

Clare Wood, Archivist, Sainsbury Archive

Sainsbury's has had its own professionally-managed archive since the company's centenary in 1969, but in 2003, The Sainsbury Archive was established as an independent charity. The Archive is also unusual for a business collection, in that it is currently on long-term loan to the Museum of London, and is accessible to the public through the Sainsbury Study Centre at the Museum in Docklands.

The shape of a typical day for me therefore depends on whether the Study Centre is open to researchers. Our search room is available to pre-booked researchers two days a week and one Saturday a month, then there is a rota for helping drop-in visitors with their enquiries in the open-access 'Information Zone' on other days.

So, on a Search Room day, I'll retrieve records from the archive store in advance (the archive catalogue isn't available to users yet, which can make this a labour-intensive process!) and invigilate researchers using both the Sainsbury and Docklands archives (which include the records of the Port of London Authority). We deal with a lot of general East London and dock-related enquiries in the Information Zone; many visitors to the museum are primarily interested in dock history and are surprised to find the archive of a supermarket chain here. However, shopping for food is a universal activity and the items on display rarely fail to spark memories ...

As well as in-person researchers, I also receive a large number of remote enquiries. The archive is still supported and well-used by the business, with about 40% of total enquiries coming from colleagues at Sainsbury's: a typical company enquiry involves research for a press story or local store anniversary, or sourcing historical product packaging as inspiration for new designs. Public users range widely, from academics to media researchers, spare-time community historians or genealogists. The collection includes a large number of photographs, artwork and advertisements, so images from the archive are always in demand.

I also promote the archive and Sainsbury's history by talking to visiting groups and running events: my day might include a lunchtime lecture for general museum visitors, addressing a Sainsbury's management briefing or entertaining a coach party of retired Sainsbury's staff. Recently, I was involved in a half-term family history workshop for family groups, which was very rewarding.

Then there is project work: at the moment I am producing new displays and resources for the Information Zone (a chance to showcase the archive's substantial object collection) and redeveloping the archive's educational website to provide new online resources for schools, families and lifelong learners.

It can sometimes be challenging to balance all these demands with the regular 'core' activity of managing the collection: processing new acquisitions (including current records from Sainsbury's), cataloguing, conservation work etc. However, these underpin the rest of my work and somehow I do make time for them. I am fortunate to have access to the help and expertise of other information professionals within the museum and a team Conservation and Collections Care specialists.

There is no shortage of variety in my job and I think this is generally true of business archives and specialist repositories. In fact this was one of the things that first attracted me to a career in archives and the constant supply of new challenges is one of the things that keeps me here!