



The National Archives

### Report on 'Meet the Chief Executive Officer day,' 22 October 2009

Thank you to everyone who took the time to come and give feedback to me in the reading rooms. It was great to get your views and to have the opportunity to see the services that we provide from a different perspective. We have really listened to what you had to say and have taken your comments on board. We have responded directly (if appropriate) to every comment or through this report. Please keep your views coming throughout the year: there are formal channels on our website, through our user forum or the Your Views Matter forms; but you can also just speak to us – we are listening.

Natalie Ceeney

| Type of issue   | Issue raised by readers  | Our response  |
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| <b>Results of the recent consultation on our savings plan</b> | Is the rumour true that there is a plan to move The National Archives out of London? | There are no plans to move The National Archives out of London! The rumour is totally unfounded.  |
|   | Is the change in your opening hours a permanent arrangement?                         | The change is permanent unless our funding increases. We had to make a choice between quality and quantity of service. Returning to opening the reading rooms five days a week was the best way to ensure continued service quality. The positive changes to the opening hours are that we will no longer be closing for stocktaking in 2010 and that on the five days a week we are open we will be open earlier (from 9am) with longer document delivery hours too. |
|   | Can you confirm that there will be no further reduction of hours?                    | We have no plans to make further changes, but we are funded almost entirely through a government grant, and if this grant funding were to reduce we would have to consider all options again. However, we are hopeful that we will be able to avoid any future reduction in hours.  |
|   | Why are you charging for car parking?  | Although the car park is currently free, it does cost us money to run it (mainly security and maintenance costs). Unfortunately we are no longer in a financial position to absorb the costs of providing a car park within our general operating costs. The cost includes proportional slices of our overall budget for security, maintenance and repair of the estate, along with the direct costs for the control and administration of the                        |

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|  |  | car park. Proposals for charging for car parking are not intended as a revenue stream but to pay for a service which has, up until now, been subsidised by The National Archives. We will therefore be charging for the car park at the actual cost of running it.  |
|  | Why don't you charge an entry fee?   | We want to make the archives accessible to everyone, so we do not want to charge people to come into our building or to look at the records on site.  |
| <b>General Register Office indexes</b> | Is the National Archives responsible for the Birth, Marriage and Death index books that were at the Family Records Centre?   | The index books belong to the General Register Office. When the Family Records Centre closed the General Register Office decided to withdraw them from public use.  |
|  | Will The National Archives keep the microfiche copy of indexes to the miscellaneous births, marriages and deaths (overseas, military etc)?   | In the reading rooms at Kew we will continue to give free access to the online indexes to overseas and military births, marriages and deaths at <a href="http://www.findmypast.com">www.findmypast.com</a><br><br>We will return our microfiche copy of the indexes to the General Register Office. Microfiche copies of the indexes can be seen at selected locations in England and Wales (see below) free of charge.   |
|  | Where can I see microfiche copies of the most recently released birth, marriage, death indexes and corrections to the indexes once The National Archives no longer holds a set of those fiche? | Microfiche copies of the indexes are currently available at Westminster City Archives as well as at the following locations outside London: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Birmingham Central Library</li> <li>• Bridgend Local Studies Library</li> <li>• Manchester County Record Office</li> <li>• Plymouth Central Library</li> </ul> All of these locations receive the updated copies. The General Register Office owns the indexes and we understand that they are seeking another venue for the microfiche, which we believe is likely to be in, or near, London. |
| <b>Reading Room issues</b>             | May we have more desk lamps in the Map and Large Document Reading Room?  | We are investigating this request and will provide more desk lamps if we can do it without risking damage to the documents from the light and heat generated by a large number of lamps. We are also planning to make some improvements to the overall lighting in the Map Room next year, which should reduce the need for desk lamps.   |

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|  | <p>The copying service in the Map and Large Document Room is intermittent and it is inconvenient to have to pay downstairs.</p>  | <p>When reader registration moves to the second floor in December there will be full till facilities and a member of the Document Services copying team on call to attend to customers using the Map and Large Document Reading Room. This will also provide a facility for handling the fee for replacement of lost reader tickets, rather than sending readers back down to the shop on the ground floor.</p> <p>When the new system is in place (scheduled for 14 December) the whole process will be simplified and current document counter staff will be cross-trained by copy team staff to make best use of resources and provide a better service to customers.</p> |
|  | <p>Please could The Dictionary of National Biography be put back on the library shelves? It is only available online in the Reading Rooms.</p>   | <p>In response to previous requests from users, we have done exactly this. The Dictionary of National Biography has been available on the library shelves as well as online in the reading rooms since July 2009</p>   |
|  | <p>Could the curriculum vitae of staff who work in the Map and Large Document Room be put on display in the room so that the extent of their experience and their area of specialism is known?</p> | <p>We will provide a list of staff who regularly work in the Map and Large Document Room, with their specialisms. This will be put on display by the end of January 2010.</p>  |
|  | <p>My proof of identity and proof of address are in a foreign language with a different alphabet. How can I satisfy your requirements to get a reader ticket?</p>                                  | <p>We have a list of staff who we can call upon to interpret various different languages and scripts. If necessary, we can use one of the internet language translation sites and compare the scripts. Some of the documents that visitors use as evidence have a near universal format which makes them readily identifiable, e.g. passport and national identity cards. We can compare signatures on official documents against the signature written on the registration card. Alternatively, we will accept an official translation provided by an embassy or consulate.</p>   |
|  | <p>Why do you have restrictions on chewing gum, erasers, etc?</p>  | <p>We value the documents in our care. They are irreplaceable and we try to ensure that there is nothing in the reading rooms that might damage the documents. A list of restricted items is at Appendix 4 to The Rules of The National Archives.</p>  |

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|  | <p>I had to queue for a long time to get a reader ticket.</p>   | <p>Unfortunately at busy times queues do develop for reader ticket issuing. In response to this we are currently implementing a series of changes to the registration process that should reduce queues substantially. This includes creating a dedicated reader registration room.</p> <p>We have recently stopped issuing short term reader tickets so that we will have fewer ticket renewals each year. Unfortunately it will take up to a year for that particular measure to have an impact on queues.</p>  |
|  | <p>You do not provide enough help with basic IT queries, especially printing.</p>   | <p>We know we can do more to help, and we are looking at ways of helping users who have limited IT skills to get started with their research. With the increasing amount of information that is made available online, basic IT skills are becoming essential for all researchers. We'll report back to a future User Forum with our plans to do more in this area.</p>   |
|  | <p>The recent fire drill was disorganised and it took far too long to evacuate the building. Disabled users were taken down in a lift and out on to the podium from where it's then very difficult to get down.</p> | <p>In order to maintain a safe environment, we have a legal requirement to hold evacuation exercises with the public as well as staff, and we had our last planned exercise on 19th May 2009. This was the largest evacuation we have carried out, involving nearly 1,000 people (staff and visitors).</p> <p>This evacuation was independently observed by two members of the London Fire Brigade, one in the reading room and one in the Security control room. They were pleased with the evacuation and on a scale of 1-4, with 4 being very good, they awarded us 4.</p> <p>The building was evacuated safely and in line with current published procedures. The first floor was cleared in 4 minutes and the whole building reported as being clear in less than 8 minutes, with no injuries sustained.</p> <p>However, we accept that the evacuation of disabled users was less straightforward than the main evacuation.</p> <p>Emergency evacuation chairs have been in position since March 2009, but the use of these chairs for evacuating disabled people down the stairs is regarded as a final resort when all other options have failed.</p> <p>We normally use a lift to take disabled users to the ground floor, but it does mean that the exit takes them out onto the podium, which is several feet</p> |

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|  |   | <p>above ground level. We have plans that are in the very early stage of development which would provide easier and more convenient egress from the podium. The podium is classed as a place of relative safety and although not ideal, it is adequate for that purpose.</p> <p>We do welcome feedback, so if this doesn't satisfy your concern, please contact our Health &amp; Safety Adviser, Graham Taylor, to talk this through in more detail.</p>  |
|  | <p>The National Archives is now entirely geared to advise the family historian. There should be more academic seminars.</p> | <p>I'm sorry if you've got the impression that we're entirely geared to one group of researchers, as we try very hard to cater for all research needs, both at Kew, and online.</p> <p>We try to present a balanced programme of talks that meet all our users' preferences. We are currently reviewing the on site talks programme, but usually those provided on Tuesdays are intended for family historians, who make up over two thirds of our onsite visitors, and the Thursday talks are aimed more at an academic audience. Recent examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The trial and execution of Charles I (29 October)</li> <li>• The gunpowder plot: key documents and hidden voices (05 November)</li> <li>• I'm All Right Jack! Britain in 1959 (12 November)</li> <li>• British town plans in The National Archives, 1540 to 1900 (19 November)</li> <li>• Catalogue Day (20 November)</li> <li>• Kindertransport: Britain's rescue plan (24 November)</li> <li>• Treaties in The National Archives: a treasure house of diplomacy (26 November)</li> </ul> <p>Sadly attendances at the talks are sometimes very low and we need to balance the use of our resources carefully when providing such events. If you are interested in our academic talks, please come, and encourage your colleagues to come!</p> <p>In the past year The National Archives' medievalists and early modernists have addressed specialist historical conferences and seminars at the late medieval seminar at the Institute of Historical Research; the thirteenth century conference at the University of Paris, specialist conferences in Quebec, Heidelberg and Lille; postgraduate seminars at Royal Holloway, London University; the department for continuing education at Oxford University; and Henry VIII conferences at The National Archives and Hampton Court. Medieval specialists have talked about cataloguing work and</p> |

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|                                   |  | <p>the development of specialist knowledge at the Leeds International Medieval Congress (July 2009), and will be speaking about unsorted records at the 2010 congress -'Exploring Unchartered Waters': Unsorted Records at The National Archives, Kew. We have also provided expert speakers on modern records at 19 external events, mainly to local and family history groups, but also on topics as diverse as 'The Evolution of Charles Darwin' and 'Design Registers at The National Archives'.</p>   |
|                                   | <p>Would it be possible to have a behind the scenes tour?</p>  | <p>In the past we have offered regular behind-the-scenes tours. Unfortunately we found that they were becoming too expensive to run, even when we introduced a charge, and so we have stopped running them.</p>  |
|                                   | <p>Is The National Archives going to charge for online records, particularly the JISC-funded Cabinet Papers online which are currently free?</p> | <p>There are no plans to charge for records that are currently free to download. The contracts for the majority of digitisation projects funded by external bodies enable The National Archives to offer the documents free for an agreed period. For example the Cabinet papers will be made available for free download for a 10 year period.</p>  |
| <p><b>Digitisation issues</b></p> | <p>How does The National Archives prioritise digitisation projects?</p>  | <p>Everyone wants more of our content to be digitised. We are trying to do as much as we can, but digitising everything is impossible (the estimated cost is over £10 billion). Also, we don't have a lot of money for digitisation. We prioritise on three main criteria:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>whether we can secure funding</li> <li>levels of use of the material (the higher, the more likely we will digitise it)</li> <li>how easy the material is to digitise.</li> </ol> <p>Often these three coincide.</p> <p>We identify projects/series of records we want to digitise. Proposed digitisation projects are assessed for practicality by our digitisation forum which represents all areas of The National Archives involved in the projects. We then actively seek funding.</p> <p>We have successfully digitised millions of our most popular records, in partnership with commercial publishers through our Licensed Internet Associateship (LIA) partnerships (as described at <a href="http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/business/internet.htm">http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/business/internet.htm</a> )</p> <p>However, LIAs are only one strand of our digitisation activity; we also license to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>academic publishers by subject area depending on their analysis of demand within the education sector,</li> </ul> |

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|  |   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• non-exclusively to family history publishers, via grant applications and research projects</li> <li>• and for our own Documents Online service which again addresses family, military and popular history topics with records assessed for the above criteria plus data protection sensitivities.</li> </ul>  |
|  | <p>Please can you publicise at The National Archives all projects for digitising records.</p> | <p>You can see how projects run by The National Archives are progressing by looking at <a href="http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/the-national-archives-digitisation-programme-2008-2013.pdf">http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/the-national-archives-digitisation-programme-2008-2013.pdf</a></p> <p>We are taking steps to make it easier to find this information on our website and we will include regular updates at the User Forum. You can see the minutes of the User Forum on our website at <a href="http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/get-involved/user-forum.htm">http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/get-involved/user-forum.htm</a></p> <p>Some projects use our records but are run by other bodies. In these cases we are not in a position to give information on progress, timescales etc. For accurate, up to date information you need to contact the organisation responsible for the project concerned.</p> |
|  | <p>When are you likely to digitise the Foreign Office card index (FO 1111)?</p>               | <p>We are aware of how popular and well-used this card index is. We are investigating options for the card index, one of which is digitisation.</p> <p>To understand more about the card index, we have been cataloguing all the series it covers for the year 1906 at item level and this has revealed a number of complexities. For the period 1906 to 1909 users need to cross refer to the registers of correspondence in FO 566, so digitising the cards alone would not be sufficient. The cataloguing has also revealed that coverage is far from complete, as only 50% of the papers are covered by the card index.</p> <p>The period 1910 to 1920 is probably more rewarding as a digitisation project but it would be an enormous task – we estimate that there are over 6 million cards. So we are investigating it, but any digitisation project will take us some time.</p>   |
|  | <p>When are you likely to digitise the RAF Operations Record Books in AIR 27 to AIR 29?</p>   | <p>These are popular series of records that we would be keen to see digitised. We have had discussions with some commercial companies as we do not have the funding to carry out the work ourselves. These are large series of records and the original text is often poor quality, which can make it difficult to obtain a clear image. As a result there are,</p>  |

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|                                      |  | <p>unfortunately, no firm plans to digitize any of these series yet.</p>   |
|                                      | <p>Can we be updated on which microfilms and microfiche will be removed from open access?</p>  | <p>It is our aim to remove all of the microfilm and microfiche from the Open Reading Room when we have been able to make available satisfactory digital images of the records. We will not remove the film/fiche until our records experts are satisfied that the digital version is acceptable. If readers need to use the microfilm they can do so – a copy will continue to be kept in our storage at Kew, and will be available to order in the same way as paper documents.</p> <p>Our digitisation programme is on our website <a href="http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/the-national-archives-digitisation-programme-2008-2013.pdf">http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/the-national-archives-digitisation-programme-2008-2013.pdf</a></p>   |
| <p><b>Specific record series</b></p> | <p>When is the transfer of Home Guard records to The National Archives likely to happen? There was a consultation run by the Ministry of Defence and a report in 2008 but there has been little news since then.</p> | <p>The public consultation that the Ministry of Defence ran last year supported the principle that the Home Guard records should be transferred to The National Archives. The Home Guard collection is of considerable size and The National Archives and the Ministry of Defence have been working together to establish the best way for the collection to be transferred to The National Archives. This includes ongoing discussions with commercial organisations about digitising the records and making them available online. As soon as the best way to transfer the records is identified, work will begin to prepare and transfer the collection to The National Archives.</p> <p>We gave an update on progress at the November User Forum and will continue to report progress through that channel. The User Forum minutes are on our website at <a href="http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/get-involved/user-forum.htm">http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/get-involved/user-forum.htm</a></p> |
|                                      | <p>Why did The National Archives not include the name of the regiment with the name of the soldier when the First World War Soldiers' Documents from Pension Claims in WO 364 were digitised?</p>                    | <p>WO 364 was one of our early digitisation projects and, with hindsight, it would have been useful to include the regiment of each soldier. We have done that in digitising the larger series of First World War soldiers documents (WO 363). The work of retrospectively capturing each soldier's regiment in WO 364 starts in February 2010 and is scheduled to be available via Ancestry in June 2010.</p>   |



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|  | <p>There are lots of records in WO 364 First World War Soldiers' Documents from Pension Claims, which can't be found by searching online that can be found on microfilm.</p>       | <p>WO 364 was one of our early digitisation projects and we accept that some records were not identified by searching online. We have learned from that experience and have worked with Ancestry to improve the search facility. In the meantime we left the microfilm copies on open access in the reading room. We are now satisfied that the searching is more reliable and we will be removing the microfilms from open access in 2010. We will produce the films if the need arises, in the same way that we will produce an original document if the surrogate is inadequate for the particular purpose.</p>  |
|  | <p>Ancestry has recently released records from Germany listing British prisoners of war. Why is it not possible to access the records free of charge at The National Archives?</p> | <p>The National Archives has a number of Licensed Internet Associateships with commercial partners, including Ancestry, through which we are able to make our own records available online. Part of any agreement is that The National Archives is able to give free access to our digitised records in the reading rooms at Kew.</p> <p>However, Ancestry, and our other partners, also digitise records from other sources. These are not our records so we have no control over what is done with them. In order to make non-National Archives material available we would have to buy an institutional subscription from the provider (such as Ancestry) to allow us to give free access to all their content in our reading rooms.</p> <p>When considering buying licences for non-National Archives material, our policy is to acquire materials that directly facilitate access to the original records of central government, the law courts and the armed services held by The National Archives, from the medieval to the modern period. The German lists of prisoners of war do not, unfortunately, meet those selection criteria and we have no plans at present to buy a subscription to them for the reading rooms.</p> |
|  | <p>Can The National Archives improve the catalogue for the King's Bench records in the same way that access to the Chancery records has been greatly improved?</p>                 | <p>The detailed and painstaking cataloguing work on the Chancery series will take several more years, and will be followed by records of the other equity courts, as the documents are richer in detail than those of King's Bench.</p> <p>Reports on our cataloguing projects are on our website<br/> <a href="http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/about/operate/meetings/catboard/catprog.htm">http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/about/operate/meetings/catboard/catprog.htm</a></p> <p>We welcome suggestions for Catalogue enhancements, whether to individual entries or for major projects. You can contact us by emailing the Catalogue mailbox</p>  |

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|                              |  | <p><a href="mailto:cataloguehelp@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk">cataloguehelp@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk</a></p> <p>We have a catalogue User Advisory Group whose remit includes reviewing and monitoring The National Archives' catalogue improvement programme. If you wish to contribute to the user advisory group, please email us at <a href="mailto:user-advisory@nationalarchives.gov.uk">user-advisory@nationalarchives.gov.uk</a></p>   |
|                              | Can The National Archives produce a guide to the King's Bench records?   | <p>Dr David Crook produced an informative research guide to the King's Bench records relatively recently. You will find it on our website <a href="http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/catalogue/RdLeaflet.asp?sLeafletID=413">http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/catalogue/RdLeaflet.asp?sLeafletID=413</a></p>  |
| <b><i>Closed records</i></b> | There are some items in your catalogue where the description is withheld. How can I access information about a file when even the title is closed? | <p>When the description of an item in the catalogue is withheld, the document itself has normally been retained by its original government department. The catalogue will indicate 'Closed Description, Retained by Department'. You can make a Freedom of Information request to that government department, quoting The National Archives document reference number.</p> <p>Most closed documents in our Catalogue show a specific 'closed until' date and are stored here. You can request a review of any closed document held at The National Archives, under the Freedom of Information Act. We have made this really easy on our catalogue – just click on the request review button.</p> |