National Audit of UK Sound Collections

Final Report, October 2015

Adam Tovell and James Knight

The British Library
Executive summary

The British Library is home to the nation’s sound archive, an extraordinary collection of over 6.5 million recordings of speech, music, wildlife and environments, from the 1880s to the present day. In January 2015, the Library launched a new initiative titled Save Our Sounds¹. One of its key aims is to preserve as much as possible of the nation’s rare and unique sound recordings, not just those in the Library’s collections but also key items from other collections across the UK.

The UK’s sound collections face a real and immediate threat from the degradation of physical media and declining support for older audio formats from today’s technology industries. To mitigate this threat, the solution is to migrate recorded sounds from so-called ‘legacy’ media to stable digital files, and to preserve those files on replicated digital storage.

To understand and to demonstrate the need for this preservation, the Library conducted an Audit of recorded sound collections held across the UK by institutions, societies, associations, trusts, companies and individual collectors. The information from this census can be used to determine the extent of recorded sound collections in the UK and to map the risks they face.

The outputs of the Audit are a database hosted by the British Library of collections, a final report summarising the results, and a PDF document presenting details from the database of the collections that holders have agreed to make publicly accessible².

The Audit ran from January to May 2015.

Where possible, existing sources of information were used to gather information on known collections. Holders of these collections were contacted and encouraged to provide further information on the items in their care.

We collected the following information:

- Locations of collection holders, including names, addresses and contact details
- Descriptions of collections, including collection names, subject areas and levels of cataloguing and description
- Information on copyrights associated with collections
- Collection extent, including information on formats and their state of digital preservation.

¹ For further information on Save Our Sounds visit - http://www.bl.uk/projects/save-our-sounds
² These outputs can be found at - http://www.bl.uk/projects/uk-sound-directory
Overview of results

The Audit recorded the following results:

- Over a period of 20 weeks, from January to May 2015, we collected information on 3,015 collections, from 488 collection holders, with collections totalling 1,870,946 items.
- The majority of responses were received from libraries and archives (36%), individuals (18%), museums and galleries (16%) and schools, colleges and universities (10%), with a relatively even spread between the remainder of categories.
- Of the total number of items surveyed 78% are held on obsolescent ‘legacy’ formats and thus require migration to stable digital formats in the near future.
- Oral history was the largest subject area reported by collection holders, with 36% of collections described as containing oral history recordings, mainly of local and regional interest.
- 56% of collections were reported as containing ‘unique’ recordings. 23% contain items described as ‘rare’ and 2% contain items described as ‘common’. Respondents reported being ‘unsure’ as to the rarity of 19% of reported collections.
- The majority (86%) of responses were received from collection holders located in England. 10% were from Scotland, 2% from Wales and 1% from Northern Ireland. The Isle of Wight, Isle of Man and Guernsey submitted a single response each constituting 1% of the total returns.
- The majority (69%) of collections were reported as being ‘in copyright’; 2% as being ‘out of copyright’ and 7% ‘partially in copyright’. Respondents were ‘unsure’ of the copyright status of 22% of collections surveyed.
- The majority (38%) of collections were reported as having electronic catalogue records, 25% partially catalogued electronically and 37% of collections were reported as having no catalogue records online.
- Only 27% of surveyed collections were reported as having digital copies, and 10% were described as having some digital copies and partially digitised. 57% of collections were reported as having no digital copies. 6% of collection holders uncertain as to the digital preservation status of their collection.

Summary of observations

We make the following observations:

- The results of the Audit are by no means comprehensive, but give an indication of the subjects of recorded sound collections extant in the UK, an overview of the types of format on which recordings are held, and an indication of the requirements for their preservation.
- Responses to the Audit were overwhelmingly positive, with many respondents noting their appreciation of the Library’s initiative to tackle what many consider to be a current problem of preservation.
- A large percentage of the collections surveyed are both a) unique and b) a very high preservation risk.
- A small percentage of the collections surveyed have been digitised.
A degree of uncertainty exists amongst collection holders as to how to deal with sound recordings in their care. Many reported being unable to determine the contents of recorded media (i.e. to replay legacy carriers), with others asking for advice on digitisation and collection care.

A degree of uncertainty exists amongst private collection holders as to what to do with sound collections they hold, particularly with regard to donating or bequeathing collections to regional archives.

There was some reluctance to submit returns from private collectors and those holding collections with monetary value, particularly recorded music collections.

The understanding of ‘digital preservation’ varies considerably between collection holders, with many respondents incorrectly considering CD-R or lossy mp3 copies to be suitable for long-term preservation.

There is an evident need for equipment and training for collection holders to be able to replay and to digitise recorded sounds held on legacy media, for the purposes of collection description, preservation and in order to provide online access.

There is a similar need for training in best practice related to the digital preservation of recorded sound collections.

The extent of in-copyright recorded music holdings in the UK is difficult to ascertain.

Any initiative to make collections accessible digitally (i.e. online) will require a considerable amount of rights-clearance activities.

The results of the Audit prove that the UK possesses a wealth of cultural memory, as demonstrated by the in excess of one million recordings surveyed, contained on formats that are under threat from loss and decay unless something is done now.

Key recommendations

We make the following recommendations:

- In the near-term, British Library subject specialists should identify key collections from among the Audit results.
- Important at-risk items identified in the Audit should be preserved.
- The Audit results should be published online, and the database details made available as a spreadsheet to members of the public on request.
- Information should be published online by the Library offering basic collection care and digitisation guidelines for audio.
- Establish the status of other significant known collections that are absent from the Audit.
- Conduct further work to establish the existence and status of collections in Wales and Northern Ireland.
- Conduct further work to establish the existence and status of collections held by record labels, recordings studios and broadcasters.
- Conduct further work to establish the existence and status of significant collections held in private hands.
- Use the contact details in the Audit database to stay in contact with collection holders in order to maintain the message and momentum of the Save Our Sounds programme.
Background

Sound recordings help us to understand the world around us. They document the UK’s creative endeavours, preserve key moments in history, capture personal memories, and give a sense of local and regional identity.

But the UK’s sound collections are under threat. Many sound recording formats, from wax cylinders to Minidiscs, rely on equipment no longer manufactured or supported by today’s technology industries. Other formats, such as lacquer discs, are fast degrading to the point of irreparability.

International consensus holds that we have around 15 years in which to preserve our sound collections. By 2030, the scarcity of older equipment, the condition of recorded media and the loss of skills will make their preservation costly, difficult and, in many cases, impossible.

These risks face all recorded sound collections, across the country; from boxes of forgotten cassette recordings to professional archives.

The digital transfer of sound recordings to more stable media (in this case, lossless digital files held on replicated digital storage) is the solution: “only the digital domain offers the possibility of lossless copying when refreshing or migrating recordings. For the long-term preservation of the primary information contained on an analogue carrier it is necessary, therefore, to first transfer it to the digital domain”\(^3\).

Prioritising and planning for digitisation requires information on the collections themselves – their contents, their extent, and the formats they are held on.

The British Library is custodian of the national sound collection and holds an irreplaceable collection of 6.5 million audio-visual recordings, on over 1.5 million physical carriers, in more than 40 different formats. Their subjects cover spoken word, performance, music and environmental sounds. The Library has already surveyed the extent and formats of its own collections as well as the time and resources required to ensure their preservation\(^4\).

However, information on collections that exist elsewhere is difficult to establish. In order to inform a national action strategy for urgent preservation and access, the British Library initiated a project in January 2015 to map the extent of sound collections in the UK, and to create a Directory of UK Sound Collections.

\(^3\) [http://www.iasa-web.org/tc03/ethics-principles-preservation-strategy](http://www.iasa-web.org/tc03/ethics-principles-preservation-strategy)

\(^4\) For an overview of the Library’s audio holdings please consult the Appendix.
Scope

Several surveys of recorded sound and audiovisual collections in the UK have been undertaken in recent years, but the majority of these surveys have confined their scope according to subject area (e.g. oral history) and to region. Conversely, the aim of this survey has been to be inclusive: to search out recordings on all subjects that exist throughout the UK, whether in libraries, archives, museums, galleries, schools and colleges, charities, societies, businesses or in private hands.

The only restrictions imposed by this project were to refine the scope of the survey to a broad geographic area (in this case, the United Kingdom, Isle of Man and the Channel Islands), and to focus on collections containing ‘unique’ or ‘rare’ recordings (i.e. recordings that exist nowhere else, or only in small numbers).

The British Library’s own sound collections constitute the National Sound Archive and were deemed out of scope, because the extent and formats of its collections as well as the time and resources required to ensure their preservation have been already measured. The sheer extent and breadth of formats, subject matter and rare, unique, at risk and unpublished material contained in the Library’s Sound Archive would also have skewed the results at a national level.

While facing many of the same risks as recorded sounds, moving image collections were not in scope of this Audit.

Figure 3: An Edison 'Concert Grand' cylinder in the British Library collections
Approach

The aim of this project was to gather, as accurately as possible, information on the number of items (i.e. physical sound carriers or digital audio files) existing in collections across the UK, their formats, the subject areas they cover, their uniqueness and their states of digital preservation, copyright and description.

Recorded sound collections exist, potentially, in their millions. Some of these collections are well known and information on them is accessible. But the details of many collections – particularly those held outside archives - are not known.

Through a combination of outreach, promotion and desk research, this Audit has brought together information from existing surveys of sound collections, ensuring that information is up to date, and has supplemented that information with details of previously unquantified collections from across the UK.

Additionally, the survey has served as an outreach tool, to raise the awareness of risks facing recorded sound collections, and of the Library’s Save Our Sounds programme as a whole.

The survey was carried out in three phases: the first, to set up the infrastructure and tools for collecting information; the second, to promote the survey, to encourage people to send details of their collections and to raise awareness both publicly and amongst communities, and the third, to ‘target’ known collection holders, asking for fuller and more up-to-date details on collections in their care.

In the context of this survey, a ‘collection’ may refer to the entire audio holdings of a particular person, institution or governing body, discrete subsets of material within the complete holdings of a collection owner, or individual items.

Phase one: project setup

The first phase of the Audit ran from mid-December 2014 to the project launch in January 2015.

This phase was focussed on three main activities:

1. Defining a list of collection holder types and collection subjects, to direct promotional materials.
2. Collating lists of contacts from these areas, to use in e-marketing activities.
3. Defining a methodology and setting up tools and systems for information collection.
## Defining collection holder types

From the start of this project, it was agreed that **a)** recorded sound collections could exist in any number of places and **b)** that no restrictions should be placed on the type of respondent wishing to send details of their collection.

In order to make the management of promotional activities simpler, and the analysis of results more effective, it was decided to specify a small number of collection holder ‘types’, and to encourage respondents to identify themselves with one of these types.

Definitions of these types are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collection holder type</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Libraries and Archives</td>
<td>Institutions holding library or archive collections, including public and research libraries, and libraries and archives associated with academic institutions (e.g. university libraries)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museums and Galleries</td>
<td>Institutions providing public access to museum collections and/or artworks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Societies, Associations and Trusts</td>
<td>Including scholarly, professional and non-profit organisations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community and Voluntary Organisations</td>
<td>Voluntary organisations and those with a particular focus on regional communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Companies</td>
<td>Businesses - either formed in the UK, or with a UK focus – owning recognised UK ‘heritage’ brands.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broadcasters and Press</td>
<td>Including print publications (newspapers, magazines), radio and television.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studios and Record Labels</td>
<td>Sound recording studios and UK-based record labels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools, Colleges and Universities</td>
<td>Academic institutions providing education from secondary level to HE/FE, including both independent and state schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individuals</td>
<td>Those with private collections not affiliated with an institution, company or governing body.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Collection holders not identifying with any of the above types.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1: Collection holder types and definitions*
Defining collection subjects

To enable more effective communication and to make the analysis of results more coherent, a list of collection subjects were agreed on during the first phase of the project.

Definitions of the collection subjects are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collection subject</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oral History</td>
<td>Recordings of interviews and personal memories relating to individuals, families, significant events and everyday life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popular Music &amp; Jazz</td>
<td>Recordings of popular (in this case, non-classical) music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classical &amp; Experimental Music</td>
<td>Recordings of western art music, experimental music and sound art</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World, Folk &amp; Traditional Music</td>
<td>Recordings of traditional music relating to particular regions or cultures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wildlife &amp; Natural Sounds</td>
<td>Recordings of animals and natural environments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanical Sounds</td>
<td>Recordings of non-musical machines (e.g. trains, factories)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drama &amp; Literature</td>
<td>Recordings of dramatic and literary works, including theatre recordings, prose and poetry readings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language &amp; Dialect</td>
<td>Recordings made primarily to demonstrate a particular language, accent or dialect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speeches &amp; Events</td>
<td>Recordings made primarily to document speeches, events or ceremonies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>Off-air recordings of radio broadcasts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documentary &amp; News</td>
<td>Recordings of news or documentary items (e.g. from radio broadcasts or talking newspapers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Any recordings not falling within the above collection subject areas.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Collection subjects and definitions
Creating contact lists

To ensure as broad a reach as possible and to enable promotion and marketing activities during the second phase of the project, a contact list (including names, locations and email addresses where available) containing details for a total of **11,545** potential collection holders was created during Phase One of the project using online resources, including large-scale sources of information on cultural institutions\(^5\) and broadcasters\(^6\), subject-specific online directories\(^7\) and market research tools\(^8\). Those contacted included UK libraries, archives, museums, galleries, historic buildings, societies, theatres, broadcasters, companies, and higher education institutions.

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\(^5\) Culture 24, Culture Grid, Database of UK Public Libraries, National Register of Archives
\(^6\) media.info
\(^7\) Association of British Orchestras, UK Theatre Members’ Directory, The Theatres Trust
\(^8\) Fame and Market IQ

Figure 4: Open reel tapes in the collections of the British Library
Methodology

From the outset, it was agreed that to conduct successfully a potentially large survey in a relatively short space of time and with limited resource would require careful planning.

A methodology was developed according to the following criteria:

1. The means of completing the survey should appeal to those with large or multiple collections (e.g. large institutions) as well as those with small collections.
2. The survey should be easy to complete, both for those with good technical knowledge as equally as those without experience of handling data.
3. The methods used to gather information should require minimal manual intervention from project staff.
4. The fields for data capture should be clearly defined and restricted to certain values where appropriate, to allow the easy calculation of statistics.
5. The tools used for capturing information should be easily customisable, ideally free, and possible to create in a short space of time.
6. The tools should be publicly available and easy to access.

Figure 5: Screen capture of Google Form for data collection
To meet these criteria, it was decided to provide respondents with a choice of two means of delivering collection information: the first an online form (to appeal to those with individual collections; in this case a Google Form, associated with a Google Sheet), and the second a standard Excel template, to be populated by respondents and returned to project staff, by email.

Data fields for capture were designed according to the following criteria (see Appendix for a full list of fields and descriptions).

1. Collection holders should be both easily identifiable and contactable
2. Collections should be readily locatable with georeferencing tools\(^9\).
3. Sufficient information should be gathered on the content of collections for subject specialists (i.e. British Library curators) to be able to understand collections, and for the information to be easily used in any analysis of results
4. Information received should include details of rights and any funding supporting collections
5. Information on collection extent, formats and state of digital preservation should be sufficient to allow prioritisation for preservation within and between collections, and to broadly plan the time and resource required to carry out any digitisation.

To simplify data processing, the same fields were used for both methods of data capture (i.e. the Google Form and Excel sheet), and the same Excel template as sent to respondents was used to collate information by project staff (allowing data to be imported directly, without the need for editing).

To overcome any difficulties on the part of collection holders in identifying sound recording formats, a link was provided to an existing online resource for audio format identification\(^10\).

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\(^9\) In this case, Google Fusion Tables
\(^10\) [https://psap.library.illinois.edu/format-id-guide](https://psap.library.illinois.edu/format-id-guide)
Phase two: promotion and outreach

The first four weeks after the project launch were focussed on raising awareness amongst the sectors identified in Phase One, using a combination of the following methods:

1. Posting details of the project on email discussion lists and forums (listed in Appendix 3).
2. Using social media (Facebook, Twitter) to publicise the project.
4. Encouraging contacts to publicise the project in their own blogs and newsletters.
5. Mentions in press around the launch of Save Our Sounds in national newspapers, national and regional television and radio news.

A webpage was published on the British Library website on 12th January 2015 to coincide with the launch of the project. This webpage provided information on the National Audit, its aims, its context as a part of the Library’s Save Our Sounds programme, contact details including a shared mailbox and links to the Google Form and Spreadsheet.
Phase three: updating collection information

By examining previous surveys and reports which attempted to map sound collections in the UK, a database of known collection holders was built. Using the collection information available from these existing reports and surveys, collection holders were contacted and asked if they still held the collection as last described and whether they could supply an up to date set of data describing their collection via one of the defined delivery methods.

The following resources (containing details of c.900 ‘known collection holders’) were used:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Directory of Recorded Sound Resources in the United Kingdom (British Library, 1989)</td>
<td>A broad overview of UK sound collections in 1989. Containing information on collections across all subject areas, and within both public and private sectors from 489 collection holders, including locations, broad extents (including formats) and subject areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museums, Libraries and Archives Councils Reports on Audio-Visual Collections in the UK, c.2003-2005.</td>
<td>Published reports on audio-visual collections and archives commissioned by regional MLAs, to map the extent and status of audio-visual and oral history collections across the UK. Containing details of collections from 305 unique institutions and collection holders, including broad format information, collection subjects and extent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mapping Religion-and Belief-Related Audio-Visual Collections in the UK (Religious Archives Group, 2014)</td>
<td>A small-scale mapping project of religion-related audio-visual collections in the UK, carried out by a partnership between the Religious Archives Group, The National Archives, and the British Library. Comprising a published report, alongside a database detailing 70 institutions holding audio-visual collections, including information on content and extent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directory of British and Irish Sound Archives (BISA, 2014)</td>
<td>An online database launched in May 2014 and maintained by BISA. Containing collection descriptions, information on access arrangements and contact details for sound collections held by 24 institutions and collection holders across the British Isles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Partner Consultations (British Library, 2014; unpublished)</td>
<td>Results from a series of questionnaires sent to potential partner institutions as part of a consultation exercise to inform the Library’s 2015 HLF funding bid. Containing overviews of collections held by 12 institutions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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11 These reports are available online at the Oral History Society website.
12 This report and the database are available online at The Religious Archives Group website.
13 This database can be found online at the BISA website.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Guide to the BBC’s Archives, 2012: What’s in the Archives and How to Use Them (BBC, 2012)</strong></td>
<td>A printed guide to recorded sound and moving image collections - including formats and extent - across most (but not all) BBC archives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Survey of Scottish Sound Archives (Tobar an Dualchais, 2013)</strong></td>
<td>A report on the survey undertaken by Tobar an Dualchais between October 2012 and March 2013 as part of the National Sound Archive for Scotland pilot project led by the National Library of Scotland. Containing names of 75 collection holders, and overall results of findings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Survey of East Anglia Sound Collections (East of England Sound Archive, 2007; unpublished)</strong></td>
<td>A regional survey of sound collections in the East of England, containing details from 84 collection holders, including information on content, digital surrogates, formats and extent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Oral History of British Science Survey (British Library, 2014; unpublished)</strong></td>
<td>A survey of oral history collections containing recordings relating to the history of science and technology in Britain. Containing details from 145 collection holders, including content information and basic details of formats and extent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Status and future of oral history Collections in the North East (Internal report for North East Museums, Libraries &amp; Archives Council, Jo Bath, 2006; unpublished)</strong></td>
<td>A regional survey of oral history sound collections containing details of collections from 100 unique institutions and collection holders, including broad format information, collection subjects and extent.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Sources of collection information
Limitations of the methodology

- The project’s scope and comprehensiveness was contingent on the time available. Individual ‘targeted’ emails to the c.900 ‘known collection holders’ were quantifiably more successful in yielding returns than mass e-mailouts, but to send c.11,000 individual emails and subsequent chase emails to potential collection holders would not have been possible in the allotted time.
- Similarly, almost all telephone conversations yielded successful returns but applying this method more widely would have been impossible within the allotted time.
- Despite attempts to engage with musicians and collectors of music and the labels and studios who distribute and record such material there was a noticeable reluctance to supply collection information in these areas perhaps due to the copyrighted nature of much of this material. And we know that many musicians, conductors and composers have personal collections of their own works and performances. We would expect that the amount of such material to far exceed the other categories of recordings; however, these remain largely hidden.
- A similar reluctance to respond was experienced with potential collectors of off-air radio broadcasts. Again this may be due to potential copyright infringements inherent in such collections.
- In many cases, respondents stressed that their answers could only be approximate as no detailed audit of their collections had been undertaken, and doing so would require resources over and above what was available in the timeframe.
Contributors

The project was conducted by Adam Tovell as Researcher assisted by James Knight as Research Support Officer.

The project board comprised Richard Ranft (Head of Sound Vision), Dr Rob Perks (Lead Curator, Oral History), Dr Janet Topp Fargion (Lead Curator, World & Traditional Music), Dr Luke McKernan (Lead Curator, News & Moving Image) and Hannah Jenkins (Portfolio Manager).

British Library specialists were consulted throughout the project to aid with their expertise and experience including: Mary Stewart (Curator, Oral History), Paul Wilson (Curator, Radio Broadcast), Jonathan Summers (Curator, Classical Music Recordings), Nicolas Bell (Lead Curator, Western Music Collections), Stephen Cleary (Lead Curator, Literature & Creative Sound Recordings), Andy Linehan (Curator, Popular Music Recordings), Cheryl Tipp (Curator, Wildlife & Environmental Sounds), Jonnie Robinson (Lead Curator, Spoken English Collection), Andrea Zarza (Curator, World & Traditional Music), Will Prentice (Head of Technical Services & Processing), Ian Macaskill (Acquisitions Officer) and James Tugwell (Acquisitions Support Officer).
Summary of results

The results of this Audit should not be considered as a comprehensive account of recorded sound collections in the UK. Rather, it is representative of what could be achieved within a relatively short timeframe.

It should be noted that some collection holders returned individual responses for each individual collection in their care, while others returned a single response for the entirety of their holdings. To avoid distorting any results here, individual responses from single collection holders have been reduced to a single return. The full collection details are held on file at the British Library.

Despite these caveats, the Audit gives an indication of the extent of sound collections existing in the UK, which may be used to inform a national strategy for sound preservation and prioritisation.

Responses

488 responses to the Audit were received.

![Figure 7: Delivery methods](chart)

378 respondents (77% of the total) delivered information through the online form while 110 respondents (23% of the total) sent information in spreadsheets, by email.
Of these respondents, **109 (22%)** provided information on multiple collections, as opposed to information on their entire holdings.

![Figure 8: Rate of response (y-axis denotes number of survey returns per day)](image)

Information was received at an average rate of 3 responses per day, with peaks following promotional activities, particularly posts on email discussion lists and in the press. There were also peaks on the originally publicised deadline (March 31st) and around the extended, final deadline (May 31st).
The majority of respondents (175; 36%) identified with the ‘Library/Archive’ sector. A further 88 returns (18% of the total) were received from individuals, 77 returns (16%) came from the ‘Museum/Gallery’ sector and 49 returns (10%) came from schools, colleges or universities.

Collection holders identifying as a ‘Society/Association/Trust’ (32; 6%) or a ‘Community/Voluntary Organisation (32; 7%) were also represented.

A relatively small number of returns were received from broadcasters and press bodies (10; 2%), companies (10; 2%) and studios and record labels (4; 1%). 12 respondents (2%) self-identified as none of the above and described themselves as ‘Other’.
Subjects

‘Oral History’ was the largest subject area reported by collection holders, with 36% of collections described as containing oral history recordings, mainly of local and regional interest. This prevalence could be due to a variety of factors including the facts that: (a) oral history collecting is well organised in the UK at both a local and national level, (b) oral history collection holders recognise such collections as a community resource to be shared publicly, as opposed to personal collections to be held privately, (c) many of these collections have received public funding so the owners may perceive the collections as common property.

Collections containing ‘Language & Dialect’ (12%), ‘Speeches & Events’ (10%) and ‘Documentary & News’ (8%) recordings were the next most frequently cited subject categories.

‘Classical Music’, ‘Radio’ and ‘Other’ recordings all featured in 6% of the collections described by respondents. These categories were undoubtedly under-reported.

The remaining subjects that respondents identified their collections containing were split between ‘World, Folk & Traditional Music’ (5%), ‘Popular Music & Jazz’ (4%), ‘Wildlife & Natural Sounds’ (2%), ‘Mechanical Sounds’ (1%) and ‘Drama & Literature’ (4%).
Of the total number of items surveyed 78% are held on obsolescent ‘legacy’ formats thus requiring migration to stable digital formats in the near future.

Shellac discs (441,093; 24%) constituted almost a quarter of the individual items surveyed.

¼” open reel tape (292,846; 16%), vinyl discs (250,300; 13%) and compact cassettes (190,964; 10%) were the next most frequently reported formats that recordings were held on followed by audio CDs (154,549; 8%) and CD-Rs (90,111; 5%).

DATs (23,201; 1%), Minidiscs (11,421; 1%), phonograph cylinders (3,650; <1%) and lacquer discs (3,694; <1%) were all reported in proportionately small but notable numbers.

5% of the recordings reported were described by respondents as being on ‘other’ formats. These included: wire recordings, Dictabelt recordings and micro-cassettes.

17% of the recordings surveyed were digital files on a variety of formats, predominantly MP3 and .WAV.
Cataloguing

38% of collections were reported as having electronic catalogue records while 37% of collections were reported as having no electronic catalogue records. 25% of collection holders reported only partially electronically catalogued collections.
56% of collections were reported as containing ‘unique’ recordings. 23% of collections surveyed were reported to contain items described as ‘rare’. Respondents reported being ‘unsure’ of the rarity of 19% of reported collections. 2% of collections were reported as ‘common’.

**Figure 13: Collection uniqueness**
The majority (69%) of collections were reported as being ‘in copyright’; 2% as being ‘out of copyright’ and 7% ‘partially in copyright’. Respondents were ‘unsure’ of the copyright status of 22% of collections.
299 of the collections surveyed (10%) reported having received external funding, some from multiple funders.
Of those 299 collections, 129 (43%) had received funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

Local councils (31; 10%) and universities (24; 8%) were the next most significant sources of funding.

The Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC) (9; 3%), Museums, Libraries & Archives Council MLA (6; 2%), The Arts Council (7; 2%) and other Lottery funds such as Big Lottery (6; 2%) were also reported.

The remaining collections (87, 29%) reported receiving funding from a diverse range of local and sector-specific funding bodies as well as from private donation.
64% of collections (1,921) were reported as being ‘complete’, 28% of collections (861) were described as ‘growing’ and 8% of respondents (233) were ‘not sure’ as to the growth status of their collections.
Location

The majority (422; 87%) of responses were received from collection holders located in England, with 10% from Scotland (49), 2% from Wales (10) and 1% from Northern Ireland (4) and The Isle of Wight, The Isle of Man and Guernsey (3).

Figure 68: Map showing collection locations
Digital copies

813 of the surveyed collections (27%) were reported as having digital copies. 308 collections (10%) were described as containing digital copies of part of the collection. 57% of collections (1,701) were reported as having no digital copies. 6% respondents (193) were unsure as to the digital preservation status of their collections.
Collection examples

There was great breadth and huge variety in terms of the kind of collections that the Audit was able to gather details on, ranging from major collections covering a broad range of subjects of national and international interest to small focused collections of local significance. Some examples include:

- **Daphne Oram Archive**: 500 recordings of works by the pioneering British composer and electronic musician Daphne Oram (1925 - 2003), creator of the "Oramics" system, a technique used to create electronic sounds.

- **EMI Group Archive**: A unique collection of record and gramophone catalogues from around the world including: artist files for the majority of artists who have recorded for EMI, general correspondence, recording sheets and contracts to 1946, Matrix Cards of EMI recordings and associated early Recording Ledgers. Extensive collection of records issued by EMI and its associated labels worldwide from 1898 – 1946.

- **Jem Finer Collection**: The personal collection of the musician, sound artist and founding member of The Pogues Jem Finer. Includes over 9,000 items many of which are unique personal recordings or works in progress.

- **Vaughan Williams Memorial Library collection at Cecil Sharp House**: An internationally significant collection containing 10,000 folk and traditional music recordings including rare and unique field recordings and private recordings by noted folk musicians and composers.

- **Delia Derbyshire Archive**: Over 267 tapes covering Derbyshire's time between 1962 and 1973 as a composer at the BBC's ground-breaking Radiophonic Workshop.

- **Canterbury Cathedral Archives**: Recordings of events at Canterbury Cathedral from the 1950s onwards, including services for past Archbishops' enthronements, Lambeth conferences and choral evensong; performances of children's operas and choral music by J.S. Bach, Britten and others.

- **Doc Rowe Archive Collection**: A nationally significant archive of British folk life, lore and cultural tradition featuring 12,000 recordings.

- **Bristol Record Office St Paul's Archive**: Recordings of performances spanning the history of the St. Paul's carnival.

- **Essex Record Office Traditional Music Archive**: 1,000 recordings of traditional and folk music played by Essex musicians or performed at Essex venues.

- **Bunnet-Muir Musical Theatre Trust Archive**: 11,000 audio recordings on cylinder, 78, 45 and 33 rpm records, cassettes, reel to reel, CD & piano rolls.

- **The Rambert Archive**: 800 recordings created by the Rambert Dance Company through the process of the work the company produce.

- **East Midlands Oral History Archive**: Orton Family Collection - Recordings made by author John Lahr with Orton family in preparation for biography of Leicester playwright Joe Orton.

- **Manchester Jewish Museum Archive**: 716 recordings from the early 1970s onwards containing interviews with first, second and third generation Jewish immigrants and providing unique anecdotal evidence of the mass migration of Eastern European Jews in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

- **Northampton Museums and Art Gallery: Hidden Histories** - The Hidden Histories oral history project was undertaken to record people's experiences of working in the shoe industry in Northampton and the County from 1945 to the present day (2008).
University of Reading Special Collections, James & Elizabeth Knowlson Collection: Over 290 recordings relating to the life and work of Samuel Beckett.

Talking Dundee: The Talking Dundee oral history project archive of 70 life story recordings, capturing the memories and life experiences of the people who live, work and play in the city.

Norfolk Record Office Adrian Hoare Collection: Oral history interviews collected in the 1990s relating to the Home Guard and ‘Secret Army’ in Norfolk during Second World War.


British Antarctic Survey: Base and Field Reports Collection – Recordings made at Faraday Station including the search for 3 base members who went missing during a climbing trip in 1976.

University of Reading Museum of English Rural Life: 1,300 Oral History recordings spread across 82 collections pertaining to agricultural matters, life, work and customs including: village life, WWII evacuees, crate making, countryside sports, milking, harvester maintenance, gypsy history, bee keeping, conservation work and the origins of the British food manufacturing industry.

Oxford Text Archive, University of Oxford: The British National Corpus - Approximately ten million words of naturally occurring spoken British English, captured and transcribed in the early 1990s as part of the project to build the British National Corpus, a digital snapshot of the language in the late twentieth century.

Marcas O Murchu Irish Language, Culture & Music Archive: Collection of traditional music and spoken word, predominantly in the Irish language collected by Belfast musician and broadcaster Marcas O Murchu held at Linen Hall Library, Belfast.

Institute of Modern Languages Research, University of London: Miller Archive - BBC German Service recordings of anti-Nazi propaganda songs and sketches from 1940; reading of Karl Kraus by Austrian actor in London in 1957.

SOAS Endangered Language Archive: A vast, unique and internationally significant archive of endangered languages from across the globe held at SOAS.

Nocturnal Primate Research Group, Oxford Brookes University: 300 hours of nocturnal recordings of primates.

Centre for Wildlife Conservation, University of Cumbria: Underwater hydrophone recordings made in the waters surrounding Shetland including recordings of killer whales (Orcinus orca) and Risso's dolphins (Grampus griseus).
Conclusion

- While the results of the Audit are by no means comprehensive they provide a good indication of the state of the UK’s recorded heritage and the preservation risks it faces.
- The responses from collection holders were revealing, offering great insight into the diverse range of recorded material throughout the UK.
- Engagement with collection holders was overwhelmingly positive with many collection holders very much welcoming both the Audit and the concept of the Save Our Sounds program as a whole as ‘much needed’.
- The Audit helped raise awareness of the potential threats to the nation’s recorded heritage via press, publicity and outreach acting as a catalyst for many institutions and individuals to examine their recorded material.
- Several notable collections of rare, unique and at risk material were discovered during the course of the Audit thus fulfilling one of its primary objectives.
- The Audit also helped log collection information for institutions that are at risk of closure or imminent loss of resource (the North West Sound Archive, The Library of Birmingham).

In less than five months, this Audit gathered information on over 1.8 million recordings held in over 3,000 collections. While not comprehensive, the results offer the most informed picture of the state of the nation’s sound collections ever collated and offer a resoundingly clear message - a message that the UK possess an invaluable wealth of recorded cultural memory that is under imminent threat from loss and decay.

Something must be done and something must be done soon to safeguard these sounds for future generations. This challenge is the focus of the British Library’s Unlocking the UK’s Sound Heritage project. As well as digitising and publishing online up to 500,000 rare and unique sounds from the British Library’s own collections the project aims to use the results of this Audit to identify rare, unique and at risk sound collections from around the UK.

The British Library will then work with partner institutions to develop a national preservation network via ten regional centres of archival excellence that will digitise, preserve and share the unique, and nationally significant, audio heritage found in their local area as identified in this Audit.

As well as helping foster professional skills in audio preservation, these regional centres will help the British Library raise awareness throughout the nation of the serious and time sensitive task ahead by collaboratively implementing a major outreach program engaging with schools and local communities to celebrate the UK’s sound heritage, and draw attention to the wealth of living history held in archives throughout the country.

For the many more collections that cannot be part of the project the British Library will publish advice online on caring for collections and helping spread relevant information to collection holders.

Appendix 1: British Library audio holdings

The British Library is home to the nation’s Sound Archive, a collection of over 6.5 million recordings of speech, music, wildlife and the environment, from the 1880s to the present day. The Sound Archive holds many sound and video recordings, with over a million discs and thousands of tapes. Its collections come from all over the world and cover the entire range of recorded sound from music, drama and literature, to oral history and wildlife sounds. Formats range from cylinders made in the late 19th century to the latest digital media.

In addition to copies of commercial recordings issued within the United Kingdom, the Sound Archive keeps selected commercial recordings from overseas, many radio broadcasts and many privately-made recordings.

The table below is an overview of the format type and extent of the British Library’s audio holdings.

These figures were not included in the reporting as the expressed aim of the Audit was to establish information on sound collections held outside of the Library’s own collections in order to attempt to establish the state of the nation’s audio heritage and the risks it faces.

The format type, extent and preservation risks of the Library’s audio holdings are established and known and inclusion of these figures would have skewed data analysis of the information gathered on sound collections throughout the nation.

Please note that these figures are accurate as of 2013. The figures have significantly increased since then and continue to grow. This is particularly true of formats still issued commercially such as CD and vinyl disc.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Format Type</th>
<th>Quantity (published)</th>
<th>Quantity (unpublished)</th>
<th>Total quantity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8-Track Cartridge</td>
<td>471</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>471</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betamax Audio</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10,852</td>
<td>10,852</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD</td>
<td>377,454</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>377,454</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD-R</td>
<td>4,503</td>
<td>82,962</td>
<td>87,465</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compact Cassette</td>
<td>39,241</td>
<td>64,112</td>
<td>103,353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAT</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4,234</td>
<td>4,235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DCC</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dictabelt</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexi Disc</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lacquer Disc</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>19,694</td>
<td>19,694</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magnetic Disc</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>31</td>
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<tr>
<td>Metal Matrix</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Microcassette</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2,129</td>
<td>2,129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MiniDisc</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>6,535</td>
<td>6,790</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAB Cartridge</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Reel Tape</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>150,672</td>
<td>150,683</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Format Type</td>
<td>Quantity (published)</td>
<td>Quantity (unpublished)</td>
<td>Total quantity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonograph Cylinder</td>
<td>3,400</td>
<td>3,095</td>
<td>6,495</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA-CD</td>
<td>1,397</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1,397</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shellac Disc</td>
<td>244,346</td>
<td>7,692</td>
<td>252,038</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stenorette</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VHS Audio</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14,144</td>
<td>14,144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vinyl Disc</td>
<td>493,161</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>493,161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wire</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,164,322</strong></td>
<td><strong>367,400</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,531,722</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix 2: Data fields

A list of the data fields used to gather information on collections.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Field</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A - Timestamp</td>
<td>Date that the collection data was returned to British Library.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B - Allow Public Access To Contact Details?</td>
<td>Option for the collection holder to choose whether or not to have their contact details publically listed as part of the Directory.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C - Collection Holder Name</td>
<td>Name of the institution or individual who holds the collection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D - Collection Holder Description</td>
<td>See ‘Defining Collection Holder Types’ for descriptive options.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E - Other Collection Holder Description</td>
<td>Use d if no suitable predefined category in field D is available.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F - Address Line 1</td>
<td>First line of the collection holder’s address.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G - Address Line 2</td>
<td>Second line of the collection holder’s address.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H - City/Region</td>
<td>The collection holder’s city or region.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I - County</td>
<td>The collection holder’s county.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J - Postcode</td>
<td>The collection holder’s postcode.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K - Website</td>
<td>The collection holder’s website URL if one exists.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L - Contact First Name</td>
<td>First name of the contact person for the collection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M - Contact Surname</td>
<td>Surname of the contact person for the collection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N - Contact Email Address</td>
<td>Email address of the contact person for the collection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O - Contact Telephone Number</td>
<td>Telephone of the contact person for the collection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P - Allow Public Access To Collection Details</td>
<td>The collection holder indicates whether or not their collection information may be shared publically.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q - Collection Name</td>
<td>The name of the collection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R - Collection Reference</td>
<td>A reference code or catalogue number for the collection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S- Collection Subject</td>
<td>See ‘Defining Collection Subjects’ for a list of descriptive options.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
T - Other Collection Subject  
Use if no suitable predefined category in field S is available.

U - Collection Description  
The collection holder’s description of the collection.

V - Collection Growth  
a choice between “Growing”, “Complete” and “Not Sure”.

W - Online Catalogue Information  
a choice between “Yes”, “No” and “Partial”.

X - Online Catalogue Information URL  
A URL for online catalogue information if available.

Y - Other Documentation  
Any other documentation supporting the collection.

Z - Uniqueness  
a choice between “Unique”, “Rare”, “Common” and “Not Sure”.

AA - Original Recordings  
a choice between “Original Recordings”, “Copies”, “Both” and “Not Sure”.

AB - Copyright  
a choice between “In”, “Out”, “Both” and “Not Sure”.

AC - Rights Information  
Any copyrights information about the collection.

AD - Funding Information  
Any funding information about the collection.

AE - Phonograph Cylinder (‘Wax Cylinder’)  
Number of phonograph cylinders in the collection (if any).

AF - Shellac Disc (‘78’)  
Number of shellac discs in the collection (if any).

AG - Lacquer Disc (‘Acetate Disc’)  
Number of lacquer discs in the collection (if any).

AH - Vinyl Disc (‘LP’, ‘Single’, etc.)  
Number of vinyl discs in the collection (if any).

AI - 1/4” Open Reel Tape (‘Reel to Reel Tape’)  
Number of open reel tapes in the collection (if any).

AJ - Compact Cassette  
Number of compact cassette tapes in the collection (if any).

AK - Digital Audio Tape (‘DAT’)  
Number of DAT (Digital Audio Tapes) in the collection (if any).

AL - MiniDisc  
Number of Mini Discs in the collection (if any).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AM - Audio CD (i.e. published CD)</th>
<th>Number of audio CDs in the collection (if any).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AN - Audio CD-R</td>
<td>Number of audio CD-Rs in the collection (if any).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AO - Digital Audio Files (e.g: WAV, MP3 etc)</td>
<td>Number of digital audio files in the collection (if any).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AP - Other Formats (sound)</td>
<td>Number of any other sound carrying formats in the collection (if any).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AQ - Other Formats Notes</td>
<td>Notes on other sound carrying formats or audio-visual formats in the collection (if any).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AR - Condition</td>
<td>The condition of the collection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AS – Digital Copies</td>
<td>A choice between “Yes”, “No”, “Partially” and “Not Sure”.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 3: Discussion lists and forums

We used the following discussion lists and electronic forums to publicise the Audit:

- ARA
  Archivists, Conservators & Records Managers Discussion List
- Art & Design Librarians Discussion List
- Arts & Humanities Data Service for Performing Arts Discussion List
- Association of Performing Arts Collections/Society for Dance Research Discussion List
- Ballads
- British & Irish Sound Archives Discussion List
- British Computer Music Research Community Discussion List
- British Forum for Ethnomusicology Discussion List
- Centre for Music Technology, Glasgow Discussion List
- Cinemuseum
- Community Music in Higher Education Discussion List
- Digital Music Research Network Discussion List
- Electronic Dance Music Culture Research Network
- Euromusicology Discussion List
- Experimental Research Network Discussion List
- Glasgow AudioVisual Network Discussion List
- Goldsmith’s Electronic Music Studios Discussion List
- Heritage Discussion List
- Heritage Yorkshire
- Higher Education, Music in Primary Schools Discussion List
- Historical Music Pedagogy Discussion List
- IAML
  International Association for the Study of Popular Music in UK and Ireland Discussion List
- International Association of Libraries, Museums, Archives and Documentation Centres of the Performing Arts
- International Association of Music Libraries, Archives and Documentation Centres Discussion List
- International Association of Sound and Audiovisual Archives Discussion List
- International Network for the Study of Early Modern Festival Discussion List
- Leeds University Centre for English Music Discussion List
- Library & Information Science Discussion List
- London Museum Librarians and Archivists Group
- London Museums, Librarians & Archivists Discussion List
- Medieval & Renaissance Music Conference Discussion List
- Medieval & Renaissance Music Discussion List
- Military Collections Discussion List
- Museum Collections
- Museum Current Awareness Discussion List
- Music & Moving Pictures Discussion List
- Music & Science Discussion List
- Music and Moving Pictures
- Music Since 1990 Discussion List
- Music Staff & Technicians Discussion List
- Musical Aesthetics Discussion List
- Musical Performance on Record
- Musical Performance on Record Discussion List
Musicology Discussion List
Nineteenth Century Music Discussion List
PALATINE - The Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for Dance, Drama and Music Discussion List
Performance Art Network Discussion List
Performance Studies Network Mailing List
Popular Music Research Group Mailing List
Popular, Folk & Traditional Ballad Discussion List
Provision & Management of Music Libraries Discussion List
Religion & Popular Music Discussion List
Researchers and Practitioners in Cinema and the Museum Discussion List
Royal Musical Association Discussion List
Royal Musical Association LGBTQ Study Group Discussion List
Scottish Leisure History Discussion List
Scottish Pop Academic Network
Sixteenth/Seventeenth-Century Music Network
Society for Dance Research
Stored Collections in UK Museums Discussion List
Suppressed Music Mailing List
UK Ethnomusicologist Discussion List
UK Live Music Research List
Yorkshire Heritage Research Discussion List