

Minutes

Title: The National Archives User Forum

Date of Meeting: Thursday 19 March, 12:30pm

Location: Talks Room

Attendees Staff

JM: Jackie Marfleet, Head of Advice and Records (Chair)

JA: Jill Allbrooke, Head of Enquiry Services

NB: Nancy Bell, Head Of Collection Care

JL: James Lawson, Customer Intelligence Manager (secretary)

JS: Jessamy Sykes, Map & Large Document Room Manager

PHJ: Peter Hills-Jones, Head of Chief Executive's Office

LMO: Lee Oliver, Head of Public Services Development

PS: Paul Sturm, Quality Manager

SA: Sarah Abbott, Advice and Records Knowledge

MW: Martin Willis, Complaints Officer

KH: Karim Hussain, Advice and Records Knowledge

II: Ian Ireland, Public Services Development

FA: Foluke Abiona, Public Services Development

CJAM, Carole MacCormack, Public Services Development

Readers: J Belloni, Maria Thomas, Joyce Hoad, Kay Payne, Doreen Heywood, Scott Reeve, Barbara Harvey, Sylvia Steer, P Eismark, John Court, A Mears, P Gallagher, A H Butler, Len Barnett, D List, Richard Bateson, John King, Else Churchill, Paul Blake, Hugh Compton, Janet Macdonald, Ken Maxwell-Jones, Clive Gardener

1	Welcome JM introduced herself as the Interim Head of Advice and Records Knowledge.	Action
2	Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising	
2.1	(2.5) JL had spoken to the Corporate Information and Enquiries Officer at the National Railway Museum who had passed him the contact details for their Archivist.	
2.2	Tom Gregan agreed that BT 381 would be untagged before production and not be retagged after use. Concern was expressed about the amount of damage that could be done if the papers were left loose in the box and that papers could be returned in the wrong order. JL is to speak to TG about these concerns.	
2.3	(7.2) To be discussed under Agenda item 4	JL

- 2.4 Concern had been expressed at the previous forum regarding a book sold in the bookshop which appeared to consist of a reproduction of original Air Historical Branch records. Chris Mumby, Head of Commercial Delivery supplied the following response:

The range of books in question replicate material that can be viewed for free at the RAF Archive. The publisher (Military Library Research Service) has done a licensing deal with that archive to reproduce the content for commercial purpose. MLRS is actually run by a fanatic of military history and an active researcher who set up the company to make content more accessible and available to a wider audience who cannot physically get to the RAF Archive.

His pricing structure (TNA bookshop sells the titles at the published RRP) is in place to cover the cost of the RAF fees, his reprographic, printing, publishing and distribution costs and (because they are a commercial organisation that has to survive) a small profit. TNA bookshop has a good working relationship with the publisher and has found the range of titles to be very popular with our customers. We plan to continue to offer his range for sale for the foreseeable future.

- 2.5 (7.4) It was noted that Tim Padfield, Information Policy Consultant will be invited to a future meeting to answer questions on Copyright. *(post meeting note: this has now been confirmed for 16 July)*

JL

- 2.6 (7.5) It is not always possible for preferred seating to be allocated with advance orders. There are two reasons why we can't guarantee a particular seat.

Firstly – If another reader has used the seat on the previous day and reserved their documents for the next day they will keep the seat (continuous research)

Secondly – We often don't know if a seat will be available until the actual morning of the advance order readers visit. Each morning the first thing that the Document Services staff working in the main reading room do is to clear out reserved and unreserved document from the day before. If a reader leaves without either reserving their documents or using the vacate facility there is no way that we know that the seat is available until the next morning.

- 2.7 (2.10) It was stated that the books available in the FRC were now very much out-of-date and in a format that would not suit the reading rooms. It was stated that JA was advised not to have the books at TNA because they are out of date.

- 2.8 (7.6) Queuing in the Restaurant is still a problem – Paul Davies, Head of Estates and Facilities will be conducting a review of the facilities, this is imminent. A presentation of his findings was requested. Paul Davies is to be invited to the next meeting. *(post meeting note: Paul Davies has*

confirmed that he will be present at the next meeting to discuss the catering review)

3 Outcome of the 30 Year Rule Review, Peter Hills-Jones, Head of Chief Executive's Office

- 3.1 The Dacre review's main recommendation was that the current 30 year rule be reduced to 15 years, gradually, and over a 15-year period. Although the Government has agreed to a substantial reduction to the closure period of records, the exact length of any new rule has yet to be agreed by Cabinet. The National Archives, the Ministry of Justice and the Cabinet Office are leading the work and are in discussions with all other departments about the response to the review's recommendations. The review also advocated that a general monitoring authority oversee the progress of departments.
- 3.2 Any reduction will affect both the Public Record Act and the Freedom of Information Act, which will have to be amended. The FOI Act will be affected because when records are 30 years old, certain qualified exemptions can no longer be applied. For example:
1. formulation of government policy; and
 2. effective conduct of public affairs
- 3.3. When the 50-year rule was reduced to 30-years, the Public Record Office at Kew was built to contain the extra records being released to it. In addition, the use of records actually increased by 25%.
- 3.4 It was stated that capacity would be a serious issue, and concern was expressed for the safety and storage of all the extra in-coming documents. It was agreed that capacity will be a serious issue if the recommendation is implemented. This will be one of many issues which The National Archives will consider at great length. It was noted that there is further storage available off site.
- 3.5 It was suggested by a user that with so many exemptions, and government departments maintaining 'significant discretion' to hold on to documents, the strength of the 30-year rule was greatly diluted in practice. It was agreed that the 30-year rule is not an absolute, but pointed out that the exemptions are applied for good reasons, such as security and protection of individuals rights.
- 3.6 It was suggested by a user that the additional pressure on Departmental Record Officers could result in a higher level of 'weeding' The way that the recommendations are implemented will be carefully thought through. It was pointed out that there are, and will continue to be extremely strong guidelines regarding selection and intellectual preservation, and that The National Archives will have a close relationship with Departmental Records Officers and high level of influence over their practices.

4 Library update, Jill Allbrooke (see separate presentation)

4.1 Q: Will there be any further access to newspapers.

A: We are looking to add the British Library's 19th Century's newspaper collection. There will be no other broadsheets added to our collection at this time.

(post meeting note: 19th century British Library newspapers online and the 17th and 18th century Burney collection are both now available. 19th century newspapers offers national, regional and local newspapers, taken from the holdings of the British Library. Currently forty-eight titles are included; shortly this will be increased by a further twenty-five. The Burney collection, also from the BL, covers the 17th and 18th centuries and includes more than one thousand pamphlets, proclamations, newsbooks and newspapers from this period)

4.2 Q: In the current recession will there be any money for new books and how do we apply for them

A: There is space and a budget for new books, please continue to request them in the normal way.

4.3 Q: Do you accept donated books?

A: Yes. Space is a problem but we do look at each case individually – if there are quite a number of The National Archives references it is more likely to be accepted as it will be a useful addition to the collection. We do try to keep within the confines of our collection policy, e.g. by accepting those written in English.

The Library Policy is currently being reassessed by Helen Pye Smith, Head of Library, in conjunction with our Records Specialists.

4.4 Q: The copy of Halsbury Laws of England has disappeared – where has it gone?

A: It has been moved to the offsite facility in Cheshire.

4.5 Q: Why did the Library Catalogue “fall over” last week?

A: Everything “fell over” last week; there was a general IT problem that affected all of our services, but it was put right quite quickly.

4.6 Q: Army, Navy, Air Lists are heavily used are there any plans to digitise them

A: Although we are aware of the seriousness of their condition, there are no plans as yet; the feasibility of the project is under discussion. Collection Care will be asked to look at them in the interim

4.7 Q: Have other archives got similar problems with their volumes?

A: Yes, not everyone has the same editions, but all are in fairly poor condition.

4.8 Q: Why can you only access the Library Catalogue here?

JL

A: It is on our website and you can access it anywhere; you cannot access resources, e.g. the Times. It can be searched by typing the Library Catalogue in the search option at the top left of the homepage.

The Library Catalogue can be found on our website at:

<http://www.library.nationalarchives.gov.uk/uhtbin/cgisirsi.exe/x/0/0/49>

5 Open discussion

5.1 It was asked if our Fire Certificate was sufficient to cover the higher numbers of visitors we now experience in the building and whether we would be able to evacuate the group of wheelchair users that were visiting today (19 March). Concern was also expressed regarding the ability of staff to evacuate the building in an emergency, and it was asked if we have regular fire drills.

5.1.1 The fire Certificate more than covers the numbers we can ever expect in the building.

5.1.2 Staff have regular fire drills, and both Advice and Records Knowledge staff and Security are trained in evacuating the reading rooms and public areas.

5.1.3 We have recently been advised that a number of our lifts are suitable for use in a fire and can be used to evacuate wheelchair users or those with walking difficulties.

5.1.4 Our alarms are tested every Thursday morning.

(Post Meeting Note: Paul Davies, Head of Estates and Facilities has met with those users who expressed particular concern regarding fire safety).

5.2 Q: It was felt that Reader Registration could get very busy and that there were not enough staff to cope with the high numbers at busy times.

A: On days when we are particularly busy we do have stand-by staff who are drafted in to help, but there are days when we are very busy and there will be queues.

5.3 The rule preventing plastic sleeves has now been reinforced. JL to investigate with Jack Lincoln, Head of Security.

JL

5.4 Q: It was asked if there were any plans for the area once the 1911 terminals are removed.

A: Once the initial rush subsides the terminals will remain and they will be repurposed for general use. The 1911 census will be then available on all pcs.

5.5 There was a query raised about DocsOnline problems, LMO to investigate:

LMO

(post meeting note: the grey dialogue box pops-up because the pdf's were created in an older version of Acrobat than the current reader version. We cannot stop this, but ticking the 'do not show again' box makes it go away for the day. If, once clicking OK on this box, the pdf does not appear, it is normally because a pdf has already been opened and minimised, rather than closed, so the new pdf is automatically minimised).

- 5.6 With the many changes that have occurred within The National Archives is there a new organisational chart available? JL to investigate.
- 5.7 It was asked why is the 1911 Census still incomplete and when will the remaining areas be added.
FindmyPast are in the process of doing this and are working as fast as they can. For up to date information on the 1911 Census please go to their blog on their website at: <http://blog.findmypast.com/>
(post meeting note: Northumberland, Cumberland and Westmorland, have been added to the 1911 Census)
- 5.8 When will the 1911 Census be available, by county on CD?
As the census is redacted, one field being blocked out, the complete census will be available in 2012. It is unlikely that CDs will be released before then.
- 5.9 It was asked why the Federation of Family History Sites' conference was not advertised on The National Archives website, with information about the lectures.
It was explained that the Federation is only using The National Archives as a venue and any questions regarding the event should be addressed to them; any such business should be discussed at Federation meetings.
- 5.10 Could a notice be placed in a more conspicuous place to remind visitors to validate their parking ticket before leaving the building?
LMO to investigate
Post meeting note: LMO has spoken to a colleague in Marketing: they will look at putting some reminders on the metal panels in the revolving doors to remind people to validate tickets.
- Please note that all minutes and presentations are available at our website at: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/events/readers.htm>
- 6 The next meeting:** will be on Thursday, 16 April in the Talks Room on the first floor

JL