



The National Archives

Academic strategy

The National Archives has a unique position, combining the responsibilities of a government department with those of a leading cultural heritage institution. Because we support the management of government's information from the point of creation through to access, we are in a position both to support research through access to records and to ensure that future research is supported by the way in which information is captured. Our role is not only to preserve and open the historical record we hold for researchers today, but also to protect the evidence that is core to future history and social science research.

We continue to value the scholarly community and our relationship with academics. This paper sets out some of the key services we provide to academic users of our archives and describes a direction of travel for the future.

Availability of records

Over the past 20 years, there has been a massive expansion in the range of records that we collect. Starting from our records of central government departments and the law courts, the collections have expanded to cover a wider and more comprehensive range of government activities. The number of items in our catalogue has increased from about six million in 1998 to over ten million now, providing an unparalleled source of vital research material to be explored by our academic users. Among the most significant developments which have allowed us to expand our collections are that we now take records from the Security Service and GCHQ, as well as archiving the entire government web estate three times a year.

We remain committed to ensuring the survival and accessibility of paper and parchment records. Our Collections Care Department is involved in world-leading research into a range of preservation challenges facing original records on a planet whose climate is changing rapidly. Our reputation for innovation in sustainable preservation of records, whether on paper or digitally, continues.

Services for researchers

Our services are world-class, and have been designed to facilitate access to our extensive collections in a range of ways. All researchers have the benefit of an integrated online and on-site service, with advance online ordering of original documents via our catalogue and bulk ordering for people who are working on a large number of documents from the same series of records. We have fast production times for records; we allow users to have a large number of records out at any one time and

our dedicated, expert staff are on hand to assist all users with any queries they may have. We provide more physical documents - and more quickly - than any other national archive in the world, all with over 90% of our readers completely satisfied. Our record copying charges are competitive and we encourage users to bring in their own digital cameras to photograph records. Currently we are experimenting with lending digital cameras to users to enable them to copy material free of charge and we have developed a Flickr community to allow users to share the digital images of records which they have captured.

We also provide access at Kew to a wide range of digital resources for free use to researchers, including the British Library local newspaper collection.

Online resources

We have invested in providing online access to our resources, allowing general users as well as the academic community much greater access to our collections. In 1998 we were the first archive in the world to provide a fully online version of its catalogue, and since then we have made increasing efforts to provide both improved catalogue data and copies of records over the internet.

We continue to provide improved access to catalogues. Our staff and a team of volunteers add a large range of new data to our online catalogue every year; last year we added 100,000 entries describing Chancery Proceedings and listed a range of other material including records relating to the Foreign Office, Female Prisoners and Convoys. Full details are available on our website:

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/about/operate/meetings/catboard/catprog.htm>

In terms of volume, the most significant piece of work has been the Supplementary Finding Aids project, which last year added a million entries to the online catalogue from manuscript finding aids. These were previously only available in the reading rooms.

We also provide online access to catalogues of local archives, notably the National Register of Archives, and have developed a wiki - Your Archives - which enables users to contribute their knowledge about records and historical topics to our catalogue. Visit Your Archives at:

http://yourarchives.nationalarchives.gov.uk/?source=ddmenu_search10

Digitising collections

We continue to work with a range of funding bodies and third parties to provide academic users with online access to a range of digital information. One of the most significant recent projects was the JISC-funded digitisation of the twentieth century Cabinet Papers, which has made a huge range of material covering almost every aspect of twentieth century government available free of charge. Users can keyword search the entire collection, making these documents more accessible than ever before, and opening up a vast amount of information to people all over the world. The website is an especially rich resource for students, covering more than 100 topics which form an integral part of both historical and social science university programmes. Visit Cabinet Papers at: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/>

Our on-going collaboration with Gale Cengage Learning aims to make 200 years of state papers available to academic institutions online. This digital resource for all

historians and students of Early Modern Britain and Europe is being released in four stages. It allows wide access to the authentic, original workings of government at the birth of the modern state and is available free at our Kew site.. When completed, State Papers Online will contain almost three million pages of correspondence, reports, memoranda and parliamentary drafts from civil servants and provincial administrators, and intelligence reports from foreign ambassadors.

For nineteenth century historians we provide free online access to the Government Gazettes – a major source on a range of topics, such as business formation, debt and imprisonment, as well as the more mundane workings of government.

For the medieval period we have the Parliament Rolls (1270 to 1503) and the Fine Rolls of Henry III. For those starting their careers we have online tutorials in both Latin and palaeography, as well as inductions to the reading rooms and research resources. (We offer free academic inductions at The National Archives for groups of between 15 and 25 postgraduates or researchers, and we can also hold inductions at individual universities or colleges for larger numbers). We are also involved in a number of joint PhD projects.

Non-commercial online academic partnerships

The National Archives currently licenses, facilitates and supports a range of free-to-view, grant-funded academic online services. These cover a diverse range of subjects far beyond the corpus sustainable by the commercial sector, and present significant volumes of imaged original records for research; these include international partnerships with archives, libraries and universities

Current projects include:

- **Anglo American Legal Tradition** funded by the University of Texas at Houston: over 1,000,000 medieval legal documents online at aalt.law.uh.edu/
- **British Film Institute 'In View Project'**, JISC funded project presenting TNA files on the thinking behind and creation of public information films, alongside film footage, launching 23 September 2010 at www.bfi.org.uk/inview/intro
- **CoRRAL** project – JISC funded project run from the MET Office's Hadley Centre, digitising Royal Navy ships' logs to extract and analyse historic climate data and map climate change www.corral.org.uk/
- **Sailing Letters** partnership with the National Library of the Netherlands, grant funded by Metamorfoze Contains Dutch language records from High Court Admiralty series, the source of many unique discoveries such as original eighteenth century slave medicine samples, seeds germinated by Kew Gardens and slave letters <http://www.kb.nl/sl/index.html>
- **Yale Indian Papers Project** *New England Indian Papers Series* is an electronic critical scholarly edition of New England Native American primary source materials from earliest contact in North America up to modern times. Currently in early development, www.library.yale.edu/yipp

We have also worked with third parties in the private sector to ensure that the most popular series of family history records are available online. As a result, Family History has become very much an online pursuit. Importantly, this has meant that numbers of researchers using our document reading rooms have remained constant over the past ten years, despite the closure of the Family Records Centre in 2008. This investment

has meant the reading rooms have been no busier, even with millions more users online.

New types of record

From early this century, the government began to create all its records electronically, using websites, email and word processed documents. This has had two consequences for us: first, it has meant that we have had to invest in a range of technologies to capture, preserve and deliver digital records; secondly, we are spending significant sums to ensure that government's digital records survive until they are ready to be transferred to the archive and that they can be preserved and delivered to users. The first fruits of this are now available online. Because of our unique long-term perspective, we are making sure that the evidence of today is safe for the future.

See:

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/webarchive/default.htm?WT.lp=sa-33628>

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ero/?WT.lp=sa-33634>

Impact of economic downturn on records

We have a great concern about the potential impact of the current economic difficulties on business archives. With a number of long-established and high profile companies going into liquidation, or falling into the hands of overseas organisations, there is a real risk that records of interest to business, economic and local historians may be lost. We have recently launched a strategy for business archives and are working with universities and local archives to ensure the survival of this material. Our role is to make the case for archives in the twenty-first century, as critical as a business, historical, and social resource.

Changes at The National Archives

Our budget has been under a number of cost pressures in recent years, which are continuing to increase. Our funding from central government has been flat (with no increase for inflation) for several years now, and we do not anticipate any rise in it in the immediate future. Despite this, our running costs continue to increase.

Against a backdrop of flat-funding, these pressures include:

- the need to ensure the survival of digital records for future history, requiring a significant investment
- increasing costs for storage. The Kew site is now full and every year we are having to acquire more off-site storage
- energy efficiency costs. The older of the two buildings at Kew is not as energy efficient as more modern facilities and consequently costs a great deal to heat and cool. This requires increasing sums to be spent on it to replace worn out plant and equipment
- inflationary pressures and general cost increases are having a further impact on our budget

As a result we have taken steps to control our running costs, to make sure that we can continue with our core activities and still have enough money for investments and contingencies. We have developed a budget which will achieve a cost saving of 10%

from 2010 as well as provide sufficient money to meet our running costs and undertake appropriate investments and replacements of obsolete plant and equipment. To see full details of the changes resulting from this cost saving, visit our website at:

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/how-we-are-run/changes.htm>

These steps have given us a one-off opportunity to invest in the two most important areas for researchers. First, we can now drive essential improvement in our Kew estate to meet environmental challenges – and improve the preservation and researcher environment as well. Second, we will invest in making our catalogue and search technologies world-class, making it far easier for academics to research, access, and use our records.

Future services to scholarly users

The academic community is greatly-valued by The National Archives. We intend to deepen and strengthen our services to academic users over the next few years. Our agenda to achieve this is set out below:

1. Develop our services to academics by further analysis of the way they use our holdings and through open consultation with the academic community. We will achieve this by:

- developing targeted digitisation products – by examining patterns of use carefully, and with the collaboration of academics, we can provide online access to collections of records which meet the needs of our scholarly users
- inviting comment and future collaboration through our wiki (Your Archives)

2. Enhance our finding aids to enable better resource discovery. We will achieve this through:

- provision of a new and easier to use online catalogue with enhanced search capability, which should greatly facilitate discovery of relevant resources within and beyond The National Archives
- continued enhancement of our catalogue descriptions using a mixture of The National Archives' staff, volunteers and external expertise
- provision of enhanced access to government data and statistical records
- continuing to work closely with research councils and other funding bodies to secure resources for specific cataloguing, records survey or digitisation projects
- Continuing to explore research partnerships with the academic community when these fulfil our strategic priorities

3. Develop our links with the broader academic community through:

- further collaboration with users to explore ways in which new research questions can be answered in the digital world. For example, how can we facilitate academic use of our online census records, as in the case of the UK Data Archive at the University of Essex
- continuing to work with local archives and private owners of collections of records to ensure that there is a vibrant and sustainable network of local archive resources
- developing closer links with the university sector in the implementation of the proposed new Government policy on archives, *Archives for the 21st Century*.
- building links with information management and archival education programmes in the university sector

Communications

The academic community has been right to emphasise that we have not worked as closely together as we would have liked. We recognise that links need to be improved and are working closely with colleagues from the British Academy, Royal Historical Society, Historical Association and Institute of Historical Research to put in place mechanisms to permit better two-way communications. We have put the following initiatives in place:

- A quarterly meeting between our CEO and leading figures from the main learned societies – the Royal Historical Society, British Academy and Historical Association. These meetings are enabling us to develop a shared strategy for academic research and to consult and listen in both directions
- A series of one-to-one meetings between The National Archives and historians to enable us to identify what their needs are and to develop trust and mutual understanding
- Improved communications – we publish a research e-newsletter which goes out to academics and we aim to get higher profile coverage in the THES
- Leveraging attendance by staff at conferences and outputs, such as articles in peer-reviewed journals

In addition, we are continuing with our successful programme of collaborative PhDs. We are involved in three projects where members of The National Archives staff partner academics in supervising a PhD in a subject that also benefits us: one in the field of history, one in archive studies and one in preservation.

Diverse histories

For a number of years we have engaged with historians who work on black, Asian, gay and lesbian history and the history of mental illness. They have been influential in encouraging us to reconsider the terms used in our catalogues, for example. We now wish to deepen and broaden this engagement and have therefore agreed with the Royal Historical Society to use the annual Aylmer seminar to discuss how we can better engage with these communities. At the seminar in April, we will be discussing how we can meet their needs in terms of the records we select and the access we provide and we will also be asking how they can engage with, and support us, in the future.

We very much welcome comments and suggestions from academic users. Please send these to: David.thomas@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk