

Prize Papers Project Launch

I'm delighted to be here in Oldenburg tonight to mark the launch of the Prize Papers Project. This is a hugely exciting and ambitious project between The UK National Archives and The University of Oldenburg which will take us to 2030 and beyond. This ambitious and exciting project - to catalogue, transcribe, digitise and make available this incredibly rich and largely unexplored collection - will make public – for the first time ever - the undelivered letters, journals, poems and artefacts captured from ships seized by the British from the 17th to the 19th century.

This is a collection of truly global importance. It is therefore fitting that the team will be drawn from many different countries, with students drawn from around the world, becoming - in effect - international ambassadors for us and for the project.

As Keeper of The National Archives, what excites me most is finding new ways to open up our collection to a new audiences – not just in the UK but internationally. And - as all of us here know - it is very often collaboration which is the key to making this happen. We all recognise the value of working together to achieve more than we can alone.

That is why last year we published our first international strategy – Archives Inspire the World – to promote the value of archival collections around the world, facilitate research, support collaboration and pioneer solutions to the challenges facing archives – not least digital.

The outputs from the Prize Papers project will eventually be made available to a global audience online – to anyone, anywhere, at any time. A fitting reflection of the international provenance of the papers.

We also know that there is a huge amount of interest in this collection - not just in the UK but much further afield. The sheer wealth of research opportunities that this will open up is breath-taking.

It's fair to say that we are living during a period of immense interest in - and scrutiny of - those significant historical events which have shaped our nations. People want to understand the past and this project will shine a light on a period in history – on the seas – that demands to be much better understood.

That is why I am delighted to be here tonight. We very much look forward to welcoming the team to Kew next month to start work on this fantastic project.

Thank you.

Jeff James
25 April 2018