

# Creating the new University Archives and Special Collections Centre at University of the Arts London

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When the family of a major film maker offers you his archive, what do you do? University of the Arts London rose to this challenge, and achieved a major strategic goal – creation of a state-of-the-art Archives and Special Collections Centre, which would be a fitting demonstration of the University’s mission and aspirations and of Stanley Kubrick’s legacy. Through project management and collaboration, in less than two years, the flagship Centre was established. It will be a beacon of good practice and inspiration for future creative practitioners in the arts.

## Background

In 2003 discussions began between Library and Learning Resources and colleagues in the University’s research team to consider how best to manage the variety of rich collections held across the colleges of the University,<sup>1</sup> so that they could be preserved for the future and used effectively to support learning, teaching and research. To achieve this a proposal for a University of the Arts London research and study centre was endorsed by the University’s Corporate Management Team and it became an element in the five-year medium term strategy. Following this, in 2005, an opportunity was presented to the University which seemed to be the key to turning this aspiration into reality. The family of the late acclaimed film maker, Stanley Kubrick, had confided in a family friend, who was also a lecturer at the University, that they were looking for a suitable home for the variety of papers, photographs, props and items that formed Kubrick’s archive.

Discussions and investigations around this exciting opportunity began; a proposal was made to the family and in September 2005 an understanding was reached that the University and the Estate would come together to ensure that Kubrick’s legacy

was secured for future film makers and creative practitioners.

A revised proposal for a University archives and special collections centre was accepted by the University and in October 2005, I took up post as Project Manager for Library and Learning Resources.

The project brief was

- to establish a secure physical space for the University Archives and Special Collections, in an appropriate environment to ensure their preservation
- to ensure that the Stanley Kubrick Archives are accessible and used to advance research, teaching, and practice in all aspects of filmmaking, associated disciplines and the arts
- to promote the Stanley Kubrick Archives and seek to encourage their expanding use through seminars, exhibitions, publications, conferences and events
- to ensure that all special collections are cared for and exploited to promote learning, teaching and research throughout the University and beyond.

## Vision

The opportunity presented by the Stanley Kubrick Archive gave us the lever to fulfil our stated ambition to create a state-of-the-art centre, with the donated archive as its cornerstone.

This was the first time the University had been able to consider a dedicated space for collection care and use. We wanted to be innovative, to demonstrate the University's vision to be 'at the forefront of learning, creativity and practice in our specialist subjects'. We also wanted to ensure that we were following the best practice recommended by the National Archives and shown by other leaders and peers in this area. It was our duty to ensure the long-term preservation of all our collections, and the arrangements surrounding the University's acquisition of the Stanley Kubrick Archive had to provide for this and protect all parties from the uncertainties of the future. In achieving these aims, we created a *flagship for the University which required sensitive publicity and promotion through the use of effective communication.*

The vision for the project is consistent with the University's medium term strategy for 2005-2010 and, in particular, supports its research strategy, strategy for student learning and its widening participation agenda. It is this synergy between the aspirations of the University, and the potential of the special collections to fulfill some of them, that demonstrates the value of the Archives and Special Collections Centre to the University and the wider community in our specialist areas.

## The Centre

The project remodelled the lower areas of an existing block and underground car park at Elephant & Castle to create the new centre. In planning from October 2005, it was completed in January 2007 and complies with BS5454:2000 *Recommendations for the storage and exhibition of archival documents*. As far as possible, it also takes account of standards recommended by the National Archives, such as the *National standard for record repositories* (2004). The facility includes a climate-controlled secure storage area, a public enquiry room, display space, collection management area and digitisation area.

In deciding the location for the Centre within the University, space availability was a critical factor. The largest college of the University is the London College of Communication, which has an internationally renowned School of Media. This made it the most appropriate college to provide a

location for the Centre and the Stanley Kubrick Archive, and to demonstrate the University's commitment to providing state-of-the-art accommodation for its special collections.

The basement car park that formed part of the available space envelope for the Centre presented an under-used area which could be easily walled in; low light levels; low risk of hazardous material. However, we were concerned that the risks of flooding and security violation associated with this area might make it unviable. Colleagues in the University's Estates department carried out an extensive risk assessment which revealed that the car park disaffirmed the three key recommendations of the National Archives in considering a location.<sup>2</sup> The risk of flooding, whether from natural or man-made origins, was too high to be ignored. Measures needed to secure the area for this purpose were beyond what was reasonable. As a result of this careful and thorough risk assessment, it was clear that the most effective solution was to place the archive above ground level. So, the underground car park was used to create a new photography teaching facility, with dark rooms and digital facilities, while the upper ground floor was used for the development of the Archives and Special Collections Centre.

The whole construction project was managed by an external company, procured by the University Estates team. The construction project manager worked closely with a team of staff from the College including me, as client for the Archives and Special Collections Centre, to ensure that all needs were met and functions accommodated. We had monthly team meetings and regular conversations throughout the construction process. I made it clear that compliance with BS5454:2000 was essential if we were to create a state-of-the-art facility. The standard was discussed with the construction project manager and the team worked tirelessly to ensure that all aspects of mechanical and electrical engineering, lighting and environmental control complied with the stringent recommendations. An area extending to 282m<sup>2</sup> in total had been made available for the Centre. 214m<sup>2</sup> were allocated to a strongroom storage repository, 25m<sup>2</sup> to a secure search room, and the rest to office and collection management areas.

The storage repository was prepared, initially, to house the Stanley Kubrick Archive and a selected range of existing University collections. The Archive was stored in approximately 1000 boxes on the family's estate, including two portacabins. The Project Manager and colleagues made several trips to the estate during the planning period and liaised

extensively with the family to plan the nature of the storage systems that would be required. At this stage, the key was to find a system which made optimum use of the storage space available and allowed sufficient flexibility to accommodate the variety of media within the Archive. Concurrently, visits were made to other centres of excellence in the UK and Los Angeles to see what was available and to learn from others' experiences. This proved to be an extremely valuable and rewarding use of time and enormous thanks are due to those colleagues who offered their expertise and help so freely.

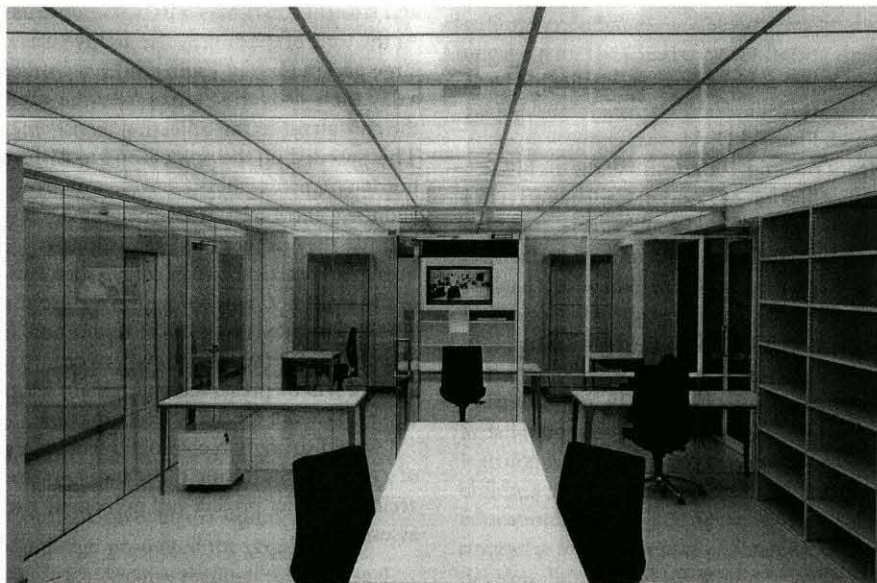
Following visits, reports from colleagues, discussions with experts and a lot of planning based on our growing knowledge of the collections, the Project Manager procured an electronically-operated mobile shelving system for the strongroom, and advised on an early warning air-sampling fire detection system and environmental control units. The shelving has integral lighting and can be moved if this becomes necessary in the future. An area at the back of the strongroom was left clear so that bespoke plan chests could be purchased in the summer, once the nature of the material in the Archive was better understood.

The Search Room was designed to provide the functionality of a traditional archive centre, but not necessarily in the way one might expect. The architects were asked to take a theme from one of Stanley Kubrick's films to inspire their design. They presented two schemes taken from *2001: a space odyssey* (1968) and we settled on the style of the

Hilton Space Station. This resulted in a clean, bright space, predominantly white, with red chairs. The result is stunning, and no visitor has yet been disappointed by the effect of walking into the search room. The display cases are of museum standard so we can show original archive artefacts in them for a period of a week each. A plasma screen and shelving provide a facility to consult secondary resources and staff help is given from a desk behind a glass hatch. The remaining space is for staff and collection management and is flexible enough to accommodate additional researchers. Security is essential and is provided by an intruder alarm system, a doorbell and clear visibility throughout the working areas.

Adjacent to the search room is a popular gallery space. This needed to be shielded from the striking visual image of the Centre so an intelligent glass solution was employed. When the glass is opaque it acts as a projection screen, which has been used by the Centre and by three students during their final year shows; when a switch is flicked the glass becomes clear, and the space merges into the gallery. This avoids the need for blinds, curtains or other intrusive visibility solutions and has proved to be a hit with the College.

In January 2007 the Centre was complete and staff moved in. The Stanley Kubrick Archive was transferred in March 2007. It took four days and six removal vans to transport the 977 boxes of material from the Estate to the University. Due to the careful planning, it fitted into the space that had been prepared for it, in large removal boxes. Over the



Search and collection management areas.

Photograph: [www.lukepotterphotography.co.uk](http://www.lukepotterphotography.co.uk)





material from *A clockwork orange* (1971) and *Full metal jacket* (1981).

Photographs, film clips, research notes, newspaper clippings and correspondence will be digitised (subject to copyright) to create learning materials which expose these issues in a supportive and investigative environment. This package of material will form an e-learning tool which will provide pupils with opportunities to support their work as part of the National Curriculum. Although the e-learning package will be complete in its own right, participants will be given the opportunity to follow up with a masterclass on site at the Elephant and Castle which will provide the opportunity to discuss, and possibly even make, work with foundation, degree and masters level students. Working alongside College students will also provide school pupils with an uplifting experience and an insight into college life.

## Conclusion

The project to create the University Archives and Special Collections Centre has taken an interdisciplinary team on a challenging and rewarding journey. Now, we have met our brief and have a Centre inspired by a Kubrick film, with state-of-the-art storage, and a research space which would grace any University, but which is particularly fitting for University of the Arts London.

Collaboration and innovation have been the buzz words during this project, which has brought about institutional change through the use of space, our approach to collection management and development, our understanding of donations to the University, and our use of outreach and communication.

We have learnt important lessons and developed our skill set as a team, particularly in providing specialist facilities and handling complex issues of collection management. We have pushed the boundaries of design and created a facility which will enable us to move forward to achieve our long-term objectives to further the use of the collections in this Centre and across the University, influencing the teaching, learning and research culture to benefit from the ambitious statement made by the Centre and its collections.

## References

1. University of the Arts London consists of six internationally renowned colleges: Camberwell

College of Arts, Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, Chelsea College of Art and Design, London College of Communication, London College of Fashion and Wimbledon College of Art. Drawing upon more than 150 years of experience, we are Europe's largest university for art, design, fashion, communication and the performing arts.

2. The National Archives make three recommendations for those choosing a site, to ensure the safety and well-being of records:
  - a situation away from, and protection against, hazards of flood
  - a preference for a freestanding building with sole occupancy
  - unimpeded access for the emergency services, especially the fire brigade.

See BS5454:2000, *Recommendations for the storage and exhibition of archival documents* (London: British Standards Institution, 2000) and Historical Manuscripts Commission, *Planning a new record repository*, Advisory memorandum no.2 (Kew, Surrey: National Archives, 2004).

3. The MLA is the Museums Libraries and Archives Council, <http://www.mlalondon.org.uk/>.
4. <http://www.arts.ac.uk/kubrick.htm/>.

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