**Repository sought for a collection from a long term experiment on personal electronic filing**  
A permanent home is required for a collection of documents which provide a unique, in-depth perspective on the emergence of the digital office and its impact on communications, the individual, and the organisation.

**Purpose of the collection**  
The collection was established in 1981 when I started working in the newly formed Office Systems Department at the National Computing Centre in Manchester. My objective was to gain practical experience of the emerging field of Office Automation. The collection was established as a paper-based system with a card index because individual-scale systems were not available at that time. However, its approach (each item uniquely numbered with the number having no significance other than as a retrieval key) was deliberately designed to be digitised downstream. Once established, the collection became, de facto, an integral and essential part of my working life. Most of my work documents were stored in it up to my retirement in 2012. This includes professional work reports, letters and notes; internal organisation documents; and published articles, brochures etc. relevant to my work as a computer consultant. The contexts within which the documents were collected are provided in my CV which is available at www.pwofc.com.

**Structure and volume**  
All items have been numbered, recorded in an index and digitised. The electronic files are managed by a Document Management System which is integrated with the electronic Index to enable seamless search and retrieval. The index comprises some 17,000 entries representing about 180,000 scanned pages and around 5000 application files. The index and all the electronic files are stored and accessed on a laptop computer running MS Windows. Some 450 special documents have been retained in their original physical form and are stored in three archive boxes.

**What’s special about it?**

It’s rare to find such a complete document collection built up by an individual during a whole career in multiple organisations in the commercial sector – in fact I’ve never came across anything similar among all the people I’ve met throughout my working life. One reason for this is that it was an exceptionally difficult thing to do pre-digitisation when most information was paper-based and very bulky in the volumes that accumulate over the years. Nothing was thrown away as I held true to my ambition to eventually possess, and use, the digital version of the collection in order to understand the impact of such a system on the individual. Maintaining the paper-based collection and enabling its operational use as I conducted a busy professional career, required the management of 50+ boxes of paper. When digitisation became feasible, it then required a stubborn persistence over many years to scan the paper. No special arrangements were made with employers to manage and use this material – I organised it as best I could within the working environments I found myself in.

**What could you use the collection for?**

The collection could be used to:

* Research the first 40 years of the digitisation of the office by, for example,
* performing a timeline analysis of the changing methods of delivery of different types of information
* analysing what type of information became easier to obtain over the period
* undertaking a timeline analysis of the impact of new office technology on the individual.
* assess the impact of the emerging internet on the contents of the collection.
* Independently assess and report on the conclusions of this lifetime experiment on personal electronic filing.
* Undertake initial investigations of specific topics such as Office Systems, HCI, Usability, and Computer-Supported Cooperative Work using the collection’s extensive set of documents from diverse sources (some published, some not) on these particular topics.
* Making quick exploratory searches of the collection to provide initial material to shape possible research topics or to illustrate teaching topics.
* Provide a realistic and reusable test bed to teach digital preservation techniques.

**Documentation**  
Because the collection was established as a learning vehicle, the owner kept detailed notes of its development and the lessons learned from its operation. These insights have been recorded in the following documents:

* ‘Ergonomic aspects of Computer Supported Personal Filing Systems’, in the proceedings of the 1990 Ergonomics Society Conference Organisation.
* Three unpublished briefing notes on the operation of the collection written during the 1990s.
* ‘Feasibility of Paperless Office’, a dissertation based around the potential digitisation of Paul Wilson’s personal filing system, Suen Chi Chan, City University, November 1993.
* ‘20 years in the life of a long-term empirical personal electronic filing study’, Behaviour & Information Technology, 2001, Vol. 20, No. 5.
* An unpublished paper on ‘The Applicability of Intrinsic Value in Personal Information Management’ based, in part, on a study of the hardcopy documents that had been retained in the collection, 2014.

**Digital Preservation Status**

I am embarking on a Digital Preservation exercise on the collection (using a process developed and refined on two other personal collections – see pwofc.com) and would be happy to collaborate in this work with any repository with an interest in the collection.

**Contact**

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