We are the only species on the planet, so far as we know, to have invented a communal memory stored neither in our genes nor in our brains. The warehouse of this memory is called the library, or archive.

**archive** [ahr-kayv]: 1. A collection of historical documents or records providing information about a place, institution, or group of people  
2. The place where historical documents or records are kept  
3. A repository for stored memories or information

Until embarking upon this project, our small team of four had never stepped foot in The National Archives before. We approached this vast cement bunker dedicated to the nation’s past with the critical and voyeuristic eye of a designer.

Wanting to experience everything the archive has to offer firsthand, we commenced our research by signing up as Readers, following their strict enrollment process in order to gain access to the 11 million public records it houses. We snooped through dog-eared documents, experimented with their inner systems, shadowed, interviewed and secretly filmed the information gatekeepers and dedicated researchers who flock to this hive of information.

In order to achieve a wider understanding of how archives work, we also explored several other public repositories across London and Brighton in order to compare and contrast the user experience, atmosphere, content and user patterns unique to each establishment.

In our current Digital Age, easy and instant access to social media has replaced the need for analogue archives for many of us. Through blogging, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and more, most of us archive all the time unknowingly, without recognising our habits for what they are. The motivation driving us to document our daily lives feeds into our central human desire to not be forgotten.

Throughout this workbook we have posed a series of “What if” questions and scenarios that challenge perceptions on current data storage systems, in order to spark discussion and stimulate ideas for what the future may hold for archives and the continuation of our collective memory.
Analytical mapping of the archives: Public vs Private / Digital vs Analogue / Accessible vs Inaccessible / Friendly vs Hostile
Mapping the archive atmospheres
Analogue Selfies
One man’s diary chronicles his life through drawing a self portrait a day, Catford, 1968 - 1988
The Great Diary Project, Bishopsgate Archives

Evan Roth:
Internet Cache Self Portrait
The Internet Cache Self Portrait is composed of uncensored streams of images passively collected through daily Internet browsing over the course of a single day

WHAT IF...
the intangible (or inner self) was archivable?

Digital Selfies
Selfie portraits
Instagram

Archiving the everyday self
INTERVIEW: THE DIARY KEEPER

XENIA ON MEMORY:

“I keep a diary because... well, at first it was because I don’t have a very good memory and I was worried I was forgetting things, so I kinda just wanted to keep a track to refer back to”

WHAT IF...

we intentionally documented daydreams and fantasies instead of our perceived reality?

A.R HOPWOOD
False Memory Archive
The human mind is unreliable and our memories can be false and altered over time. Hopwood collected false memories from individuals, such as childhood holidays they never went on, who had been convinced they had been true for years.
We’re in this paradigm shift between paper and digital. The next generation will interact with us virtually; their expectations will be very different.

If you go use to Google search, you may get your answer, but you won’t necessarily understand where that sits with everything, and I think that’s part of what we do – to help you understand where it sits in history.

WHAT IF...

popular search terms were censored, or users were redirected to other obscure results?

Digital Zeitgeist:
The most popular search terms by users of The National Archives online catalogue (over 8.3 million searches in 2012)
We talk about 11 million items on the catalogue. We've only digitised less than 10% of that. The estimated cost of digitising everything runs into the billions.

I think there is a perception that all archives are dusty, you know, parchment and paper...

I want to challenge the way that people engage with archive resources.

**WHAT IF...**

digitised archives become obsolete... can archives be passed on to future generations in other formats?
ARCHIVE ENACTMENT

WHAT IF...

alternative archive formats were taken outdoors, or to unconventional spaces?

ARCHIVES AT NIGHT:
Public engagement activities working with actors help bring the collections to life
INTERVIEW: THE HOBBYIST

Denise Cain (51), American tourist and history enthusiast researching Jacobite tribes. Denise admitted she had to fly from California to London to access the documents she wanted, as they weren’t available online.

People are so accustomed to doing things online. The iPad is great for blowing up pictures of ancient documents which are really tricky to read. The digitised stuff online doesn’t have that same mobility [to let you zoom in], so it’s very hard to read. I think my generation prefers to handle the originals, anyway.

Today I found some microfilm stuff, but I can’t blow it up big enough to make it legible. And Safari won’t download that file. So I can’t view it but I KNOW it’s there. It’s driving me insane. That’s why I came down here for a coffee to talk to you guys. It’s making me lose my mind.

You know what, everyone here is obsessed with history. Everything—and everyone—is connected to the past. And people are usually really happy to give their opinions.

We all want to this place function better. People who come in to the actual archives are all a bit nutty...

Most people aren’t going to do it, are they? A normal person doesn’t venture in here.

WHAT IF... analogue archives were easier to access and take home?
SpyScanner Bookmark

Take a piece of history home with you – simply guide this discreet bookmark vertically or horizontally over the page(s) you wish to scan for perfect, high-res quality copies of original documents.

Features include:

- Instant high-res page scans (user can send images via wifi or USB to computer, tablet, phone, email, friend etc.)
- Illuminates pages
- Magnifies and checks legibility on text
- Translates foreign languages
How to access The National Archives, Kew Gardens

**PROCEDURE**

1. **pre-register online to save time. visit:** secure.nationalarchives.gov.uk/login/yourdetails
2. **visit the archive, go to floor 2 to receive your readers ticket**
3. **present 2 forms of ID (such as passport and utility bill with proof of address)**
4. **store valuables including coat, bag, food & pens in a locker (pencils, notepads, laptops & phones are permitted in the Reading Rooms)**
5. **search the online catalogue to order any public documents by scanning your ID card**
6. **wait approx. 30-60 mins for your documents to be retrieved from storage**
7. **celebrate your patience has allowed you access to the national archives. what a journey!**
8. **return all items to designated return desks or shelves-leave Reading Rooms by scanning ID at the entry/exit barriers**
9. **collect your items (self-service machines accessed via your ID card will inform you where and when your documents are ready to collect)**
10. **browse your documents, taking care to follow proper handing measures, including using gloves, weights and foam blocks to prop up books**
A CONVERSATION WITH ELDER

This’ll get you into google

We have ummm... This is firefox

And this is family search. We have wiki, Family Search Maps, Ancestry, Indexing, Jamaican Family History

Let’s go onto this computer
I like this one better
That one has the old XP

I like this one better simply because... like if we went on this one on workshouses

(Double Click)
Come on!

So its gonna be slow on me, just me makin’ me out a liar! Ittt’s coming

Here’s the main search up on the task bar
See these? Their all linked to these icons... see on the main menu these icons?

I would just start out on family search... just type in and see what you get!
USER SPACES vs BEHIND THE SCENES

WHAT IF...

behind the scenes processes were brought into view for users in an exciting way?
Visitor: Zosia
Assigned Operator: Kelly
Company: The National Archives
Started: 4-Feb-2016 4:25:20 PM
Finished: 4-Feb-2016 4:30:17 PM

4:25:20 PM: Zosia:
I want to put something in the National Archives. It is very important piece of history. How do I do it?

4:25:39 PM:
Your call has been accepted by Kelly. Currently in room: Zosia, Kelly. We're looking at your question, we'll be with you shortly....

4:26:16 PM: Kelly:
Hello Zosia, welcome to our live chat service.

4:26:57 PM: Kelly:
I should explain that The National Archives' holdings consist primarily of official records created by and selected from government departments and public sector bodies and that although we get many offers of records, photographs, and other historical documents from a generous public, we are rarely able to incorporate them into our holdings in a way that will allow others to access and make use of them. Perhaps you could enquire with the archives, record offices, study groups or museums in your area. Use the Find an Archive search tool on our website to find contact details of local archives.

4:27:22 PM: Zosia:
Smiley: Sad

4:27:35 PM: Zosia:
That's a real shame Kelly

4:29:45 PM: Zosia:
Thank you and have a good day!

4:30:01 PM: Kelly:
You too Zosia.

Chat Transcript: How to get my important piece of history into The National Archives
INTERVENTION

The Arbitrary Archives 27 January 2016 London England

mac charger. is this the same mac charger you have? they keep changing the component at the end. i’m cycling so don’t want to carry my charger with me in my bag but it’s risky. your’s might be different

THE ARBITRARY ARCHIVES: Arbitrary information from our lives was recorded and sneakily place into The National Archive records for future researchers to discover
(1) Give your reasons and analyse your motives for living in the district where you live.

(2) In what ways do you consider yourself different from your neighbours?

(3) When you go into pubs, which bar do you use and why?

(4) What priced seats do you use at the cinema and why?

(5) What forms of food, drink or amusement are thought “infra dig” or not quite the things in your circle?

(6) Are you sensitive on the subject of accent and have you made any attempt to change your own?

(7) Do you make a habit of using the following words and phrases? If not, what is your reaction when they are used by others?

Cheerioh, Bye-bye, Tooleoo, Okay, Okidoke, Not half, Ta (for thank you). Old boy, chum, pal, mate.
Archiving the Final Exhibition:

Archive the engaging design exhibition by collecting data on site, in several different perspectives, from different individuals who both run and visit the exhibition.

The process of collecting data will be the part of the exhibition, and the collected results will then be presented.

Example 1. Archiving Locations
Visitors will mark where they are from, where they visited before coming to the exhibition, where they plan to go after the exhibition on the map.

Example 2. Archiving People
Visitors will answer specific questions or respond requests, and the result will be archived and presented. The questions posed could be personal and/or arbitrary.

“There’s a danger that we try to second-guess what records future historians want, and that’s not for us to decide, that’s not our role to determine to what research interests are going to be in the future. There’s a balancing act between what archivists do, and how they work with researchers.”

Jeff James, The Keeper
Chat Transcript
Visitor: Soo
Assigned Operator: Sarah A
Company: The National Archives

Soo:
Do I need to wear gloves to access history all the time?

Sarah A:
Hello Soo, welcome to our live chat service.

Soo:
Hello Sarah
I saw the great video when I got my Readers Card
It says I have to use all the equipment when I use the documents

Sarah A:
No, you do not need to wear gloves all the time whilst using our records.
There will be occasions when it is necessary. For example when handling photographs. We can supply gloves in these circumstances.

Soo:
What about when I access online archives? Do I wear gloves?

Sarah A:
No, that won't be necessary.
WHAT IF...

similar props and processes were active in all areas of our lives?

Handle internet history with care:
A journey to The National Archives to access yesterday’s Twitter feed
PROCEDURE FOR READING BUS TIMETABLE:

(1) swipe oyster card on reader

(2) turn around, tap your left shoulder with your right hand, turn back

(3) put on your transport for london glasses

(4) wait 30 seconds whilst the timetable registers your destination

(5) you have 1 minute to read the timetable and vacate the readers spot