

Research at The National Archives

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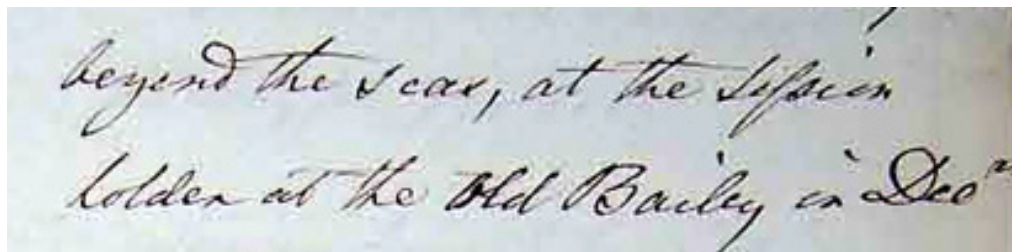
Welcome to the third issue of The National Archives research newsletter, which demonstrates the continued expansion of our research activities over the last six months.

A key aspect of our research agenda has been to build strong links with the social science community. In this issue we highlight the outputs of the research undertaken by five Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)-funded doctoral students who recently completed three-month knowledge transfer placements at Kew. The interns worked on projects ranging from using digital resources to improve our understanding of eighteenth-century criminal law, to assessing the impact of the Freedom of Information Act; and from interpreting cases of neglect in Victorian England to analysing early twentieth-century Foreign Office correspondence. Add a project surveying aspects of national nuclear record collections, and you'll get a sense of the diversity of their work here.

In our news section we describe The National Archives' success in a number of funding bids: including three collaborative doctoral awards from ESRC and the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) with our partners, and receiving funding from the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) to undertake research into user requirements in Web Archiving.

Communicating this success has also been a priority - our inaugural 'Research Award' in February celebrated the high quality research being undertaken by staff from The National Archives; our joint event with the British Library on social science research into poverty enabled academic experts to demonstrate how they have used our collections in their work; and planning is well under way at The National Archives for the Fifth International Conference on the History of Records and Archives.

Caroline M Williams
Head of Research and Collections Development



Making the links

Researchers have hitherto paid scant attention to the administrative context which produced a key set of records for the history of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century crime. Questions regarding the completeness and representativeness of Judges' Reports - held at The National Archives and used as the basis of many received accounts - have rarely been asked.

Stephen Thompson's project ('Making the Links': Judges' Reports and the Old Bailey Online, c.1784-1830) sought to fill this gap by examining the links between individuals named in the record series [HO 47](#) and the [Old Bailey Online](#).

Stephen was supervised by experts at The National Archives, and his findings suggest that fewer reports on pleas for clemency were requested by the Home Office from the mid-1790s onwards, raising serious doubts about the extent to which HO 47 is representative of the pardon process. Future researchers, he argues, would benefit from assessing both sources in tandem.

[Read more about Stephen's project](#)



CORRAL: UK Colonial Registers and Royal Navy Logbooks

Funded by JISC, [CORRAL](#) aims to capture the rich historical and scientific content produced by voyages of exploration by digitising a [collection of ship's logbooks](#) held at The National Archives.

The logs of Robert Fitzroy, captain of HMS Beagle during Charles Darwin's famous voyage, are a notable example.

The logbooks are a record of the daily activities of such explorers, but also of the weather they endured. They are a unique source of meteorological data, invaluable for the scientific community's knowledge of historic climatic change.

CORRAL will run until 30 September 2009, by which time the team will have digitised every one of these documents - as well data from the archives of the UK Met Office (now jointly administered in Exeter by the Devon Record Office) - and made them available online.



I-CHORA 5, 1-3 July 2010

The National Archives, in partnership with University College London and the University of Liverpool, is organising the Fifth International Conference on the History of Records and Archives in London on 1-3 July 2010.

The conference will explore the theme 'Records, archives and technology: interdependence over time'.

Find out more about the [conference and keynote speakers](#).

Research award



Assessing the impact of policy on academic research

In 2000 the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) was passed in a highly publicised move towards more transparent and accountable government. The Act has significant implications for how The National Archives - as the official archive of the UK government - treats 'open' and 'closed' files transferred from departments. One particular consequence is that any information held by a public authority can be subject to an FOI request - even files shown as 'closed' in The National Archives' catalogue.

Amy Gibbons' project ('Assessing the impact of policy on academic research: the Freedom of Information Act 2000') examined one aspect of the FOIA - privileged academic access to 'closed' information - concluding that, although it has been widely assumed that the Act had repealed so-called 'Privileged Access Agreements', different arrangements persist across local and central government.

[Read more about Amy's project](#)



The world in action

Charlotte Hastings' internship project ('The world in action: Foreign Office Correspondence, 1906-1920') was part of a wider Foreign Office cataloguing project at The National Archives, which aims to transfer existing card index and correspondence files to a database. Charlotte's main research interest is colonial Africa, and during the project she worked on records in the Africa series in [FO 367](#).

These records comprise negotiations between European colonial powers, such as France, Portugal and Germany, and are incredibly diverse. Only detailed cataloguing will make them fully accessible to researchers. Although Charlotte's research has found that the majority of the 1906 correspondence has survived (which is not the case with later years), many files were never added to the card index. Less than half of this Foreign Office material has been properly indexed, representing a hidden set of records of significant potential value to researchers.

[Read more about Charlotte's project](#)



Care and neglect

'Scandal' is a recurring theme in British history and welfare policy, and one which attracts a large amount of media attention. 'Welfare scandals' are not, however, a new phenomenon, as Samantha Shave discovered in her project 'Care and Neglect: Cases of Neglect in the Victorian Workhouse in England and Wales, 1834-1871'.

Before undertaking this project using the [MH 12 records](#), it had been assumed that neglect was sporadic and straightforward (for instance, neglect to provide medical attendance); but it now appears that scandals were more frequent - and far more complicated.

[Read more about Samantha's project](#)

The National Archives' new annual Research Award - established in recognition of the most outstanding peer-reviewed article written by a member of staff - was won Dr Louise Craven for her article, 'Epic, group identity and the archive in the modern world'.

External judges Professor Michael Moss and Dr Andrew Prescott also commended runners-up Dr Daniel Gilfoyle (for his article on anthrax in South Africa, featured in our winter 2009 issue), Dr Adrian Ailes (for his paper on heraldic visitations) and Malcolm Todd (for his study on the application of archival methodologies to contemporary thinking about privacy).

Louise presented her paper at an event hosted by Natalie Ceeney, Chief Executive of The National Archives, on 11 March 2009.

Collaborative doctoral awards

The National Archives and its partners have been awarded three collaborative doctoral awards by the AHRC and ESRC.

The ESRC CASE award on the business of the Poor Law will be co-supervised by Dr David Green (King's College, London) and Dr Paul Carter (The National Archives).

Dr Andrew Flinn and Dr Elizabeth Shepherd (both of UCL) will co-supervise a doctorate on archival theory with Dr Louise Craven (The National Archives).

And Dr Andrew Wareham's (University of Roehampton) supervision of a doctoral project on the hearth tax will benefit from the expert input of Pete Seaman from The National Archives.

Researching poverty

In April, The National Archives and the British Library held a joint seminar on sources for the study of poverty in the social sciences.

Speakers included records experts from both institutions, and Professor Pat Thane of the School of Advanced Study, Professor Peter Scott and Dr James Walker, University of Reading, and Richard Berthout of the Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of Essex.

Web Archives: now and in the future

The National Archives has



Nuclear policy and British politics

The National Archives holds a rich collection of material relating to civil nuclear energy policy. Elizabeth Rough explored this diverse and fascinating collection as part of her project ('Nuclear policy and British politics: changing debates about energy since 1945') which aimed to improve awareness of, and access to, civil nuclear records for researchers.

Her work involved scoping the current usage of these records and identifying the specific types of records held by The National Archives, and by external organisations and institutions, in order to establish the scope of existing data. The project demonstrates how nuclear records at The National Archives have barely been used by social scientists and historians, and has given us a clearer understanding of the types of records held by local and county records offices, universities and other institutional archives - information that has been fed back to the National Nuclear Archive, which is currently writing its collection strategy.

[Read more about Elizabeth's project](#)

recently won funding from JISC to undertake a study into how archived websites are collected and made available to users.

The study will take place in collaboration with the UK Web Archiving Consortium and aims to: investigate how UK web archives are delivered to users now, and how they might be delivered in the future; define the long-term historical and research value of online content in the UK; and look at different organisations that collect web archives, and their interests.

The project team is keen to involve users and potential users of web archives, so please [email us](#) if you would like to take part in surveys or discussions.

If you would prefer not to receive this newsletter in future please [contact us](#). We will continue to send you information on research at The National Archives unless you ask to be removed from our database. We will not pass your data on to any third parties. Please read the [privacy statement](#) on our website for more information.

Please contact our [corporate research manager](#) with your research enquiries.

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Making the links

'Making the Links': Judges' Reports and the Old Bailey Online, c.1784-1830

On 19 June 1788 the Home Secretary, Viscount Sydney, wrote to James Adair, the most senior judge of the City of London (known as the Recorder of London), in some distress. The cause of the Home Secretary's distress appears to have been prison overcrowding, a problem that still plagues present-day ministers and officials. Yet, while modern judges are frequently criticised for being too lenient on criminals, the reverse was true in Hanoverian Britain, renowned for its infamous 'Bloody Code', which saw the death penalty routinely handed down for all manner of crimes against property.

What the Home Secretary wanted from the Recorder of London was judicial guidance on how the statutory severity of the criminal law might be moderated in particular cases. Since the re-organisation of Whitehall departments in 1782, the Home Office had been responsible for processing all pleas for clemency. These usually took the form of a petition, written either by the individual seeking royal mercy, or written on his or her behalf by a relative, friend or associate.

The aim of petitioning was to secure either a reduced sentence or an outright pardon. During the first half-century or so of the Home Office's history, petitions were routinely referred to trial judges with the standard instruction to report 'for His Majesty's information, a State of his [or her] case, as the same appeared to You upon his [or her] Trial, together with your Opinion how far he [or she] may be an object of the Royal Mercy.' If the judge's report was favourable, clemency would usually be forthcoming. A large number of these reports (and sometimes the accompanying petitions), favourable and unfavourable, survive in the record series Home Office 47 ([HO 47](#)).

One of the obvious limitations of the reports in [HO 47](#) (which cover all of England and Wales) is that they offer modern readers only a snapshot view of a particular case's life-cycle. Though details of the original indictment and trial can often be gleaned, these are transmitted to us through the memory of the reporting judge. However, thanks to the digitisation of the Proceedings of the Old Bailey (the published record of trials held at the Old Bailey), available at www.oldbaileyonline.org, and the item-level calendaring of [HO 47](#), available through The National Archives' catalogue, it is now possible to link up reports on Old Bailey convicts to the original trial proceedings.

During the course of a three-month ESRC-funded internship, over 1,000 individuals convicted between 1779 and 1827 who appear in [HO 47](#) have been linked to their original Old Bailey convictions. This figure, it should be noted, represents a tiny proportion - less than three per cent - of the nearly 40,000 defendants found guilty by Old Bailey juries in this period, and an unknown fraction of either all petitioners, or all recipients of mercy. Nonetheless, by systematically linking the Recorder of London's reports to Old Bailey trial records historians will be able to build up a more comprehensive picture of the judicial mind in particular, and the unreformed criminal law more generally.

Stephen Thompson is currently completing a PhD on 'Census-taking, political economy and state formation, c. 1790-1840' at the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure, University of Cambridge.

Assessing the impact of policy on academic research

Assessing the impact of policy on academic research: the Freedom of Information Act 2000

Under the terms of the Public Records Act, researchers used to be able to apply to the Lord Chancellor for permission to access 'closed' files. If granted, the host government department would be advised to allow the researcher to view the relevant files in a secure setting. Now, under [section 66](#) of the FOIA, once a researcher makes an FOI request a sensitivity review is conducted at TNA in conjunction with the record's department of origin to determine whether any exemptions apply. If the file contains the personal data of a living individual, it will either remain closed or be redacted (removing all sensitive information) in order to protect the rights of the subject (under [section 40](#) of the Act). Several government departments, however, still provide researchers with some form of - closely monitored - 'privileged access'. A number of factors account for the persistence of such privileged access, but in general this can be seen as a consequence of departmental attempts to balance the protection of personal data with the aim of promoting transparent and accountable government. Government's recognition of the potential benefits of new research to policymakers and citizens also plays an important part.

Existing access arrangements are therefore inconsistent, but changing record formats threaten to complicate the picture further. The 30-year time lag between current governmental operations and the transfer of documentary records of this activity to TNA means that only a small percentage of digital files are so far accessible online - but government's recent response to the [Dacre Review](#) (which in January 2009 recommended a reduction in this 30-year transfer period) may result in the digital record soon becoming the predominant type transferred to TNA. This will have an effect on the way in which records are accessed, processed and stored, both at the 'back-end' (with government departments reviewing their retention schedules and what information they keep) and at the 'front-end' (with regards to access, storage space and future compatibility at TNA, as technology continues to advance).

The 2009 Walport and Thomas [Data Sharing Review](#) provides an insight into the future of researchers' access to public records. The authors recommend a 'safe haven' policy, enabling academics to access closed datasets, and - in conjunction with academic funding bodies - government departments such as the Office of National Statistics and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs are now taking these principles forward. One example of the new services on offer is the ESRC's Academic Data Liaison Service, which encompasses all research areas. The next step for funding councils, public record holders and data providers is therefore to train researchers in the array of data available and the different legislative and technical barriers to access.

Amy Gibbons is a doctoral student at Lancaster University Management School. Her research interests include surveillance and privacy studies (especially the work of [privacy advocates](#)) and information rights. She will be presenting on some of these issues at the next LSE & UCL Transparency Workshop in July and the Research Information Network in Glasgow this September.

The world in action

The world in action: Foreign Office Correspondence, 1906-1920

During the project Charlotte identified records that offer rich details for the social historian as much as for the diplomatic specialist. One particularly dramatic example of this is the correspondence of a West African trader to the Foreign Office relating to accusations that he had kidnapped an African child. Originally from Manchester, the complainant argued that although he had indeed carried a 'native boy' back to England with him, this had been done with the boy's consent. He also sought to refute any charges of immorality, pointing out that his previous 'defence [in print] of [Oscar] Wilde's memory as an author of skill did not also imply a defence of Wilde's example as a perverter (sic) of the moral code...' ([FO 367/7](#)). For more information on the case see Stephanie Newell's book, *The forger's tale: the search for Odeziaku* (2006).

There are also poignant cases of families broken apart as those in the UK lost touch with individuals who had travelled to the British colonies to seek their fortune. The families and friends of such people wrote to the Foreign Office asking for help, often sending in newspaper cuttings or photographs. In the case of Joseph Winteringham, imprisoned in Windhoek, a friend wrote to the Foreign Office defending his good character and excellent military service record. Once the Foreign Office had established that Winteringham had indeed served in campaigns in the Sudan and South Africa, it lobbied the German authorities on his behalf. Whether coincidentally or not, Winteringham was subsequently released ([FO 367/8](#)). Charlotte also discovered that these Foreign Office sources can throw new light on important events in British colonial history. Although historians have written extensively about the Namibian genocide (1904-8), in what was then known as German South West Africa, for example, their accounts have relied largely on German and Namibian archival sources. This has led some scholars to underestimate the extent of British assistance to German troops in the systematic attack on Herero and Nama peoples. The Germans refused to take prisoners, drove women and children into the desert, established concentration camps, and killed 80 per cent of the Herero and 50 per cent of the Nama peoples. Horst Drechsler had previously argued that the British assistance played a vital part in the German campaign (see his 'Let us die fighting': the struggle of the Herero and the Nama against German imperialism [1884-1915] [1980]), but his claims are now verified by the 1906 Foreign Office correspondence. In particular, the files in [FO 367/11](#) show how the South African and British authorities focused on the expense of the German campaign rather than criticising its ethics and that the Cape Police aided in the monitoring and capture of Herero and Nama leaders.

As a result of her research, Charlotte now intends to write an article on British responses to the genocide of 1904-8.

Charlotte Hastings is a doctoral student at the University of Edinburgh, working on the history of education in Nigeria between 1918 and 1940.

Care and neglect

Care and neglect: Cases of neglect in the Victorian workhouse in England and Wales

The provision and administration of state welfare in the United Kingdom changed following the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, and it is possible to trace the history of neglect scandals from this date onwards using records held at The National Archives. The Law required parishes to group together to administer the provision of (most) welfare through a union workhouse - buildings that became iconic symbols of Victorian discipline and austerity. While every union was locally administered by an elected Board of Guardians, the system was overseen by Britain's first centralised welfare authority, the Poor Law Commission (1834-47), and later the Poor Law Board (1847-71). Although the Commission and Board were directly accountable to Parliament for the administration of the New Poor Law, neglect and abuse of the poor were widespread. The most well-known scandal of this era was the so-called Andover Scandal (1845) in which it emerged that the men confined in one Hampshire workhouse were driven by their hunger to gnaw on the animal bones they had been tasked to crush in order to make fertiliser.

Such welfare scandals were, however, just the tip of the iceberg: cases of neglect and abuse proliferated within the Victorian welfare system, though the majority were probably never reported to the authorities. Those allegations that did reach the Commission and the Board have left archival traces in the [MH12](#) series. These records contain letters between Boards of Guardians throughout England and Wales and the Poor Law authorities based in London. They also contain reports and witness statements relating to particular issues of concern, including allegations of maltreatment. The National Archives is currently running a project called 'Living the Poor Life' which aims to digitise and catalogue in detail the contents of 105 [MH12](#) volumes relating to 22 different unions. There are, however, a total of 16,741 volumes in MH12: Dr Carter, the project director, estimates that this series alone contains about 21,763,300 pages.

Cases of neglect and abuse are currently buried within the [MH12](#) series, and Samantha's internship project was designed to simultaneously raise awareness of the rich contents of [MH12](#) and to explore new routes into the series. Using a sample of [MH15](#) volumes - an index first created at Somerset House (see below) - almost 1,000 potential cases of abuse and neglect within the [MH12](#) series have been identified. This research reveals the very large number of cases of neglect and abuse within the workhouse system, but also their variety (from deaths caused by lack of medical attendance to severe punishments carried out by workhouse staff). [MH12](#) also provides an insight into the immediate procedural responses of the central authorities on receiving news of such allegations: Assistant Poor Law Commissions (later called 'Inspectors') were initially sent to take evidence from witnesses and subsequently advised Boards of Guardians on whether to dismiss members of staff or not.

Samantha's research has underlined how crucial the [MH12](#) and [MH15](#) records are for an understanding of the experiences of the poor under the New Poor Law and demonstrates how the Commission and Board sought to learn from cases of neglect in order to prevent future failures.

[Samantha Shave](#) is a doctoral student in the Division of Sociology and Social Policy at the University of Southampton. Her research focuses on the development of social policies and welfare recipients'

experiences of statutory welfare provision from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries in the south of England.

Nuclear policy and British politics

Nuclear Policy and British Politics: changing debates about energy since 1945

There is currently no official history of civil nuclear energy covering the period after 1958, and most unofficial histories have not used unpublished, archival sources. The records Elizabeth identified as of potential interest at TNA included those of the UK Atomic Energy Authority (UK AEA), the Department of the Environment's Radioactive Waste Division, and the Atomic Energy Division of the Department of Energy. Despite the enduring importance of this material, her preliminary survey of usage suggests that it is underused; civil nuclear records are rarely requested by TNA readers and tend, as noted, not to feature in scholarly research. When TNA records are cited in publications that discussed nuclear energy policy, Elizabeth found, they are usually Prime Ministerial or Cabinet papers, rather than those in the 'atomic energy' series listed above. This represents a large, untapped resource.

In addition, a review of UK university departments currently conducting research on nuclear energy policy revealed only one instance in which records held at TNA had been consulted, and in the majority of cases recently funded research has focused on issues associated with 'new nuclear build', with details of the history of UK civil nuclear energy policy gleaned through official publications or secondary sources only. Elizabeth's project drew on these findings to inform collection development policy in this area and will help develop an access and awareness strategy for nuclear energy policy records for future researchers. She also intends to write a short article for the ESRC, using her project as a case-study for the knowledge transfer internship scheme.

Elizabeth Rough is in her second year of doctoral research on 'Nuclear Narratives in UK Energy Policy' at the Department of Geography, University of Cambridge.