

# Preserving our nation's past, one piece at a time



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METRO NEWS

Tuesday, 05 Aug 2025



Archivists demonstrating how documents such as letters and files are repaired and restored. — Photos: AZLINA ABDULLAH/The Star

WHAT if some of Malaysia's most significant historical treasures are not stored in a national vault, but lie forgotten in private homes or old photo albums?

This is the primary motivation behind the National Archives of Malaysia's (ANM) new Community Archives programme.



The initiative encourages citizens and communities to actively participate in preserving the nation's history by contributing significant materials to the agency, which is responsible for managing Malaysia's heritage documents and records.

The programme was launched in Klang in partnership with the Klang Royal City Council (MBDK), serving as a clarion call for the public to enrich the national archives with their unique historical collections.

The ANM team was present to provide basic restoration services for cherished paper-based items such as certificates. They also demonstrated how proper care and digitisation can ensure the historical pieces endure for generations to come.



Zaidil Akmal (standing) observes as an archive assistant scans documents as part of the digitisation process.

“This Community Archives programme will be expanded by ANM across the country to reach out to individuals, families, prominent figures, organisations and communities that possess historically valuable collections,” said National Unity Minister Datuk Aaron Ago Dagang in his speech during the launch.



### STARPICKS

## OYSTERS TAKE THE LEAD IN CAREY ISLAND FLOOD FIGHT



“The public is encouraged to contribute their personal collections to ANM to help complete the existing archive and fill gaps in historical information.”

Aaron also unveiled ANM’s Community Archives Kit during the launch in May at Galeri Warisan at MBDK branch office in Jalan Tengku Kelana, Klang.

### **Empowering communities**

ANM Private Archives Acquisition Section archive officer Nor Nazuha Mazalam said the kit was available in hardcopy and softcopy to help people understand the organisation’s archiving work.

“The work starts from the collection and acquisition of materials, then goes on to preservation, digitisation and documentation of local and national historical heritage,” she said.



Nor Nazuha says ANM plans to expand the Community Archives programme nationwide next year.

“The kit can also be used by communities interested in conducting educational projects, studies and research for the reference of future generations.”

Nor Nazuha emphasised the programme’s significance in empowering communities to preserve the nation’s heritage by educating the public and encouraging contributions of items deemed to be of national value.

These items could include family tree charts, local organisation publications, handwritten recipe books, and records of cultural events.

Contributions can be made as voluntary donations, testament orders upon the owner's death, digital copies, or temporary loans.

Nor Nazuha added that ANM planned to expand the programme nationwide next year.



Mohd Firdaus says his team's conservation works include fragile documents dating back to the 1600s.

For enquiries, call 03-6209 0600 ext 1829/ 1830/ 1831/ 1832 or email [spapr@arkib.com.my](mailto:spapr@arkib.com.my)

The Community Archives Kit can be downloaded via <https://get-qr.com/content/0y9PnR>

### **Safeguard for the future**

Known as the Public Records Office when it was first established on Dec 1, 1957, the national archives was renamed the National Archives of Malaysia in 1963.

ANM acts as the nation's "memory bank", collecting and safeguarding important historical materials so that future generations can access and learn from them.

It currently holds some 4.2 million "national treasures", including government records, private collections, photographs, films, maps, drawings, manuscripts, audiovisual materials and various other forms of documentation that tell the story of Malaysia's past.

## Workflow for preservation process



1. Clean the document and prepare it for the preservation process



2. Use CMC\* to ensure the document sticks to the surface



3. Wet a special tissue and carefully put it on the document

4. Use wet sponge to flatten the tissue



5. Apply CMC\* again on top of the tissue to serve as a protective thin layer



6. Check for any air pockets or air bubbles on the surface



7. Allow the material to dry at room temperature (24 hours)



9. Perform a final quality check before proceeding with the binding process



8. After it has fully dried, check for any air pockets. If visible, repeat from Step 5

(CMC = Carboxymethylcellulose)  
Source: National Archives of Malaysia

*TheStar*graphics

During the launch of the Community Archives programme, ANM staff showcased tools and services related to preservation, such as scanning documents and bookbinding.

“These services are sometimes requested by government agencies and prominent figures, but are not available to the public,” said Nor Nazuha.

ANM Preservation and Reprography Section senior archive assistant Mohd Firdaus Mat Desa said birth certificates and books were the most common items brought in for basic conservation and binding services during the event in Klang.

“We believe people brought items that had sentimental or personal value, and wanted to have them repaired or restored,” he said of the service that was open to the first 100 visitors.

The ANM staff took about 30 minutes to an hour to fix each item. The restored certificates were then kept in Mylar plastic to ensure the paper do not turn yellow, yet allowed it to be removed from the plastic sheet.



Mohd Firdaus said his team's conservation works also encompassed fragile documents such as letters, plans and charts dating back to the 1600s, newspapers, photo albums, maps, royal archives and religious texts.

These items could take between one day to six months to repair, depending on the condition and complexity of the documents. (See graphic)

"We also advise and assist government agencies in restoring documents that have been damaged due to water-related disasters, such as floods, pipe leaks or sewage," he said.

"For example, we helped health clinic staff restore records damaged during the Shah Alam floods in late 2021."

ANM is also heavily invested in digitising materials received to ensure long-term storage, easier and quicker access, knowledge sharing and security to reduce risk of loss or damage.

Its Digital Archives Section head Zaidil Akmal Zainuddin said a copy of the digitised items could be accessed via the National Archives' Online Finding Aid (OFA) portal at ofa.arkib.gov.my

"The public can preview a limited number of documents for free on the OFA system," said Zaidil Akmal.

Those interested in full access to the entire body of the archival materials, whether in soft or hardcopy format, can liaise with the Reference and Access Section by completing an order form and paying a fee.

The charges range from 30sen for a page of A4 paper, RM30 for a copy of a photograph to RM75 to a copy of audio recording of more than 60 minutes.

ANM's headquarters in Jalan Tuanku Abdul Halim, Kuala Lumpur, also houses a library where researchers and the public can visit to do research or look for specific archived documents.

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**TAGS / KEYWORDS:**

**National Archives Of Malaysia , ANM , Community Archives , Klang , Datuk Aaron Ago Dagang , Archiving , Preservation , Digitisation , Heritage , History**

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