

Minutes

Title: The National Archives User Forum
Date of Meeting: Thursday 21 August 2008, 12:30pm
Location: Talks Room

Attendees Staff:
JJ: Jeff James, Director Public Services (chair)
NC: Natalie Ceeney, Chief Executive
LMO: Lee Oliver, Head of Public Services Development
JA: Jill Allbrooke, Enquiry Service Manager
JL: James Lawson, Customer Intelligence Manager (secretary)
PS: Paul Sturm, Quality Manager
JS: Jessamy Sykes, Map & Large Document Reading Room Manager
FA: Foluke Abiona, Advice and Records Knowledge
KH: Karim Hussain, Advice and Records Knowledge
DM: David Magee, Research and Collections Development
II: Ian Ireland, Advice and Records Knowledge
CJAM: Carole MacCormack (minutes)
GR: Gemma Richardson, Strategic Development Manager
RG: Rufus Green, Sub Editor, Web Team

Readers:
Kay Payne, M L Paine, D Heywood, Joyce Hoad, Ken Otter, John Martin, Evelyn Semlyen, Barbara Harvey, Paul Blake, Bob O'Hara, Jonathan Collins, James C Young, N Ramsay, Clive Gardener, Kay Priestley, A Mears, P Gallagher, Pauline Eismark, Ken Maxwell-Jones, Janet Macdonald, Richard Bateson, John King, Diana Hall, Ron Nowicki, Else Churchill, Tony Cowan, John Gallehawk, Bob Horner, Brian Oakley

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- 1 The National Archives Annual Report 2007/08**
Natalie Ceeney gave a short presentation regarding The National Archives' Annual Report.
Copies of the report were handed out and are also available on the website (*see separate document*).
- Questions arising from the presentation
- 1.1 Q. If a government agency were to release documents earlier than agreed, are there any contingency plans in place to deal with the extra workload?
A. We have a good relationship, and work closely, with government departments and are confident that departments will liaise with The

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National Archives when records are due to be released. An example of this is the recent MoD consultations regarding the release of post First World War records. However The National Archives does take contingency planning seriously: Our Business Continuity Department deals with planning for a broad range of scenarios that could potentially affect our ability to deliver our key services.

1.2 Q. Is there any control over the format of the records coming to The National Archives?

A. The National Archives does not have sufficient funds to undertake large-scale digitisation projects independently, and therefore we generally make records available in the format that we receive them in. Commercial organisations are encouraged to take on digitisation projects, however this is dependant on their commercial viability.

1.3 Q. Have we considered that the apparent dip in recognition of The National Archives brand as suggested by the recent MORI poll is a genuine reflection of the public's awareness of The National Archives?

The fact that there was a general dip in recognition of all the brands involved, including comparable organisations such as the British Library indicates that the dramatic drop in recognition (in comparison to several years worth of previous data) is as a result of a change in MORI's methodology. A decision has therefore been made not to take part in this particular poll in the future.

1.4 The National Archives are popular with those who are interested in what The National Archives has to offer. Our profile is being raised with programmes such as 'Who Do You Think You Are' and our regular press releases.

1.5 Q. Would changing the name be advantageous in explaining what we do?

A. The name of an organisation can never cover everything it does, and there are no plans to re-brand or re-name; such an exercise would cost money that could be well spent on other areas.

1.6 Q. Could we encourage academics to publish their bibliographic essays on Your Archives?

A. We are aware that researchers, including academics, have a wealth of knowledge that could be shared with other users, and facilitating this type of knowledge sharing is one of the key purposes of Your Archives. *(Post meeting note: Users of Your Archives should bare in mind that there are potential issues with 'publishing' material on YA that is considered to be a definitive piece of academic research, as there is always the possibility that it may be edited by others).* **(JL to discuss with Janet Macdonald)**

1.7 Q. Are The National Archives decisions on accessioning material

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affected by the availability of commercial contracts for digitisation?
A. Absolutely not. There are approximately 20 years worth of paper records to be accessioned before all records that come to us are 'born digital'. We do need commercial concerns or grants to enable us to digitise records, however the criteria for accessioning are not affected by these considerations.

- 1.8 Q. With the electronically – based way government is run today, how can we ensure that the relevant e-mails are kept.
A. This is a hot topic at the moment. We do not manage staff in government departments, but we are in a position to influence the way government departments keep their records. It is a difficult task but we need strong people in government departments to ensure information management is a priority. This includes records created by non-government workers e.g. special advisors to politicians.
- 1.9 Q. Did The National Archives have involvement with the failed Siemens contract to produce digitised 1911 Birth, Marriage and Death Certificates?
A. No, these are not The National Archives records.

The presentation and the following discussion resulted in a round of applause for NC.

2 Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising

- 2.1 (2.3, 2.5) JA is looking at signage in general and there are new signs on order. It was asked if there could be time to install the new signage and work with it before the matter is discussed again. It was requested that a temporary sign is installed for the new toilets on the first floor
- 2.2 (2.4) Concern was expressed about the removal of the Times on microfilm, particularly with regard to copyright restrictions on the online version, which has replaced the microfilm. It was pointed out that copyright restriction exist for all forms of publications, regardless of format and that users, before publishing, should investigate their obligations.
- 2.3 (6.5) Concern was expressed over publicity of the recent light touch surveys.
It was explained that only 100 people over four days were targeted, and that a large stand-alone sign had advertised the event. The purpose of the exercise was to ensure that information will be gathered effectively during the main survey to be held over two weeks in September, and to function as a regular 'health check' following the major refurbishments - to see if there were any pressing issues that needed to be addressed. It was stressed that these findings were not statistically valid and were being used to gauge the present state of affairs.

- 2.4 The Library area.
(6.6) Helen Pye Smith will attend either the September or October forum to update us with her progress. In the meantime, due to feedback received some modifications are to be made to the library area; please bear with us while these changes are being instigated.
- 2.5 It will take between 6-8 weeks to implement the following:
LMO has had approval to install an upgraded lighting system
Extra tables are on order
252 metres of shelving is being re-instated, replacing the unused microfiche readers
480 crates of boxes are currently being unpacked (this will take approximately 6 weeks to complete)
Training is underway for all staff
(A more detailed handout on library improvements was distributed at the meeting and is available on the website – see separate document)
- Introduction of foreign language dictionaries: to be investigated by JL **JL**
- Once the above are in place improved signage and floor plans for the library will be implemented.
- 2.6 (10.2) This should read 'Finding Archives Day' and not 'Training Archives Day'
- 2.7 (11.4) LMO had a successful discussion with Jack Lincoln
- 3 Open discussion**
- 3.1 National Collections Strategy: A colleague is to be invited to the October meeting to answer questions.
The website is at present being updated, and a link will be sent round once this has been done.
- 3.2 Security issues: Concern was expressed for the lack of Security and protection of the records and finding aids.
The Welcome Desk stands back from the entrance and Security do not seem to have a high profile presence. This is being investigated and the desk may be rotated slightly so that all reception staff will have a more identifiable presence.
- 3.3 Jack Lincoln, Head of Security is looking into re-instating random bag searches.
- 3.4 Most of the security procedures we have are not visible. We have a sophisticated CCTV set-up, with 98 cameras and all information received is digitally recorded. Security Officers are on patrol. There are also tattle-tape machines at the entrance of the reading rooms on the first and second floors.

- 3.5 Use of mobile phones in the reading rooms is prohibited. New signage should help make users aware of this. Users should report infringements to members of staff.
- 3.6 Car park: the new barrier to monitor usage is due to be installed towards the end of the year: details are now being finalised. Results of a recent car park survey indicated that the majority of car park users are The National Archives users.
- 3.7 There are no times of opening on the signs to the car park. JL to investigate.
- 3.8 A 'Your Views' form was submitted about a user who had 4 indexes out at one time and then failed to return them. This is something to be monitored and staff and users alike need to be educated. PS is to look into the complaint and the answer received.
- 3.9 Paper cups had been offered in the Café recently. The paper cups had been used due to equipment failure, now resolved. If any food or drink is substandard, please speak to the restaurant staff at the time, or mention it to PS or JJ who are in regular contact with the Catering Manager.
- 3.10 The last MEMRIS (Medieval and Early Modern Records Information Service) magazine was last year and there had been no contact regarding further issues. MEMRIS had now been replaced by MEMLEX (Medieval, Early Modern and Legal – LEX being Latin for Legal), which includes the legal specialists team: the next magazine is due in autumn.
- 3.11 It was asked why there were so few MEMLEX experts in the MLDRR. It was felt that this was not the case and that all that worked there (except Jess – the room manager) were records specialists. Joyce Hoad to speak to Jess after the meeting.
- 3.12 British Airways archives were not sent to The National Archives like the major railways collections had been in the 1970s. The BA collection is looked after by volunteers – John King brought a recent article about the BA archives to the meeting. A number of users expressed an interest in obtaining a copy of the article, which will be distributed with these minutes.
- 3.13 Both the Times and Independent newspapers are supporting Bletchley Park in their attempt to get funding. It was suggested by a user that The National Archives could support them, especially as we have 77 classes and 11 indexes of files relating to Bletchley. JL to investigate further and contact the users concerned.
- 3.14 Talks Room
The doors into the Talks Room are very heavy and bright light

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through the doors and windows affects the screen during talks. Signage towards the Talks Room is insufficient. There is usually a member of staff available to guide visitors to the talks, but this is not always possible. JA to investigate.

JA

- 3.15 The 'Welcome to Kew' talk was thought excellent, but it was suggested that it be put on the website so that people can see it before their visit. There is to be a virtual tour on our website, but it will work together with the talks at Kew and will not replace them; not everyone has a computer, or will consult one before a visit.

Thanks was expressed for the lunch, which once again was excellent

Please note that all minutes and presentations are available at our website at: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/events/readers.htm>

- 4 The next meeting will be on Thursday 18 September in the Talks Room – all are welcome.**