

Priority Research Projects: Summaries

Bringing historic records to life in a digital era

How do we reshape the provision of research and public services, and engage with new audiences in a digital era?

Non-destructive rapid analysis of photographs

Significant progress has been made over the last decade in understanding the relationship between environmental factors, the preservation of our photographic heritage and the potential for analytical techniques to inform our understanding of this relationship; various studies have yet to achieve wider application. This project would aim to create a well characterised reference collection of photographs using a range of analytical techniques that can be correlated to non-destructive spectroscopic techniques. In collaboration with an industry partner it would develop a portable instrument for condition assessment, authentication and dating of photographs.

Collections demography

This follow on project will deliver interactive engagement and dissemination activities for different user communities and audiences to enhance the impact of the Collections Demography project. One of the outputs of the Collections Demography project was a prototype model that can describe the demographic evolution of a large collection of paper based items in relation to four variables: material composition, environmental conditions in storage, level of access and value. The project will develop case histories, a Collections Demography Start-up Toolkit, which will include methodologies and an interactive knowledge exchange seminar, which will bring together users, non-users and custodians of collections, alongside conservation educators to explore the gaps, conflicts and consensus between conservation education, business needs and user expectations.

Customer behaviour data analysis technology

To explore the application of customer behaviour data analysis technology to generate 'other people who liked this also bought this' results to the people using our website.

Digital archival selection and presentation

This project will address how to, or even whether to, select digital material for archiving and how to present it to the public, particularly when, if discovery is via search rather than a formal filing structure, this may make it harder to recreate any sort of context for individual archival records.

Digital sensitivity review

To develop automated ways of assessing the sensitivity of records.

Dignity

This research project would focus on notions of dignity and neglect in care institutions such as workhouses, asylums, hospitals. from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries onwards. The National Archives has a strong collection around medical provision, the wider

delivery and monitoring of care. The state generated and collected millions of letters, files and volumes, still largely untapped, concerning care provision and these represent an irreplaceable evidence-based storehouse for research. The information they contain has the potential to facilitate new ways of thinking about key challenges that are currently confronting policy-makers in Britain in regard to care and will provide human solutions to current healthcare dilemmas about how to secure and deliver dignity.

This project will be made up of seven cross-cutting themes to unify cross-disciplinary research around: the Rhetoric of Dignity, Believing in Dignity, Representing Dignity, Administrating Dignity, Monitoring Dignity, Delivering Dignity and Securing Dignity. The research would deliver practical welfare policy solutions for many of the most challenging human problems in government, which cross political boundaries today.

From Domesday to Crown Estates

The aim of the overall project is to use digital Domesday and associated transcript to investigate the distribution and management of Crown lands and estates from the Conquest onwards. Some initial scoping work with the University of East Anglia and the Victoria County History has identified a range of existing Domesday transcription projects. The first phase will create a research network that brings this corpus of scholarly activity together and identifies a series of research programmes; in the second phase, these streams of work will expand our knowledge of crown lands and their management over time, linking in with existing work on private deeds, manorial records and forests.

Facilitating web archive research

This proposal addresses the problem of the development of discovery tools for scale access. The UK Government Web Archive has become the biggest single collection of records we hold and it continues to grow. Some initial work with the University of Southampton has highlighted some barriers to interpreting and visualising the 100 TB of text rich data accessible through the web archive's API including the way in which collection decisions or a transfer of function within government may distort the volume of results returned for a query. This project would identify and articulate the potential flaws in the data and barriers to its use at scale, and subsequently pose solutions and signposting methods that could apply to our own and other web archives. The project could develop tools based on user requirements, involving collaboration with students, the digital humanities, developers etc.

Historic records on a map

This project would build an open source toolkit to enable us to show geographic historic metadata on the map, or alternative geographic interface. This includes handling historic name alternatives, boundary changes etc. The toolkit would be made available openly for re-use.

Historical NHS records

This project will assess current and potential value of historical NHS records held by places of deposit for clinical and health policy research. The partners will work to establish what quantities and types of records are currently preserved, and conduct interviews/surveys with selected members of the research community to identify research potential of content and barriers to use. The project will deliver recommendations for the development of revised historical selection criteria for NHS Records, to take account of clinical/policy research value.

HOSPREC

The project will provide the public with updated and accurate name authority and records location information about hospitals in England & Wales, and will enable the incorporation of the HOSPREC data into Discovery and its closer integration with other data sets. It will take forward our programme to develop and extend the authority content of Discovery, providing a second major group of such content (after the manor authority files being generated through the current MDR projects).

Magna Carta and the development of Parliament

The Education Department is already working to develop an education resource about Magna Carta and the development of Parliament during the 13th Century. This project would develop an online game environment which will complement the classroom resources. The game will give a purposeful motive to the whole investigation and require genuine skills in historical interpretation, evaluation and judgement, as well as a compelling competitive reward with an unknown outcome. Students would receive an “Apprentice” style briefing from a wealthy philanthropist who wishes to purchase a Magna Carta for permanent display in Parliament. Students must travel back in time to 4 locations and dates to identify which is the most significant version of Magna Carta – 1215, 1225 or 1297. Alternatively, they can choose to bring back The Provisions of Oxford 1258 as having greater significance and thereby disprove the emphasis on Magna Carta. Multi-player functionality may be possible, enhancing the competitive element by ensuring students make a more compelling case than their class-competitors for their choice of document.

Military medicine and wellbeing

TNA holds one of the world’s most important collections of military material and this project would look at the impact of military service. The project would address key research priorities around military and naval medicine, wellbeing, aftercare of veterans and dependents (widows, orphans, next of kin) from the 18th to 20th century. Initially the project would establish a research network to convene a series of workshops and conduct a scoping study to identify potential research questions to inform a larger scale funding bid.

Nature of the digital archival record

This project aims to establish a research network of stakeholders to explore the nature of the digital archival record, by appraising the current state of understanding and perspectives on the nature of digital records. This scoping/networking bid would enable the development of a full research bid that will aim to establish a new conceptual framework for born digital records.

Philanthropic archives survey

This project aims to map the major archive collections in the philanthropic and voluntary sector, to increase the awareness of the research, social and cultural value of such material and to assess the long-term sustainability of the sector, in the context of continuing concern at its vulnerability. The project has been endorsed as a strategic priority by the Lord Chancellor’s Forum on Historical Manuscripts and Academic Research. It focuses on the records created by a major element in civil society that is responsible for a wide range of cultural, humanitarian and heritage services.

Prize papers

This project will conserve, digitise and raise awareness of a sub-set of 'prize papers' : large amounts of correspondence in transit by ship, and of ships' papers, which were found on board c. 28,000 ships captured by the British during wartime in the 17th and 18th centuries. This collection of pan-European papers held by TNA is an extremely rich resource and this European research project would form and support an international research network, focusing on the development of a European identity in a global context.

Public history research network

The project will seek to understand the use of archives by public history audiences both on-site and online. It will investigate models for the sharing of research between public and academic history audiences. The proposal could be developed into a larger funding bid to create scalable best practice to identify and engage current and new public audiences, and develop improved online archival services to support that engagement.

Technical analysis of wax seals

TNA holds the largest collection of non-metallic seals in the UK and it has not been examined explicitly in regard to materials and techniques before. The aim of this project is to combine technical analysis of the composition of wax seals and documentary evidence to answer historical questions not only around the use of seals, but also wider socio-economic relationships between the sovereign, the government and different communities. TNA is seeking to establish its leadership role nationally and internationally by engaging new partners with common interest in wax seals and the use of technical analysis in informing historical questions. The outcomes of the project have the potential to transform our understanding of our large collection of wax seals and to inform their preservation needs, as well as generate interest in this resource from the public and researchers.

Technology and historical understanding

This project would address questions around the use of online collaboration tools and the improvement of the understanding of history. It would assess the use of digital tools to analyse big historical datasets to improve teachers' and students' understanding of historical concepts. The project will inform current and future education services and provide a framework for the development and evaluation of technology-based learning programmes in relation to the development of historical understanding.