

**Title: The National Archives' User Forum**

**Date: 22 January 2015**

**Location: Talks Room**

**Attendees (staff):**

Lee Oliver (LMO) Interim Head of ARK and Head of Public Services Development (Chair); Caroline Ottaway-Searle (COS) Director of Public Services and Human Resources; Mary Gledhill (MG) Commercial Director; Julia Jones (JJo) Head of Information Management and Practice; Roger Kershaw (RK) Head of Military, Maritime, Transport and Public History, ARK; Helen Pye-Smith (HP-S) Head of Library and Deployment Services; Tom Gregan (TG) Head of Document Services; Richard Grocock (RG) Operations, Storage and Contract Liaison Manager; David Priest (DP) Production Co-ordination Manager; Foluke Abiona (FA) Customer Intelligence Manager; Emily McIntyre (EMc) Customer Intelligence Officer; Joanna Robinson (JCR) Customer Intelligence Assistant (Minutes).

**Attendees (outside speakers)**

Paul Relfe (PR) (The Stationery Office Pre-Press Manager)

**Attendees (users)**

Roger Whitworth; Chris Eley, Richard Travell; P. Eismark; David Matthew; Peter Thorsheim; Sharon Hintze; B. McKechnie; Bob Rogers; Michael Hill; John Seaman; Richard P. Bateson.

**1. LMO welcomed all to the meeting.**

1.1 LMO introduced PR, who has come to speak following requests from User Forum attendees.

**2. Demonstration of how to navigate The Gazette's online search facility – Staff from The Stationery Office (TSO).**

2.1 PR explained that The Gazettes have been through more changes in the last 20 years than the previous 200. He said that TSO understand that there can be problems navigating the site, but hoped attendees would see that recent changes have been for the better.

PR then gave a presentation about The Gazette website. He explained the layout of the Home page, and pointed out useful features which have been developed from user feedback, including an updated search guide, and a 'Handy hints' section. There are four key places to begin searching: All notices; Wills and Probate for deceased estate notices; Insolvency; and Awards and Accreditation. PR advised that

'All notices' is a good place for beginners to start searching on the Gazette. He also pointed out the News section, and a guide on how to begin a search immediately.

PR explained that the TSO team have needed to break 350 years of archived Gazettes into manageable digitised chunks. He said that the website is evolving constantly, and that user feedback will continue to be welcome.

PR said that 'All notices' allow users to search regardless of category. The 'handy hints' section explains the steps to take to search efficiently, and incorporates text guides and a video. PR explained ways to identify a 'John Smith', by using date, place, year, and postcode. He advised that once you are registered on the Gazette site, you are able to save your searches, which can be particularly useful when conducting military research.

PR also explained a feature which allows site users to create PDF 'mini Gazettes', at no charge, in which connected notices may be kept. There is also the ability to connect to social media, so users can share discoveries.

PR then explained how to look for a company or person in the Insolvency section, and advised that this is most useful for searching for corporate insolvency; searching for personal insolvency is more difficult.

PR said that searching Probate is useful for relatives dealing with estates. The Gazette website has advice on how to deal with estates matters.

2.2 Q. How can you search for a postcode, for example if you enter 'Birmingham' as a search term?

A. Searching for 'Birmingham' will search through all B postcodes, so you would need to add any further information you have to help narrow down the search.

2.3 Q. The search engine needs to have a wildcard for possible postcodes. However, there should be two wildcards, one for B followed by a digit, and one for B followed by a letter.

A. PR said he will find out the best way to search for postcodes.

2.4 Q. How recent are the published Gazettes? Are they as up to date as the Courts and Tribunals service?

A. Today is the most recent! We add to the site every day.

2.5 PR then spoke about the Honours and Awards section, and explained how to search for notices from 1998 onwards. He said most people use it for MoD supplements.

2.6 Q. In the supplements, there is a huge problem with OCR software; there are lots of misreads.

A. Yes, there can be issues with OCR when it comes to old documents, though the software is improving all the time. We do fix these problems as we become aware of them so if you find an error, we can change it. We are considering crowd-sourcing though we can't yet say when or if this will happen.

2.7 Q. I have reported an error to the Gazette, and received an email of thanks, but not a confirmation that a change has been made.

A. Thank you for bringing this up – we will look into this as we aim to give feedback when errors have been corrected.

2.8 Q. When searching for a person using their initials, is it important to use a full stop?

A. This can vary, as we only publish what we are supplied with and the editing styles can vary. This can be a challenge when searching. I would recommend trying different variations in cases like this. I also recommend that you remember the context within which you are searching. For example, if you search for 'how many died on the first day of the Somme' you will not find the result you are looking for, as that search will not find a match within the kind of data published in the Gazette.

2.9 Q. It would be useful to have a catalogue of British Nationality cases on the Gazette, for example the ability to search for common names such as 'Goldberg' within nationality notices.

A. We will look into this, but it may not be easy to achieve.

2.10 Q. MG asked if there are tagging facilities for users on the Gazette.

A. PR said not at the moment, but it would be a good feature to consider in future.

2.11 Q. What about the MoD Supplements that contain most of the honours and awards entries?

A. MoD supplements are published by MoD. It's not clear exactly why they are published on the Tuesday, as a supplement to the Monday edition. The entry will state what date it was published, and if you search within the following day you will have more chance of finding it. I will make a URL available which will take you to the indexes. When searching the Gazette by page number, the supplement continues the page numbering from the Gazette for that day.

*Post-meeting note:*

*URL to access Gazette indexes:*

<https://www.thegazette.co.uk/%7bEdition%7d/index/year/%7byear%7d/volume/%7bvolume%7d>

*Changing the edition, year or volume number in the URL will allow the other indexes to be accessed. For example:*

<https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/index/year/1909/volume/4> would return Volume 4 of the index for 1909 for the London Gazette.

2.12 Q. In the December UAG minutes (Item 4.14 12/14) there was a question about the closure of the London Probate Office. Is this anything to do with The Gazette?

A. LMO said this is totally separate.

### **3. Matters Arising**

3.1 Q. (Item 5.1 11/14) No notices have been put up on the proper use of these tables. I have seen people continuing to use these tables to look at documents.

A. RG said that we have had notices in the past which had no effect. It is therefore a matter of policing the area, rather than using notices.

Q. Why not remove these tables?

A. The tables are necessary for those who have ordered several documents, as used correctly; they provide a safe place to rest document boxes while accessing other items in document lockers.

3.2 (Item 2.6 11.14) Regarding WO 97, how large is this series?

A. LMO answered, approximately 5,500 pieces.

Q. I looked for the WO 97 Red List, but couldn't find it.

A. LMO said that this list was one that had been removed as it met the removal criteria – WO 97 has been fully indexed by name, online.

3.3 (Item 3.2 11/14) Is Jeff James still interested in hearing suggestions for the four year plan?

A. This item referred to a discussion at the September 2014 UAG. The four year plan is now at an advanced stage, but we are always happy to hear suggestions.

3.4 (Item 3.8 11/14) The December UAG agenda says half an hour is devoted to Jeff James on the TNA strategy for 2015-2019, but in the minutes this item is in a 'Separate confidential minute'. Yet we have information on the subject from the agenda.

A. The agenda was not confidential, but points in the discussion were not appropriate to be made public at this stage.

3.5 Q. (Item 3.13 11/14) It is interesting that some MoD service records have been released for individuals born 100 years ago, whereas some are retained for 116 years from date of birth.

A. The reason for this is because of the way the records were created and managed. Some parts of the Armed Forces kept records by date of birth, but others by date of recruitment or service number. The records were created in different ways and therefore need to be handled differently.

3.6 Q. (Item 4.5 11/14) Will it be possible to extend the time of the February meeting?

A. We don't have an event following on from User Forum that day, so we may be able to extend the time, within reason.

3.7 Q. (Item 5.2 11/14) Are there any further plans for a booklet?

A. We have no plans to produce any more booklets. There will be a webinar on Monday 25 January on how to use Discovery.

#### **4. Open Discussion**

4.1 Q. I have previously asked IMP about Record Transfer Reports. It will be eight months since the last Record Transfer Report was released. I hope the due report is ready to consult before the Extraordinary User Forum in February.

A. The Record Transfer Report can only be published once the Keeper has been given permission to publish by our Minister. We appreciate the importance of seeing the report before the February User Forum, but process has to be followed and the publishing date is outside of our control.

4.2 Q. I am concerned about the fragmentation of records online, where AIR 27/1518 appears in 70 different files. This makes it difficult to use. Why has this happened to some files and not others? AIR 27/1518 has been fragmented, but AIR 27/1519 has not.

A. This is a known issue. We will be keeping the microfilms of this series in the reading rooms until this is resolved.

4.3 Q. The decorations at TNA around Christmas last year were very disappointing. There didn't seem to be much evidence that TNA had made any effort to decorate the building; the only decoration was bland, and it could have been any time of year.

A. We will take this away. TNA does not possess Christmas decorations, apart from lighting our tree. Expenditure on Christmas decorations would have to be at the expense of something else.

4.4 Q. Many archives and libraries are cutting costs. One local archive has had a £17m refurbishment and is only open for half the week.

A. As lead for the archive sector, TNA is well aware of the financial pressures on archives.

4.5 Q. I have previously reported this issue to the Friends of TNA; the television in the restaurant is sometimes tuned into Sky News, which I don't think is appropriate to broadcast in The National Archives. I have had responses saying that TNA doesn't want the channel changed, but it is sometimes still tuned to Sky News.

A. COS said that this has been noted and reported to Estates and Facilities. She said that we are looking at implementing more robust measures to prevent the television channel being changed from BBC News.

4.6 Q. I have serious concern about the issues facing IWM Library. Is TNA keeping an eye on what is happening there?

A. We are keeping up to date with the situation. However we can't comment on the situation, or intercede with decisions IWM make about their library.

Q. Surely TNA has an influence on and a responsibility to the welfare of such archives?

A. We have a responsibility to archives, not to library services. The IWM archive collection is not part of the Library.

LMO reminded attendees that the February User Forum will focus on the selection and transfer of records and the roles played by government departments, The National Archives and others in this process, including the impact of the Freedom of Information Act (FOI) and Data Protection Act (DPA). Questions must be submitted in advance.

**Next meeting: Tuesday 17 February 2015, 15:15-16:30**