



Jeff Highfield

Guardians of pensions' past

➤ **The Pensions Archive Trust (PAT) chair, Jeff Highfield, tells Callum Conway how the charity is safeguarding the industry's history for future generations**



pensions archive

For readers who may not be familiar, could you briefly explain the mission of the PAT and why it matters for the industry?

Our objective is to preserve the documentary and material history of the occupational pensions movement in the UK, both physical and digital.

We believe that pensions in the UK have been a force for good, economically and socially, and have had such an impact that their history is worth preserving for the benefit of academics, policymakers, and all those interested.

It can also help inform the development of current policy, as a lot of questions come round again and again, so to have historical material is really useful.

➤ **What kinds of materials and history does the trust preserve, and who typically makes use of them?**

We've been operating for 20 years and have built up a significant collection of material from three main sources: Professional bodies and associations, archives from prominent industry figures, and material directly from pension schemes that have completed wind up.

We obviously don't hold personal information from schemes, although that doesn't stop people reaching out to us asking to trace their pension!

➤ **How has the trust's role evolved since it was first established?**

The charitable objectives of the trust have not changed – we remain committed to preserving the history of the pensions industry.

However, our focus has developed recently as more final-salary schemes are winding up, which risks the valuable history of these schemes rotting in a basement somewhere.

This presents an opportunity for us to capture and preserve their material.

➤ **What are the biggest challenges the trust faces today and how do you plan to address them?**

A lot of our material is only accessible at the London Archive in Farringdon, and we'd love to be able to digitise more of that material to make it more accessible to more people. Digitisation is getting easier and cheaper, but we still require significant funds to achieve it.

Another priority for us is to raise the charity's profile and remind the industry that we're still here and hold valuable information. This is something our trustees have been working hard on over the past few years.

Funding is also a priority. We have several long-standing donors who we're very grateful for, but if we're going to expand our digitisation, we will need more support from organisations.

➤ **You recently appointed KBPR as a consultant. What prompted PAT to bring in external PR and communications support at this point?**

At the charity, we are all either current or retired pension professionals. We have come to a point where we recognise that we are not public relations professionals, just as we are

not professional archivists. We needed some professional PR support to help raise the trust's profile and bring our work into focus.

Working with KBPR will be really important to help raise the trust's profile.

➤ **Are there particular audiences or stakeholders you're especially keen to reach?**

Great question. One audience is the pure academic, such as an economic historian, where we will need to increase our visibility.

We're also keen to reach out to consultancy and actuarial firms to remind them that when they're doing their own research, the rich history of pensions legislation is available to them through us.

➤ **Do you see opportunities to connect the lessons of pensions history with today's policy and regulatory debates?**

Absolutely. One of the earlier items we have in our archives is from 1923, from the Association of Superannuation and Pension Funds (ASPF), which was established in the same year. That organisation played a role in representing pension interests at a time when tax

relief for pensions was already under discussion and formalised in law.

Pensions and tax will always be related and remain a constant issue, so showing how that has developed over time and preserving that history is very important.

➤ **Written by Callum Conway**

