

Title: The National Archives' User Forum

Date: 15th November 2018, 12.30pm – 1.30pm

Location: Talks Room

Attendees

Staff:

Neil Curtis (NC) – Director of Finance & Commercial
Paul Davies (PD) – Director of Operations (for Jeff James, Keeper & Chief Executive)
Caroline Ottaway-Searle – Director of Public Engagement
Lee Oliver (LO) – Head of Venue Management & Services (chair)
Tom Gregan (TG) – Head of Document Services
Christine Peters (CP) - Team Leader, Services Development
David Priest (DP) – Document Production Coordination Manager
Hafiz Sule (HS) - Estates Customer Service Manager
Ailsa Vigrass (AV) – PA to Val Johnson & Neil Curtis (notes)

Users:

Jacqueline Speel
Pauline Eismark
Chris Eley
Charles McNaught-Davis
Joyce Hoad

1. **LO welcomed all to the meeting** and advised that PD would be providing the Keeper's Session on behalf of Jeff James.

2. Matters Arising - August meeting notes.

2.1 Item 2.3 - is there any update on the evaluation of the results of the trial period for late night opening?

LO advised that this has been completed and a report is to be presented to the Executive Team in two weeks. A further update will be given to the Forum at the February meeting.

3. Update on the Fees Order.

3.1 NC advised that the Fees Order has been reviewed and is being updated, the last time this happened being in April 2017. The Fees Order operates on a cost recovery basis. NC mentioned there had been a number of cost pressures (business rates and London Living Wage) that had been absorbed but also a number of process efficiencies that had been incorporated resulting in minimal changes to pricing.

3.2 It is anticipated that the new pricing will come into effect from January 2019.

3.3 Have there been any staff reductions? Some familiar faces have disappeared.

NC replied that there had been a number of voluntary exits in April and September as part of TNA's 'Developing our Future Workforce' programme. New roles with different skill sets are being created to help TNA meet its challenges as part of 'Archives Inspire'.

3.4 How would the digitisation of a previously un-digitised record be captured in the pricing structure?

NC confirmed that this would equate to a black and white/colour digital copy and would be charged per page as per the published Fees Order rate. DP advised that users may take photographs for private use for free. LO confirmed that if an image is to be used for commercial purposes, published or shared publicly, agreement from TNA would be required beforehand.

4. Keeper's Session.

4.1 The text of the Keeper's update given by PD is in the Annex to these notes.

Questions on the Keeper's update:

4.2 A recent episode of BBC's 'Click' programme reviewed a new form of media giving far denser information storage. Is TNA aware of this?

PD was unaware of the specific media referred to but reassured that TNA's Digital Preservation Department is focused on researching the challenges posed by storage needs not just for TNA but archives as a whole. This is a worldwide problem as the old paper based paradigms will no longer work for the future and 'disruptive' digital archive.

4.3 How is TNA approaching the shelf life of metal disc based storage?

PD advised that knowing when to transfer records to digital is a big challenge. He cited the British Library's transference of audio files from wax cylinders to CDs to digital whilst keeping the original cylinders as an example of the need to retain the original record format. The challenge is to anticipate storage challenges and utilise the most appropriate technology.

4.4 Given the risks of obsolescence has consideration been given to printing digital material out?

PD – Obsolescence is a challenge but the volumes created by printing would make this option unfeasible. Day-to-day government is now executed digitally - TNA will play an important role in helping to educate government departments on how to select the most important and historically significant material especially in relation to social media and email.

4.5 A number of local authorities are experiencing severe financial difficulties e.g. Northamptonshire. What responsibilities does TNA have in supporting local archives?

PD – local archives are the financial responsibility of the relevant local authority. TNA’s leadership role includes supporting local archives and advising local councils in respect of their statutory obligations in the provision of archive services.

4.6 Has TNA taken over the running of any archives negatively impacted by local authority finances?

PD – No.

5. Open discussion

5.1 Is it correct that the Commonwealth Graves Commission (CWGC) is exempt from FOI and why?

LO - the CWGC is not a public record body as defined by the Public Records Act. As a charitable foundation it is not covered by FOI legislation. TNA provides and publishes guidance and advice to public record bodies which they can follow. Any further questions regarding records or action of the CWGC would need to be raised with them.

5.2 What are the current legal and practical positions regarding FOIs in respect of Air Historical Branch, the MoD and TNA when it comes to AIR81 files? Transfers to TNA seem once again to have ground to a complete halt.

LO – AIR 81 records held by TNA and MoD are subject to FOI and a request can therefore be raised. TNA are unable to comment on MoD’s charging regime and any further queries should be submitted to MoD. This year two batches were transferred and released in April and another in July. There are more transfers in the pipeline but with no firm transfer date at present. Further queries regarding the transfer of records should be directed to MoD.

Post meeting note: a further batch of 1,037 AIR 81’s have been received and will be released soon following normal post-receipt processing.

5.3 If an AIR81 file is opened, is that file transferred to TNA and available in Discovery? Can the Air Historical Branch collect £30 from repeat enquiries on it? Is the file transferred open or closed?

LO – files are transferred to TNA when they have been processed and not when they have been opened by AHB in response to an enquiry. TNA are unable to comment on MoD charging regime.

5.4 Is TNA aware of any previous challenge to disclosures (as in the case of AIR81) via MoD’s Information Rights Compliance team?

LO - it is recommended that users look at the Information Commission's (ICO) decision notices on the ICO website, searching for Section 40 and MoD. The information tribunal's database may also be searched.

5.5 It is difficult to locate the 'Advanced Search' function on TNA's website. Other than bringing this up by opening a file, where can this be located?

DP – there are four access points on the TNA website: 1) the search box on the front page; 2) an A-Z listing at the bottom of the page; 3) by finding a document and selecting the 'Choose' button; 4) under 'Plan your visit' option on the front page. LO advised that the 'Findability' project is looking to improve navigability of TNA's site – this is a constant process as technology and the internet evolves.

5.6 Are there any figures available from 2017 on the number of reclosed files?

LO will take this forward as an action with a view to updating the TNA website.

6. Date of next meeting:

Thursday 21st February 2019, 12.30-13.30.

* * * * *

ANNEX. Keeper's Update: Highlights and reflections on 2017-18 (PD)

Introduction

I am delighted to be here today, though it is unfortunate that Jeff is unable to attend. He sends his sincerest apologies.

Three years ago, we published *Archives Inspire*, our ambitious, audience-focused strategy. *Archives Inspire* sets out what we wanted to do in order to meet the needs of our major audiences: government, the public, the archives sector, and the academic and research communities.

Archives Inspire was a deliberate departure from our previous business plan, *For the Record, For Good*, which largely spoke about our public task to collect, preserve and provide access to public records. *Archives Inspire* speaks to the public good we deliver, and how we can change the way people think about archives by articulating what archives are for. It looks outwards, arguing that we need to think and organise ourselves differently if we are to meet the needs of our four core audiences. And, it also recognises that archives need to embrace how much digital technologies have changed what it means to be an archive.

Next year marks the completion of *Archives Inspire*, and we are currently in the midst of creating a new four-year plan. The aim is that this future strategy will build on what we've learned – and achieved – over the last four years. So, this afternoon, I'd like to share with you all a few highlights and reflections of 2017-18, the penultimate year of *Archives Inspire*.

Our government audience

More than ever, the public expects government to be transparent. The Public Records Act 1958 sets out our statutory role of ensuring that government departments meet their obligations around records management and preservation. During 2017-18, we strengthened our partnership with the Cabinet Office under the 'Better Information for Better Government' programme, driving improvements across government in managing digital records.

We accessioned an unprecedented number of public records, a total of 74,551 over the course of the year. We also released a wide variety of records to the public, including Cold War espionage material from the 1960s, and those charting the defection of Kim Philby and the Profumo Affair.

The work leading up to the UK's exit from the EU presents various challenges across government. Over the past year, we made preparations to support departments with pre- and post-exit legislation. This includes adaptations to the drafting tools and publishing system we provide for new legislation. And, the publication of the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill, which will create new duties for the Queen's Printer of Acts of Parliament to publish European legislation post-exit. If you weren't already aware, since 1 July 2017, Jeff James holds the offices of Queen's Printer of Acts of Parliament, Queen's Printer for Scotland and Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. Since October 2017, Jeff also holds the office of Government Printer for Northern Ireland.

Over the coming months, and indeed into the New Year, our immediate focus includes supporting departments to develop their digital capacity so that they can transfer born-digital records to Kew for permanent preservation.

Engaging and growing our audiences

We truly do wish to change the way people think about and use archives, and over the last year, we have engaged new audiences with our unique and fascinating records. Once again, we threw open our doors – from our ‘Archives at Night’ events, to Open House, to our programme of events covering the Tudors, suffrage, the First World War, 20th-century Britain, and LGBT+ history – to name just a few.

In the spring, we opened a stunning new 250-capacity event space which has since been used for film screenings, lectures, performances, conferences and choirs.

Our award-winning education programme reached thousands of schoolchildren and students across the country, bringing our historical records – and the events they describe – to life.

We’d like to say many thanks to The Friends of The National Archives who provided financial support for our educational, outreach and ‘What’s On’ programmes, and volunteered their time to help deliver a number of tours and events.

We also loaned our records to other institutions across the UK and internationally, giving new audiences the opportunity to see our records in different places. Perhaps our most iconic record, Domesday, dating back nearly a thousand years, went on display at Lincoln Castle for their ‘Battles and Dynasties’ exhibition. Domesday was enjoyed by more than 80,000 visitors across the region, and it is currently part of the British Library’s major ‘Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms’ exhibition that runs until February 2019. Further afield, we also loaned records to the Netherlands, France, Germany and the USA.

We continued to provide opportunities for young people to engage with our collections in creative ways. ‘Somme Tales’, a student animation short film based on our First World War records, won the international MEDEA Award for Best User Generated Content, out of more than 100 entries from over 26 countries.

We have updated many of the services on offer to the public in our document reading rooms. Visitors can now order more documents in advance than ever before, and are able to download and send documents to their own devices. This move to a paperless environment has been very high, a change for many of our users.

Our aspirations involve reimagining our public spaces to encourage more people to experience archives. As part of these plans, The National Archives Trust will be launched in the New Year. It has two charitable objects, which, put plainly come down to 1) education in the public record and other collections; and 2) advancement of heritage through increasing public interest in our work. Given the broad range of our work – research, digital, leadership of the archives sector – these objects leave a broad scope for the charity to work for many

different parts of the organisation. We also have the support of some fascinating public figures as Trustees.

Sustaining and supporting our ecosystem of archives

As the sector leader for England's 2,500 archives, it has been a busy year. We began to put into action the ambitions around digital capacity, resilience and impact, set out in *Archives Unlocked*, the government's strategic vision for archives, co-created with the archives sector that was launched in March 2017.

A key theme of the vision's action plan is improving the sector's digital capacity. To this end, we successfully applied to the Heritage Lottery Fund for our new trainee programme, 'Bridging the Digital Gap'. More than £720,000 will go towards recruiting 24 trainee digital archive technicians. This successful application marks a big step towards growing the necessary digital expertise, and in diversifying talent throughout the sector, as well as providing entry-routes into the profession overall.

In addition to funding, we looked to build resilience within the sector by supporting the development of 12 archive networks. These networks are vital as they enable archives to tackle common problems by pooling resource and expertise. We also developed a workforce development strategy, which looks to scope and improve knowledge and skills across the sector.

The Archive Service Accreditation scheme, the UK-wide standard awarded to archives, continues to thrive. We collaborated with the Digital Preservation Coalition on the development of a new digital component to the scheme, and there are now more than 100 accredited services in England and Wales, with many more underway since.

The past year proved difficult for many archive services. The sector as a whole faces a challenging landscape in relation to achieving financial sustainability, identifying new income streams, and sustaining their services. To help UK archives catalogue and unlock the potential of their collections, we launched our new funding programme, 'Archives Revealed'. This programme has a total funding of £825,000 over three years: £300,000 from The National Archives, £300,000 from The Pilgrim Trust and £225,000 from the Wolfson Foundation.

Lastly, the annual 'Explore Your Archive' campaign, delivered in partnership with the Archives and Records Association, was once again successful. During the launch week, we trended every day on Twitter. Over 28,000 tweets were sent using campaign hashtags, and more than 100 archives ran a total of 189 events across the country.

Pioneering and leading research

Research is at the heart of what we do, underpinned by our status as an Independent Research Organisation. The success of our inaugural summer lecture series, 'Secrets and Lies', is testament to the public's keen interest for lively debate and rigorous scholarship. Sponsored by the Friends of The National Archives, and supported by the Royal Historical Society, we were honoured to host high-profile academic speakers and over 450 delegates.

We also delivered the fifth annual 'Discovering Collections, Discovering Communities' conference, in partnership with Research Libraries UK, attracting more than 430 delegates from the archives, library, museum and academic sectors.

International research collaboration presents real opportunities for us, and we are delighted to be a primary partner in an international research project to digitise and catalogue the Prize Papers; around 160,000 undelivered letters seized from captured ships in the 17th to 19th centuries. This massive project, led by The University of Oldenburg, and funded through the Union of the German Academies of Sciences and Humanities, will receive €9.7 million and take 20 years to complete.

We developed our infrastructure and technology in order to enhance our research capabilities. A new Research Hub provides an on-site centre for supporting research. In addition, investment in new conservation technology enabled us to continue developing techniques and processes that help us to safeguard the record.

We also continued to raise our digital research profile through the development of a series of digital experimentation workshops, helping to establish key relationships with academic and industry partners.

The disruptive digital archive

Digital remains our greatest challenge and our digital strategy, published in March 2017, sets out our direction of travel. We are leading the way in rethinking a century or more of archival practice and, in doing so, fast becoming a digital archive by instinct and design. Throughout the year, we started the process of delivering the strategy, exploring in detail the development of new systems for transferring and providing access to government digital records.

We moved our 120-terabyte web archive to the cloud, making it one of the largest cloud-based archives in the world. And, we made improvements to our online services, introducing a new home page for our website and updating how we display information about records on our catalogue, Discovery. We continue to enhance our online services to make it easier for anyone, anywhere to access our records.

We shared digital knowledge and expertise with archives and archivists across the world, and presented our new practices to international audiences at the Association of Canadian Archivists, and the Archives and Records Association conferences. We also continued to be an active and contributing member of both the Digital Preservation Coalition and the DLM Forum, in addition to joining the Open Preservation Foundation in early 2018. Our leadership role of the Forum of National Archivists, a section of the International Council on

Archives, also provided an opportunity for us to drive shared learning across national archives in the arena of digital.

We developed our capability as a digital archive: replacing hardware used for our Digital Records Infrastructure, or DRI, widening the types of record we can preserve and publishing software that helps to automate the creation of metadata. However, further investment is still needed to overcome many technical limitations.

We continue to find it a challenge to recruit digital expertise. However, this year, in collaboration with Ada: the National College of Digital Skills, we recruited five new digital apprentices for a two-year programme. We also developed the knowledge and skills of existing colleagues in key areas, including cloud computing services and machine learning.

Last but by no means least, we partnered with the University of Surrey on their research project, 'Archangel', launched in 2017. The project seeks to ensure the long-term sustainability of digital archives through the design, development and trialling of transformational new distributed ledger technology.

Conclusion

As we come to the end of *Archives Inspire*, there is still much that we need to do for our audiences, and we are confident that we will achieve much more. We couldn't have accomplished, or learned so much, without our staff, partners, volunteers, the Friends of The National Archives, and of course, all our visitors – both online and in person at Kew.

2019 is almost here, and we plan to continue to look outwards, forging exciting new collaborations and partnerships with a range of organisations and public bodies across the UK and the rest of the world, in a bid to define what it means to be a 21st century archive.

Thank you.

Are there any questions?

* * * * *