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# Protection of Our Loose Pamphlet Collection

## Armagh Robinson Library & No. 5 Vicars' Hill

A Case Study on NI Museum  
Council's Grant Funding



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Armagh Robinson Library, founded in 1771, is the oldest public library in Northern Ireland and a remarkable centre of scholarship, heritage, and preservation. Its collections of rare books, pamphlets, manuscripts, and prints offer an unparalleled insight into religious, cultural, and intellectual history. Together with No. 5 Vicars' Hill, the Library provides an engaging space where visitors, researchers, and learners can explore historic collections through interpretation, object handling, and hands-on discovery.

## Project Summary

Armagh Robinson Library received £1,063.05 of funding through the NIMC Museum Collections Capital Grant round 1 to support essential improvements to the care and management of its loose pamphlet collection.

The grant enabled the Library to invest in high-quality, conservation-grade materials that would strengthen the long-term preservation of this important research resource.

This targeted support has allowed the Library to enhance the safety, organisation, and accessibility of the collection, ensuring it can continue to be used and enjoyed by visitors and researchers



# Context and Need

Armagh Robinson Library holds a significant collection of loose pamphlets, many of which were at risk due to outdated storage.

Before the project, pamphlets were stored tightly against each other with no protective covers. Removing a single item often caused pages to tear, catch, or distort. Staff described the situation as “a constant worry,”

## Risks Before the Project

Risks Before the Project:

- Pamphlets stored unprotected, causing mechanical damage
- Tight shelving meant removing one item damaged others
- Historic acidic card surrounds were contributing to chemical deterioration
- Retrieval was difficult and unsafe
- The entire collection was stored in one location, increasing handling risk



# What the Funding Supported

The NIMC grant funded the purchase of archival-quality storage materials, including:

- L-velope folders
- Juris-expansion folders
- Acid-free shelf files
- Replacement of historic acidic surrounds

Activities Carried Out:

- Full rehousing of over 2,000 pamphlets
- Removal of damaging historic card supports
- Reorganisation of shelving
- Improved retrieval systems
- Preventive conservation measures applied across the collection



**“The Improvement and difference is amazing” – Carol, Assistant Keeper**



## **Impact: Collections Care**

The project has had a significant impact on the preservation and stability of the pamphlet collection:

- Dramatically reduced risk of mechanical damage
- Pamphlets no longer sag or distort on the shelf
- Items can be safely removed without disturbing neighbouring pamphlets
- Delicate items can be retrieved without risk of tearing
- Chemical deterioration slowed by removing acidic historic surrounds
- Shelf files labelled with location numbers reduce unnecessary handling

Staff confidence in long-term preservation has “increased considerably,” with the Archivist noting that they can now retrieve items “without worrying.”

Volunteers also reported seeing “a massive difference.”

# Impact: Organisational Impact

The project has strengthened the Library's capacity in several ways:

- Increased staff confidence in preservation and retrieval
- Reduced time spent managing damaged or unstable items
- Improved preventive conservation practice
- Reinforced the value of NIMC membership, described as “immensely helpful”

For a small independent museum with only four staff members, the impact has been substantial.

# Impact: Access, Engagement, & Visitor Impact

While the project is primarily internal, the improved storage supports:

- Better service for researchers
- More reliable access for academic visitors
- Enhanced ability to share materials with the public
- Increased confidence in offering items for consultation

The project strengthens the Library's role as a trusted research resource

**“The project has made work for us a lot easier,” -  
Thirza, Archivist.**

# Long-Term Value



The project creates a sustainable foundation for future collections work.

The team plans to audit and update catalogue records to further increase accessibility, supported by the improved storage system.

The new system ensures long-term preservation, reduces future conservation costs, and strengthens the Library's resilience.

**“Gaining a grant is such a morale booster,” -  
Carol, Assistant Keeper**

# Overall Assessment

This project has delivered significant improvements to the care, accessibility, and long-term preservation of the pamphlet collection. The shift from unprotected, tightly packed storage to a fully rehoused, organised system represents a major step forward in preventive conservation.

Staff confidence has increased dramatically, retrieval is safer and more efficient, and the risk of damage has been substantially reduced. For a small independent museum, the impact of this investment has been profound – both practically and emotionally.

As Carol reflected, “the improvement and difference is amazing,” and the project stands as a clear example of how targeted support can deliver high-value, long-lasting benefits.

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