, public events and festivals, research and publications.

In order to enable the use of collections to their full potential, the NFCA will strive to obtain the assignment of copyrights or copyright licenses on all new acquisitions whenever possible. The NFCA will also strive to obtain associated information on the material collected whether biographical, historical or contextual on collectors, donors, authors, places, subject matter, performers and show families.

Acquisitions will be listed following national standards for archives in three distinctive sections:

- **Named Collections:** Personal, family and business archives will be listed according to type and recorded as Named Collections. Items within these types of collections will be kept and stored together.
- **Individual items:** Individual items entering the collection will be listed and stored according to type.
- **Curated Collections:** Collections of items on the same subject matter or individual accumulated overtime may be curated to form a Named Collection in order to encapsulate all the information and history on that topic or individual.

New acquisitions will undergo a condition assessment and when appropriate will receive conservation treatment. The decision to carry out conservation treatment will be decided on the basis of uniqueness, rareness, fragility, use, artistic merit and visual, historical and documentary worth.

All new acquisitions will be processed before joining the existing collections using conservation grade materials for their storage such as melinex sleeves, interleaving acid free paper and acid free boxes, to improve their accessibility, handling and future preservation.

Photographic and audio-visual material is digitised as soon as possible after acquisition and will form an integral part of the University wide digital preservation strategy. Formats especially vulnerable to deterioration such as obsolete media formats prone to rapid deterioration or loss are prioritised for conservation. Additionally nitrate film is handled and stored separately.

Books are categorised into Normal and Rare and are listed and stored accordingly following the British Library standards. All books, journals and periodicals are listed electronically on the University of Sheffield STAR Plus system.

Once objects have been processed and recorded we make collections accessible to the public digitally and physically through:

#### Websites:

National Fairground and Circus Archive web page

<https://sheffield.ac.uk/library/special-collections-heritage-and-archives/national-fairground-and-circus-archive>

University Library search engine Discover our Archives

<https://archives.shef.ac.uk/>

National Fairground and Circus Archive Digital

<https://cdm15847.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15847coll3>

Archives Hub <https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/search/locations/9206e86e-4858-3cf7-83a5-d0aeb515887b>

National Archives Website

[https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/results/r?q=national+fairground+and+circus+archive&\\_sd=&\\_ed=&\\_hb=](https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/results/r?q=national+fairground+and+circus+archive&_sd=&_ed=&_hb=)

Adams Matthew by subscription

<https://www.victorianpopularculture.amdigital.co.uk/>

#### Social media platforms:

Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/nfcarchive/>

Bluesky <https://bsky.app/profile/uoscollections.bsky.social>

#### Physically:

Special Collections, Heritage and Archives reading room, where access to the collections as well as other digital resources such as the John Turner database can also be gained

Exhibitions

Loans

Publications

Collaborative work with specialist publications, researchers, organisations and performers

Talks and seminars

Public broadcast interviews on television, newspapers, journals and radio

Outreach events such as cultural festivals and fairs

## **6. Key partnerships**

The NFCA holds long standing partnerships with key specialist groups and entities such as the Circus Friends Association (CFA), the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain, The Fairground Association of Great Britain (FAGB) and the Fairground Organ Preservation Society (FOPS).

The NFCA also works in collaboration with the performing arts network Backstage and has links to the Theatre Museum in London, Blackpool Pleasure Beach and the British Film Institute (BFI).

## **7. Collecting Criteria**

The NFCA will take into consideration the collecting policies of other museums, libraries and archives collecting in the same or related areas or subject fields. It will consult with these organisations where conflict of interest may arise and/or to define areas of specialism and expertise in order to avoid unnecessary duplication and waste of resources.

In order to avoid the unnecessary duplication of collections the NFCA will conduct periodical reviews of its holdings. The NFCA will also review its collecting policy and adapt its practices to reflect the development of contemporary practitioners within its fields of collecting, to provide a better resource to its users and a more accurate history of its collecting subjects.

The NFCA will retain a maximum of two copies of each printed item in the collections, excluding magazines and periodical subscriptions, which will only be kept in single copies.

The NFCA will exercise due diligence and make every effort not to acquire, whether by purchase, gift, bequest or exchange, any object unless satisfied that the Archive can acquire valid legal title.

The NFCA will not acquire any object unless it is satisfied that the object has not been acquired in, or exported from its country of origin or any intermediate country in which it may have been legally owned, in violation of that country's laws. For the purpose of this paragraph country of origin includes the United Kingdom.

In accordance with the provision of the UNESCO 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property and the Dealing in Cultural Objects, (Offences) Act 2003, the Archive will reject any items that have been illicitly traded.

The NFCA will not acquire by any direct or indirect means, any specimen that contains the totality or parts of any specimen that has been collected, sold or otherwise transferred in contravention of any national or international wildlife protection or natural history conservation law or treaty of the United Kingdom or any other country, except with the express consent of the appropriate authority.

The Archive will follow the principles laid out under 'Spoliation of Works of Art during the Holocaust and World War II period: Statement of Principles and Proposed Actions', issued for non-national museums in 1999 by the Museums and Galleries Commission.

Should collections in the Archive be subject to an enquiry or claim, the NFCA will follow the practices established by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport to extend research, make information available and, if appropriate, refer the case to the Spoliation Advisory Committee.

Any exceptions to the above will only be because:

- The Archive has acquired an items that lacks secure ownership history but in the best judgment of experts in the field is unlikely to have been illicitly traded
- The Archive has acted with the permission of the authorities with the requisite jurisdiction in the country of origin
- The Archive possess reliable documentary evidence that the item was exported from its country of origin before 1970

## **8. Exceptions to the policy**

The NFCA is a young and unique archive and is constantly expanding and developing. Items not considered in this policy may come to our attention from time to time which may introduce new areas of collecting into the Archive. Additionally, as a result of its rapid expansion new themes and sub-themes are born within the Archive, which may affect its collecting remit. There are historical precedents when the integrity of donated and otherwise acquired collections have introduced new areas of collecting into the Archive in order to avoid the

dispersion, disassociation and/or disposal of parts of these collections. We anticipate further re-structuring the thematic division of the collection as it grows.

## **9. Disposals**

The NFCA has a strong disposition against disposals. However, disposals are considered an integral part of a responsible collecting practice to ensure the future sustainability and preservation of the collections and best use of resources and will be considered in the following instances:

- When objects are duplicated in the collection beyond the guidelines set in this policy
- When objects fall outside the collecting remit of this policy
- When objects are in such a poor physical condition that are deemed beyond conservation
- When objects pose a health risk to staff and the public due to deterioration, their chemical composition or chemical reaction
- When objects may damage other collections through contamination of noxious materials
- When objects are damaged beyond repair
- Removable digital storage working as an information holding platform, in much the way a box does for physical collections, such as floppy disks, CDs and USB sticks will be considered for disposal once the information they hold has been extracted and securely stored on an up to date, sustainable digital format, except when this storage media is considered to have a strong link to a specific collection or has the potential to aid on the future interpretation of such collection

Any disposals will be carefully assessed and will follow relevant national guidelines.

- Material donated will be offered back to the donor in the first instance whenever possible
- We will aim at transferring material, either by way of gift, sale or exchange, to relevant alternative repositories
- Transfer to educational bodies or organisations
- Objects containing toxic or noxious materials, damaged beyond repair or presenting any other health and safety risks will be disposed of by destruction

## **10. Policy Review**

The National Fairground and Circus Archive is expected to grow and evolve rapidly in the near future. It is anticipated that future reviews of this policy may

see drastic changes mainly in the themes we collect, but also possibly in the formats. It is imperative that it remains flexible to allow for this natural evolution and it is revised as appropriate.

This policy will be reviewed every three years or earlier if deemed appropriate.

Date: 25 July 2018

Date of Review: June 2020