

A Concise History of the University of Ulster, Trans-Gender Archive (1986-2010)

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The Trans-Gender Archive (TGA) was founded in January 1986 by Richard Ekins at the University of Ulster, UK. It was the first such collection in the world to be housed within a University setting. In 1986, the term 'trans-gender' was barely in use. The TGA became 'The Transgender Archive' in 2000, in recognition of the widespread use of the term 'transgender' by that time. The Archive ceased its connection with the University of Ulster in July 2010, by which time Richard Ekins had become Emeritus Professor of Sociology and Cultural Studies at the University.

The TGA was initially established with the collaboration of the President and the Librarian of the UK-based 'Self Help Association of Transsexuals' (SHAFT), following the retirement of Cheryl of Battersea as librarian for SHAFT. The SHAFT collection was housed within the Trans-Gender Archive and Richard Ekins took over as librarian for the SHAFT collection and remained in that position until the retirement of Judy Cousins as executive President of SHAFT in late 1988.

Initial public notice of the Archive was provided through the *Beaumont Bulletin* in 1986, the newsletter of the leading UK transvestite organisation, The Beaumont Society, as well as in the *SHAFT Newsletter*. The notice in the *Beaumont Bulletin* was headed 'University Base for Transvestite Archive' whereas the notice in the *SHAFT Newsletter* was headed 'University Base for Transsexual Archive'. The notices ran thus:

1986 sees the establishment and development of a Trans-Gender Archive at the University of Ulster, Northern Ireland. The archive will provide a source of information for all interested in transsexualism, transvestism and other trans-gender matters. The first stage of development is taking place in close co-operation with the Self Help Association for Transsexuals (SHAFT) and will entail the consolidation of the existing SHAFT holdings within a greatly expanded transsexual collection.

The archive will also house collections on transvestism and on trans-gender erotica, together with background material on sex, sexuality and gender more generally. Books, pamphlets, magazines, articles, press-cuttings, letters, photographs, personal histories, video and audio tapes will all be included; as will the full range of material by and for TVs and TSs by and for the professionals, as well as that intended primarily for a mass audience.

Following this notice, the celebrated UK 'gender transient', Bruce Laker/Phaedra Kelly became the Archive's leading advocate and research assistant. Bruce/Phaedra played a major role in the establishment of the archive publication, *Archive News: Bulletin of the Trans-Gender Archive*, which ran from May 1990 to October 1992. This newsletter was sub-titled 'A News and Information Bulletin for the International Trans-Gender Community'. The first issue of *Archive News* included a short piece on 'Building the TGA' which set forth the development of the Archive between 1986 and 1989 with particular reference to its international dimensions. This first issue also included reprints of 'The Chrysalis Interview of 1987' and 'Interview Update – May 1989' which set forth the programme of the Trans-Gender Archive in terms of its origins, development, major donors, and proposed future. Further elaboration of these themes followed in the conference talk by Richard Ekins, 'Building a Trans-Gender Archive: On the Classification and Framing of Trans-Gender Knowledge' <http://www.gender.org.uk/conf/1990/90ekins.htm>.

1993 onwards saw the academic fruits of the Trans-Gender Archive in an extensive series of further publications by Richard Ekins, beginning with 'On Male Femaling: A Grounded Theory Approach to Cross-Dressing and Sex-Changing' (*The Sociological Review*, 41: 1-29) and expanded in book form in *Male Femaling* (Routledge, 1997). From 1995 to 2010 Richard Ekins worked with Dave King of Liverpool University, UK, to produce a series of jointly authored articles, book chapters and books on transgender which culminated in their book *The Transgender Phenomenon* (Sage, 2006) and their final book chapter together 'The Emergence of New Transgendering Identities in the Age of the Internet', in *Transgender Identities: Towards a Social Analysis of Gender Diversity*, edited by Sally Hines and Tam Sanger (Routledge, 2010, pp. 25-42).

The Archive was donated to the University of Victoria Transgender Archives in 2013.