

Title: The National Archives User Forum

Date of Meeting: Thursday 15 May 2008, 12:30pm

Location: Talks Room

Attendees

Staff:

JJ: Jeff James, Head of Advice and Records Knowledge (chair)  
JL: James Lawson, Customer Intelligence Manager (secretary)  
PS: Paul Sturm, Quality Manager  
CC: Chris Cooper, Kew 2008 Programme Manager  
AB: Amanda Bevan, Principal Records Specialist  
JS: Jessamy Sykes, Map and Large Document Reading Room Manager  
MS: Meg Sweet, Head of Records Management and Cataloguing  
HD: Howard Davies, Information Management Consultant  
DP: Dave Priest, Production Co-ordination Manager  
JS: Jacqui Shepherd,  
IB: Isabelle Biraben, Senior Project Manager  
KH: Karim Hussain, Advice and Records Knowledge  
CJAM: Carole MacCormack (minutes)

Readers:

Jonathan Collins, Patricio O'Neill, Roger Marsh, John Martin, Barbara Harvey, Martin Kane, A H Butler, Peter Gallagher, A Mears, B estani, Richard Bateson, John Gallehawk, Tom Tulloch-Marshall, John King, Janet Macdonald, Kea Maxwell Jones, Andy Nicholson, Clive G Gardener, Lawrence Woodcock, Bob O'Hara, Joyce Hoad, Pauline Eismark

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**1 Welcome from JJ**

JJ welcomed all to the new Talks Room, which will be used to give 'New to Kew' talks and specialist lectures. This will be the new home of The National Archives User Forum.

A leaflet listing the schedule of talks in the Talks Room is available, and the next run covering August to October will include dates for the User Forums.

Chris Cooper was present to answer any queries regarding the refurbishment of the reading rooms. The work is very close to the end; the final touches will be completed next month. A user satisfaction survey will be carried out during the summer.

**Action**

**2. Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising**

- 2.1 (2.2) The list of priority items to be tattle-taped was in last month minutes. It was requested that the Shelf Lists were considered for inclusion on the list:
- 2.2 (2.3) It was agreed that it is not impossible for the ATM to be moved – but there are a number of practical considerations. A privacy screen is to be placed around the ATM and users views will be considered once this is in place
- 2.3 (3.3) The new payment system for copying has been introduced. The public information screens are now in place but have yet to be programmed for use. *(post meeting note: the screens are now in use displaying basic information)*
- 2.4 (4.4, 7.4) Jone Garmendia, Senior Archivist and Catalogue Manager is to be invited to a future meeting, as will a member of Collection Care. A list of invited staff to speak at future meetings will be published. JL
- 2.5 (7.6) The Navy Board Project: Being dealt with off-line. JL to talk to Janet MacDonald. JL
- 2.6 The shelves in the Open Reading Room have now been adjusted and there is more room to consult the items on them; users at the forum appreciated this.
- 2.7 Locker doors: these have been inspected and will be replaced as necessary. It was thought that the upper locker doors should be more conspicuous, perhaps have additional stickers on them – this is being looked into. DP
- 2.8 The suitability of the square tables in the Document Reading Room is being looked into. LO

**3 Proposed Records Review Day: Meg Sweet**

- 3.1 Meg Sweet had been approached by Richard Bateson with a suggestion that TNA host a Records Review Day. MS reported that TNA would be happy to host a Records Review Day, and if successful it could be made into an annual event. Subjects that might be covered on the day would include:
- Operational selection policies and how to make the best of operational selection consultation
  - Role of the records review panel
  - Places of deposit Preservation of records not selected for preservation by TNA
  - The role of the Information Management Consultant
  - Brainstorming the events of particular relevance if 30-years transfer rule is recommended to be changed

It was envisioned that the first Records Review Day would take place towards the end of the year, and would be scheduled between late morning and early afternoon, to allow time for travel.

- 3.3 A working group, consisting of both TNA staff and users is to be set up to look into how the Records Review Day can be taken forward. Richard Bateson had already agreed to be on the group and further volunteers were called for. JL took down a list of several users who expressed an interest in being involved, which has been passed to Meg Sweet.
- 3.4 Suggested topics for discussion were also called for, and there was a good response from users; suggestions included.

Acquisitions strategy:

Presentations (in particular, MoD records not accessioned by TNA which go to regimental museums: it was pointed out that it is not that easy to gain entrance to these institutions)

Lack of continuity in some records e.g. early reports and inspections of railways are complete – yet after the 1960s records seem to ‘fizzle out’ have not been kept that accurately. Concern was expressed that modern railway records do not seem to be collected as fastidiously/accurately as those from earlier eras.

The relationship with the British Film Institute (we send our public information films to the BFI as we are unable to preserve them here)

#### **4 Post First World War service records held by the MoD – Howard Davies**

- 4.1 All service records are held by MoD, with the head of the team here liaising with the staff working in that government department. Due to staff changes at TNA, HD has been liaising directly with the MoD over the last year.
- 4.2 Four specific questions have been asked about MoD service personal records:
1. Which will be the next service records to be transferred
  2. Transfer earlier collections
  3. Will the transfer of these records be public
  4. Will the records have ‘next-of-kin’ sensibilities
- 4.3 The Ministry of Defence's retention approval lasts till 2010 – it needs the records for administrative pension reasons. The trigger for transfer is when they are no longer required for these purposes: i.e. when they stop paying servicemen's pensions.

Different services are filed by different dates: currently there are 4

categories for consideration:

1. 17,000 Army personnel born before 1895 and served beyond WWI (1921 and beyond) - these records include Winston Churchill.
  2. 45,000 enlisted into the RAF up until 1928
  3. 4,500,000 enlisted in the Home Guard in WWII (the planning for these records is going ahead on the assumption that the minister will agree)
  4. 27,000 naval ratings cards with date of birth up to 1920s
- 4.4 Long term all WWII records, once they have dropped out of administration use will be preserved here. Because of the sheer volume they will all be digitised.
- 4.5 Concern was expressed about the quality of digitising: what checking would be done to ensure that the work is done correctly, especially after the problems with the WWI records.
- 4.6 Many were not happy with digitising and gave the example that many of the moon landing records cannot now be read. JJ explained that we are aware of the problems of long-term preservation of digitised images: it was a big issue we are continually researching the topic.
- 4.7 It was asked if TNA staff would have any input to FOI requests while records were with MoD: unfortunately there is little scope for us to get involved at this stage.
- 4.8 Neither do we have any influence over disposal lists and cycles: there are no cycles for MoD records, no file-by-file reviews. Our cycles of records involve policy and policy developments. Service records are subject to the PR Act.
- 4.9 There are two submissions to the Ministry of State from MoD (now with the Ministry of State) – which proposes the above 4 categories of personnel records for early release after a consultation exercise. We are planning for the release, which will probably follow the current Data Security Review.
- 4.10 Opening of the records, once transferred: there is the assumption of a 100 years life expectancy, but this may need to be reconsidered in the future.
- 4.11 Exemptions: a small proportion may be kept closer longer for reasons of the personally sensitive information they contain that might have an effect on their descendants. There will be a sample analysis to see what is in a typical random selection of files – a decision can then be made. This process has been done for the Home Guard records seems to show no sensitive data.

- 4.12 The MoD has a duty of care to servicemen and their families, and it keeps the expected life span figure of 100 years under review. If the typical upper-life span of the individual alters over time this closure period might need to be extended in future.
- 4.13 AIR 81 – Air Ministry: Casualty Branch: Enquiries into Missing Personnel, 1939-45 War. These records are unlikely to be released in the near future. They are considered to be more sensitive than the Army and Navy records.

## **5 Non-availability of original documents**

There was a short presentation by DP (*see separate document*).

- 5.1 Documents out to staff and government departments are now being monitored more closely. Although the figures out to staff are high, numbers have been reduced and letters are sent out twice a year as a reminder.
- 5.2 Delivery times at peak have been maintained with an average of 20-21 minute production time. Production figures seem to be down but this is due to the closure periods.
- 5.3 Documents sent to Cheshire are low-usage, but if the situation alters and these documents become popular they can be relocated to Kew. If low usage documents at Kew are stored away from the production area, they also can be relocated nearer the production area. We do have the space and we do monitor usage of the classes.
- 5.4 It was asked if a presentation could be given at a future meeting on the Deep Store facilities in Cheshire.

DP/JL

## **6 Complaints, Suggestions and Compliments received by The National Archives**

- 6.1 Statistics, including the accumulative total from January to April were shown – this is available on the website (*see separate document*).  
Complaints included:
  - one involving the relocation of the security barrier (although there were favourable comments about this improvement)
  - a number about the water cooler: an apology was given – there was a problem with contracts that is being resolved
  - noise in the reading rooms – which is being addressed
  - noise by table 44
- 6.2 There were 17 operational complaints; users were asked to be aware of the systems of complaint so that we can follow up.
- 6.3 There were complaints about the noise from the automated doors opposite the Document Services information desk. JS explained that

there is a problem with the belt and the mechanism within it, which is currently being investigated).

- 6.4 Readers expressed concern that the Times Online is often unavailable. PWS explained that there is a limited number of licenses for this product, but that we would look in to increasing the number. *(post meeting note: the library are currently looking into getting a new type of license that offers unlimited access).*

**7 Finding Aids in the Map and Large Document Reading Room**

Jessamy Sykes, the Map & Large Document Reading Room Manager introduced herself. JS reported that two meetings have been arranged to discuss finding aids in the Map and Large Document Reading Room and to discover if there should be a provision for library books to be kept there.

Those wishing to listen to proposals or give their own views are invited to either:

a Working Breakfast on 11<sup>th</sup> June, Conference Room B (9:00 – 10:30)

or

a Working Tea on 17<sup>th</sup> June, location to be confirmed (16:30 – 18:00)

More information is available from Jessamy Sykes.

**8 The National Archive's public service performance against our targets**

This presentation can be downloaded from our website *(see separate document)*

**9 The next meeting will be at 12:30 (lunch from 12:15) on Thursday 19 June in the Talks Room – all are welcome**