arkivum
Bringing archived data to life

IRISH TRADITIONAL MUSIC ARCHIVE

Irish Traditional Music Archive
Taisce Cheol Dúchais Éireann

About the Irish Traditional Music Archive

Irish Traditional Music Archive (ITMA) is the national public archive and resource centre for Irish traditional music, song and dance, and the globally-recognised specialist advisory agency to advance appreciation, knowledge, and the practice of Irish traditional music.

Established in 1987 and funded by the Irish Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon, and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, the role of ITMA is to:

- collect and preserve the historical and contemporary materials of Irish traditional music, particularly those that are at risk;

- organise and describe these materials according to international standards of archival and library practice to create collections that are discoverable by all;

- present and publish content from collections in ways that enhance the living tradition; contribute to the knowledge base of traditional music and engage with diverse audiences worldwide.

The Archives: Balancing preservation requirements

ITMA holds both physical and born digital material including large volumes of digital surrogates as a result of years of digitisation work carried out on their analogue audio/ audio-visual collections as well as their photographic and print collections. ITMA being born into the digital age, has digitised sound recordings since inception and this continues as a core activity for them.

The agency currently has close to 31 terabytes of audio, score and image files in their digital collections, made up of over 62,800 audio files, just under 120,000 image files and 13,000 scores (music notation files). Video files currently occupy about 66 terabytes of space. 15.6 terabytes of these files have been successfully safeguarded in their trusted digital repository. The remaining files are stored on backed-up QNAP & NAS devices.

The Archives: Balancing preservation requirements *(Cont.)*

The preservation file formats used are WAV for sound and MXF for video and TIFF for text and images, access copies are made available in MP3, MP4, JPG & PDF(A) formats.

In the early days of safeguarding all this data, ITMA faced many challenges.

Like all small archives ITMA staff multitask, with those responsible for preserving the data also engaged in the regular day to day running of the archive. It took a number of years to develop scalable workflows for the ingest of data into the Perpetua system.

As an organisation decisions had to be made about file naming conventions, normalisation, the structure of Archival Information Packages (AIPs), and the structure of the collections in AtoM. Staff needed to upskill in order to have the confidence to make these decision.

Choosing the right approach for effective digital preservation

Over the years ITMA has invested large sums of public money in the creation and digitisation of collections and has been acutely aware of the importance of preserving this investment long-term.

Therefore, ITMA's digital files live on three storage units. The agency has long been involved in the BIT preservation of their digital materials with various onsite and offsite backup systems put in place over the years, virus checking, and the periodic refreshment to new storage media. The current back-up setup involves the mirroring of two QNAP storage devices and the back-up of their NAS drive to the cloud.

However, they were very aware that BIT preservation is not digital preservation. This was the main driver for seeking a long-term digital preservation solution.

In looking for this system ITMA had a number of requirements. They needed a solution that was both highly secure for safeguarding the valuable digital collection and that also provided their users with an engaging and easy to use search interface.

ITMA are a small archive with limited resources so a turn-key service with an emphasis on customer support and guidance was a priority. Three scenarios were considered for the provisioning of a system:

• the first was to employ a full-time digital archivist;
• the second was looking at the Preservica model, and;
• the third was Arkivum's Perpetua system.

Choosing the right approach for effective digital preservation
(Cont.)

For a number of reasons including compliance with the Open Archival Information System (OAIS) standards, the 100% data integrity guarantee for ITMA's files, the customer support on offer, the cost, the use of open-source products, and the end-to-end nature of the Perpetua system (that is preservation as well as access) the Perpetua system was chosen.

As well as the on-site data referenced previously, to date ITMA has 15.6TB of files safe guarded in their digital repository. The preservation of these files was as a result of the 2019 Digital Audio/visual Preservation (DAP) Project made possible with generous funding from the Irish Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht as part of the Department's 'national digitisation investment programme'.

This project involved the digitisation of over 2,500 sound and video carriers, resulting in the generation of more than 24,000 audio and video files. The work was both a digitisation project and a digital preservation project with a workflow that involved the lifecycle of the digital audio file from its creation, to its ingest into the Perpetua system. Underpinning the work was also an aspiration to adhere to the FAIR data management principles of Finable, Accessible, Interoperable and Reusable data.

Ultimately, the long-term preservation of these files was the key focus to the success of the initiative.

Lessons learnt

It took ITMA a number of years to get up and running with the Perpetua solution. The agency had hoped that it would be a quick fix to their data storage problems, but this was not the case. It took the agency time and money to develop scalable workflows, but this necessary investment in staff and resources has meant that the rate of data ingest into the system will now increase. The upskilling of current staff was also required and this training has given staff confidence to work in the area of digital preservation.

This reinforces Arkivum's belief that effective digital preservation requires the appropriate level of investment in the right people, processes and tools.

That said, over the last couple of years, working with Arkivum has met ITMAs needs and provides assurance that their valuable digital assets are future proofed, and widely available for the long term.

The system has also been invaluable during the COVID-19 pandemic, enabling ITMA to engage with artists remotely, providing easy access to the collections, all in a secure environment. This collaboration throughout a challenging time has been a real benefit to the agency.

Additionally, the customer support offered by Arkivum has been a major benefit to ITMA and a wonderful working relationship has developed between the two organisations over the last number of years.

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After a number of years refining scalable workflows for the ingest of assets into Arkivum-Perpetua, ITMA is now well ensconced on its digital preservation journey. We are safeguarding an extensive digital collection while also providing meaningful access to a national public archive for Irish traditional music, song and dance.

Maeve Gebruers, Archivist
Irish Traditional Music Archive

About Arkivum

Arkivum is recognised internationally for its expertise in the archiving and digital preservation of valuable data and digitised assets in large volumes and multiple formats. The long-term security, integrity and accessibility of data is crucial for all Arkivum's clients and partners, who share a commitment to good practice in its stewardship and governance.

Arkivum's specialist software and services are chosen by major institutions and commercial organisations in a diversity of sectors, including life sciences, research (CERN), financial services, and organisations in higher education, culture and heritage. Confident in Arkivum's reputation and resources, they are in a position to maximise insight and discovery by deriving optimum long-term value from their data, collections and intellectual property.

Headquartered in the UK, with presence in the US, Arkivum advocates the use of the FAIR principles in data management: Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable. Arkivum is also certified in ISO 9001 and 27001.

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