

Research at The National Archives

Issue 2 | Winter 2009

Welcome to the second issue of The National Archives research newsletter.

Research at The National Archives has had a highly successful six months. The JISC-funded [Cabinet Papers project](#), digitising and making available Cabinet records from 1915 to 1978, has gone online; the [National Digital Archive of Datasets](#) is now fully accessible online; the AHRC-funded [History and Policy Research Training scheme](#) will start next month; and The National Archives has won funding from ESRC to host five student internships.

In order to capitalise on this success The National Archives will, from spring 2009, begin to proactively seek out academic collaborators, setting a dynamic research agenda that focuses on the most pressing questions facing us as an organisation.

Caroline Williams
Head of Research and Collections Development



Cabinet papers online

Two World Wars, the General Strike, the creation of the Welfare State - these are key events in British history, with lasting consequences for the governance of the United Kingdom. The role played by government in each of these key moments is captured in cabinet records held at The National Archives.

Cabinet notebooks and papers from 1915 to 1978 have been digitised and made available online free of charge in a fully text-searchable format, thanks to funding from the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC). Additional resources include an interactive map and a writing frame to assist students in structuring essays.

For more information on this groundbreaking resource, [click here](#).

What are archives?

What challenges do archivists face in the early years of the twenty-first century? How can they provide quality online access to archives for the post-Google generation? What are community archives? Are digital records fundamentally different from their paper counterparts? What is 'identity' in an archival context? What do we know about our users?

Discussion and debate around these topics form the basis of a new collection of essays, *What are archives?*, edited by Dr Louise Craven, Archival Catalogue Programme Manager at The National Archives. The collection (published by Ashgate in November 2008) comprises contributions from a number of key thinkers in archival studies, including Paddy Collis, Andrew Flinn, Andrea Johnson, Michael Moss, Andrew Prescott, Jane Stevenson, Caroline Williams and Louise Craven.

[Find out more](#).

South Africans abroad: the control of rinderpest in Tanganyika, 1938-1952

The outbreak of foot and mouth disease in 2001 brought home the potentially devastating effects of stock epidemics, but there are plenty of historical precedents.

Deadly cattle plague, or rinderpest, for example, threatened the British cattle farming industry during the mid-1860s. The authorities dealt with the epidemic through quarantine and slaughter, establishing a system of veterinary controls that has not been relinquished since. To the pastoral societies of sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, however, rinderpest has remained a frightening and immediate threat.

In this article, Dr Daniel Gilfoyle, academic strategies coordinator at



Gascon Rolls project

The Arts and Humanities Research Council has awarded almost £750,000 to the Universities of Oxford and Liverpool to digitise and edit the unpublished [Gascon Rolls](#).

The rolls comprise administrative records relating to English rule in medieval Gascony, such as writs and grants, but also contain enrolments of diplomatic and official material. This is a three-year project, designed to make this rich but underused resource more accessible to a wider audience.

The project, led by Dr Malcolm Vale and Mr Paul Booth, will result in an edition of the Gascon Rolls between 1317 and 1468, available both in a searchable electronic form online and in a printed edition.

National Digital Archive of Datasets now fully accessible to the public

The National Digital Archive of Datasets (NDAD) is now [fully accessible to the public](#). It contains quantitative and qualitative data created by central government departments and agencies. Unavailable elsewhere, the material dates from the 1960s and provides a unique insight into social trends.

The datasets cover a broad range of subjects, including crime, health and environment. They are of special interest to social scientists, statisticians and historians of the recent past. NDAD also provides finding aids and descriptive documentation to assist users of the collection.

Joint National Archives and ESRC internships

As part of The National Archives' drive to open up its collections to social science researchers, five joint internships from The National Archives and Economic Social Research Council (ESRC) have been awarded to postgraduate students in the final year of their doctorates.

For three months, from March 2009 onwards, the interns will assist experts at The National Archives with five unique projects, covering Freedom of Information legislation, the records of the British nuclear industry, the workings of the criminal justice system in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and Foreign Office correspondence between 1906 and 1920.

The National Archives, describes his research based on documents held at The National Archives and also unpublished material at the South African National Archives and the Onderstepoort Veterinary Research Institute in South Africa.

For more information, [click here](#).



Administering the Empire, 1801-1968

This new guide, written by Dr Mandy Banton of The National Archives, is designed to equip the reader to use the records of the Colonial Office.

Based on Dr Banton's extensive knowledge of Colonial Office history, this book concentrates on the organisation of the records, the information they are likely to provide, and the use of the contemporary finding aids. An introductory essay outlines the extent and development of the British Empire in the period, and comments on the notion of 'informal' empire. The appendices include geographical and subject-based lists of record series.

The guide also covers the records of the Dominions Office and Commonwealth Relations Office, and introduces the records of other government departments concerned with aspects of colonial administration.

[Click here for further details.](#)

Repackaging research or rewriting a book?

Since June 2006, William Spencer (Principal Military Records Specialist at The National Archives) has written two new record guides and rewritten three others, originally authored or co-authored by him and published between 1998 and 2001.

These guides are highly regarded by The National Archives' visitors, and reveal not only the deep subject knowledge held by our specialists but also how this knowledge develops over time, opening up new or underused collections to the public. New research is clearly essential to advancing this knowledge - but even the process of 'repackaging' and 'rewriting', can add value to the original guides.

For more information, [click here](#).

Documents on British policy overseas

As an associate editor for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) Historians, Dr Ed Hampshire (collections adviser at The National Archives) has been working on two volumes of government documents tracing the formation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) for Series I of Documents on British Policy Overseas (DBPO).

In this article he describes what the work of an associate editor involves, stresses the importance of producing this type of scholarly document collection, and suggests that the original publications in this FCO series represented the beginnings of British diplomatic history, as we now understand it.

[Click here to read this article.](#)

Forthcoming events:

AHRC collaborative research training scheme

The National Archives and the [History and Policy Unit](#) have recently been awarded AHRC funding to run a collaborative research training scheme for postgraduate students.

Using archival sources to inform contemporary policy debates will run in 2009 and 2010 (with the first session on 19-20 February), aiming to provide a detailed introduction to using archival research to undertake research into contemporary policy issues.

Expert record specialists from The National Archives will present a series of themed sessions alongside a number of leading academic historians, drawing out the links between high quality research and good practice in policy-making and implementation.

Find [more information](#) on our website.

Archives and history seminar

The Institute for Historical Research and The National Archives will be co-hosting a series of lectures exploring the relationship between historical research and archives between January and March 2009.

[Find more information here.](#)



Tudor power, pageantry and propaganda

The National Archives is holding a one-day conference on Saturday 21 March 2009 to celebrate the 500th anniversary of Henry VIII's coronation in 1509 and the 450th anniversary of Elizabeth I's coronation in 1559.

This sold-out event will look at how England's most famous royal dynasty used ceremonial, chivalric values, royal magnificence and propaganda to establish its position and power.

[Find out more about the conference here.](#)

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Cabinet Papers project

The ability to search Cabinet records for keywords and phrases makes the Cabinet Papers resource an invaluable research tool, enabling a wide range of new users - including A level students, undergraduate and graduate researchers and the general public - to engage with the raw material of 20th century British political history. Whether onsite at The National Archives in Kew or online, all users are now able to access this resource (see <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documentsonline/cabinetpapers.asp>).

The resource contains tools designed specifically for A level students, providing them with access to a large amount of content relevant to the current national curriculum syllabus, as well as support, interactive tools, video clips and pictures. The maps section, for example, enables students to follow geopolitical changes over the 20th century using colour maps and images scanned from the original documents. Another important tool is the dynamic writing framework, which helps students learn how to study and evaluate primary sources and how to structure essays around central themes and arguments.

The Higher Education section of Cabinet Papers covers over 100 topical essays written and peer-reviewed by leading academic historians, providing students with an authoritative introduction to the subject area and encouraging them to undertake their own research. Each training 'package' - which students and lecturers can select according to the focus of specific courses - is associated with a photograph, a poster or a cartoon, making Cabinet Papers a comprehensive visual snapshot of the 20th century, as well as a unique research training resource.

The National Archives is committed to maintaining Cabinet Papers and providing free access at the point of use for ten years for A level students, five years for Further and Higher Education users, and 18 months for general users.

What are archives?

The essays in Dr Louise Craven's new edited book (*What are Archives? Cultural and Theoretical Perspectives: A Reader*) are based on papers presented by contributors at the Society of Archivists Conference in Lancaster in September 2006. The essays assess the impact of recent technological developments - and attendant social, political and epistemological changes - on archival theory and practice. These changes have coincided with a significant perceived shift in the role of archives in cultural and heritage contexts, resulting in new ways of thinking and writing about archives and an increased recognition of the social and political role of the archive in academic disciplines such as politics, sociology, philosophy, linguistics, cultural studies and literary criticism.

Addressing the themes of 'continuity and change in the archival paradigm', 'the impact of technology', 'the impact of community archives' and 'archival use and users', this book seeks to contribute to this process of rethinking: to look to the future for solutions, rather than to the past; to examine the challenges that electronic records present to archival theory and practice; to consider the role of archives in culture and heritage; to grapple with the philosophy of the archive; and to ask whether the current intellectual and practical division between museums and archives is a result of outdated - and increasingly obsolete - educational and professional principles. Dr Craven's book therefore seeks to set archives in their cultural, political and social context, with each of the contributors considering whether archivists ought now to rethink the nature and borders of their profession.

The control of rinderpest in Tanganyika, 1938-1952

During the early 1890s, cattle imported from India brought the dangerous cattle disease rinderpest to East Africa. Rinderpest (a viral disease, closely related to human measles) probably killed over 85% of cattle in East Africa and spread over much of sub-Saharan Africa during the following decade. Affecting many species of game animals, it was an important factor in the East African ecological crisis of the early colonial period and the spread of trypanosomiasis (sleeping sickness).

Dr Gilfoyle's research concerns a pivotal 15 year period in the history of disease control in Africa. Rinderpest was eradicated from southern Africa by 1910, but became endemic in parts of Kenya. During the 1930s, it again spread southwards through Tanganyika and appeared to pose a serious threat to the southern colonies. In South Africa, which had well-developed veterinary services, officials became increasingly concerned. During 1938, the South African government despatched a number of its veterinary scientists to take part in rinderpest vaccination campaigns in Tanganyika. They played a key role in laboratory experiments and field control, seeking to influence Kenyan officials who were less enthusiastic about the merits of eradication. Facing the threat of war and concerned about food security, the imperial government became active in urging control measures. These initiatives led to the foundation of the Pan-African Bureau of Epizootic Disease at Nairobi in 1952, and the subsequent initiation of continental eradication.

Dr Gilfoyle's article based on this research examines the international networks of veterinary science within the context of rinderpest control. It explores dynamics of disease control and the idea of sub-imperialism in the relations between the South Africans and their counterparts in the East African colonies. It also elucidates improvements in rinderpest vaccines which were achieved at this time. The ways in which the changing technology influenced historical arguments about the respective merits of eradication and endemic stability are traced.

[Find out more](#) about some of the documents concerning rinderpest used in this article, which are held at The National Archives.

For Dr Gilfoyle's previous research, see his 'Veterinary immunology as colonial science: method and quantification in the investigation of horsesickness in South Africa, c.1905-1945', *Journal of History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, Vol.61, (2006), 25-66', and 'Anthrax in South Africa: economics, experiment and the mass vaccination of animals, c1910-1945', *Medical History*, Vol.50 (2006), 465-90',

Repackaging research or rewriting a book

William Spencer's first new record guide, *Medals: The Researcher's Guide*, was published in June 2006 and, for the first time in one book, brought together essential information about medals and their associated records held by both The National Archives and the British Library. His second new publication, *Family History in the Wars* (December 2007), provides the reader with key information about records relating to British military service between 1899 and 1953. Unlike many previous books about military records, *Family History in the Wars* contains vital information about records that reveal how civilians, such as aliens and internees, were affected by war.

Although much of the information in William's three rewritten guides (*Army Records*, *Air Force Records* and *First World War Army Service Records*) is the same as in previous editions, the revised works are, in many ways, significantly different. They enable the reader to benefit from the latest research and an increased understanding of the records themselves, as well as providing details of new ways to access records knowledge online. Readers interested in the War Office's Service Medal and Award Rolls Index (series WO 371), for example, can now access digital copies on [The National Archives' DocumentsOnline service](#).

Therefore, while these hard copy records guides may appear to be somewhat old fashioned in the context of The National Archives' many online services and finding aids, they continue to perform a vital function. The primary research underpinning them, resultant improved cataloguing and the process of rewriting older guides continue to enable William and other specialists to open up records that have lain undisturbed or underused for many years.

Documents on British policy overseas

DBPO is the most recent incarnation of a long-running series of republished government documents relating to British foreign policy, first produced in 1926. The aim of the original volumes (Documents on the Origins of War: DOW) was to release significant government documents throwing light on the causes of the First World War into the public domain, many decades before they were due to be formally opened to the public. After the Second World War, a new run of volumes (Documents on British Foreign Policy: DBFP) was commissioned, covering the inter-war period; and in the 1980s, FCO historians began producing a post-war series: Documents on British Policy Overseas (DBPO).

FCO historians are now concentrating on volumes covering documents from the 1980s that are currently closed to the public, such as those relating to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Dr Hampshire has been commissioned, as an associate editor, to fill in some of the gaps in coverage in the original 1940s material. Almost all of the relevant documents have an 'open' status at The National Archives, so accessing the records has not been difficult. The scale of the project, however, presents its own unique challenges. Dr Hampshire's first volume covers the period 1940 to 1948, from the earliest suggestions and discussions of a post-war military guarantee system through to the Dunkirk Treaty and the Brussels Pact. The second volume will document the negotiations for the Atlantic Treaty itself.

The work involves reviewing records mainly, but not wholly, from the large Foreign Office Correspondence Series (FO 371), describing their contents and basic details, and identifying which specific documents should be considered for inclusion in the volume. These details are then passed to the FCO historians, who borrow the documents in order to transcribe them, either using Optical Character Recognition (OCR) technology or manual transcription. Approximately 500 documents will be transcribed, so the selection of documents involves a strict assessment of their value as primary evidence and their potential to illustrate as succinctly as possible particular issues or government decisions. Some longer documents will also be included in the volumes, but these may also be published as edited extracts.

The FCO historians, in partnership with the academic publishers Proquest, are in the process of launching a subscription digitisation of the documents in the DOW, DBFP and DBPO series. It is anticipated that the content of the two volumes Dr Hampshire produces (to be published by 2012) will also be digitally reproduced, alongside some of those documents not included in the print volume.

These publications will continue an FCO tradition of producing scholarly source editions for an academic and general readership that dates back to the 1920s, and to the origins of 20th century British diplomatic history itself.