

# CALL FOR PAPERS

## CONFERENCE

### Archives of Public Benefit Legal Trusts: their value and use, and are they at risk?



**EDINBURGH - 6 NOVEMBER 2026**

Public benefit trusts have played a significant role in the development and provision of educational, medical and social services in Scotland from the Middle Ages to the present. Their records are held partly in private hands (by solicitors or by trust employees) and partly in public hands (by archive services of local authorities, the National Health Service, and universities). Evidence from trusts' records has featured in recent public inquiries and criminal trials, and the records are also used by social and economic historians and for research into property, buildings, and finance.

Despite their importance, the records of some trusts may be regarded as being at risk, as they face threats to their survival, such as the closure or merger of legal firms and constraints imposed on public sector archives to accept deposits of private records. Even where solicitors' records, including those of the trusts they managed, have been accessioned by archives, there may be restrictions on access for researchers.

This conference seeks to highlight the importance of public trusts' records and to discuss issues affecting their survival and availability to the public. Papers on related topics are invited from historians, journalists, and other researchers who use (or attempt to use) such records, as well as from solicitors, archivists, librarians, trustees and their employees or volunteers, and others who care for the records of trusts.

Proposals for papers (600 words maximum) should be sent to Robert Urquhart, Membership Secretary of the Scottish Records Association, at [sra-membership@abbotshall.net](mailto:sra-membership@abbotshall.net) by **15 May 2026**. Topics can include but are not limited to:

- the nature of trusts' records;
- the use of such records by researchers;
- issues affecting keeping records and risks to their survival;
- problems encountered in accessing the records of trusts.

The Scottish Records Association is a Scottish charity, which provides a forum for users, owners and custodians of records to discuss matters relating to the records, their custody and conservation and research (<https://www.scottishrecordsassociation.org/>). Its conferences attract a mixture of academic, commercial and amateur researchers; owners of records; archivists, museum curators and librarians; journalists; and the wider public.

Speakers at the conference are encouraged to submit written versions of their presentations for inclusion (subject to peer review) in the Association's journal, *Scottish Archives*. As the resulting journal issue is likely to include substantial content on public trusts and their records, articles on this theme are also sought from anyone who cannot make a presentation at the conference. For further information on the journal please see <https://www.scottishrecordsassociation.org/scottish-archives>.

Illustration: early-eighteenth century woodcut, showing lawyers discussing a legacy, originally from William Dodd (editor), *Specimens of Early Wood Engraving* (1862), republished in *800 Decorative Woodcuts for Artists and Craftspeople* (1999).