



A YEAR IN ARCHIVES 2017

TRUST

People and institutions trust in the authenticity of archive records, and how they are preserved and presented.

Building trust in collections through diversity of records

Diverse archive collections hold the key to widening participation and representing all sections of society. What archives choose to hold has to complement and challenge more formal historical records and give voice to people that that are often invisible or silent in records.

It is refreshing to see the commitment of institutions like the Bishopsgate Institute, University of Bristol and London Metropolitan Archives (LMA) to doing just that.

The Bishopsgate Institute was the first to put out a call for people to deposit material from the womens march in January 2017 with them. Its long tradition of collecting materials from London protests and campaigns (including two of the largest demonstrations in British history; the National Reform League demonstration 1866 and the Stop the War demonstration 2003) is pivotal in representing often marginalised people and events.

Funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, Speak Out London, Diversity City is a community-led LGBTQ+ oral history project based at LMA that has focused on collecting information about everyday lives from 1945 to the present. The records include a new and significant contemporary archive of oral histories and ephemera, representing often marginalised sections of society.

The University of Bristol Special Collections went into overdrive, asking people to collect and send them the election leaflets which come through their door for all 650 Westminster Constituencies, covering over 3,000 candidates. This allows future generations to have an insight into the political landscape and manifestos.

It is projects like these that enhance links with the community and a sense of ownership, ensuring that no one in society is left out of our history.

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THE THINKING BEHIND OUR COLLECTING IS TO ALLOW FUTURE GENERATIONS TO UNDERSTAND HOW DEMOCRACY AND SOCIETY ARE STRENGTHENED BY THE COLLECTING OF ARCHIVE RECORDS.

STEFAN DICKERS, LIBRARY SPECIAL COLLECTIONS MANAGER, BISHOPSGATE INSTITUTE

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ENRICHMENT

Archives enhance and enrich our society intellectually, culturally and economically.

Graffiti and archives may sound like a strange combination, but the success of the Strong Rooms project, an outdoor, touring art installation, was a significant milestone for the newly-launched Archives West Midlands last summer.

Supported by Arts Connect West Midlands and funded by Arts Council England, the project presented archives in a totally different way.

Birmingham-born street artist Mohammed Ali MBE of Soul City Arts was commissioned to develop a new archives-inspired work to tour venues in Coventry, Dudley, Rugby and Worcester. Mohammed is well-known for fusing street art with Islamic script and patterns to convey meaningful messages connecting people of all faiths.

The two graffitied shipping containers spent a week at each venue. Artists were

commissioned to engage with community groups at each location, talking about the installation. The tour was supported by volunteers and staff from the key partners: Warwickshire County Record Office, Culture Coventry Trust, Dudley Archives and Local Studies, and Worcestershire Archives and Archaeology Service.

Nearly 8,000 people participated directly, most of whom were completely new to archives. The installation was viewed by 40,000 passers-by. Coverage by Midlands Today, radio and local newspapers reached more than three million people. This project clearly demonstrated the huge appetite for large-scale interaction and the value of presenting collections in a creative way.

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IT ALSO SHOWED HOW NECESSARY IT IS TO COME OUT OF OUR COMFORT ZONE AND TAKE OUR ARCHIVES OUT TO THE PEOPLE.

SAM COLLENETTE, TRUSTEE, ARCHIVES WEST MIDLANDS

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OPENESS

Archives cultivate an open approach to knowledge and are accessible to all.

Opening Worcestershire archives to overseas audiences

Family history is popular all over the world, but those undertaking research in far-flung countries do not always engage with archives in the UK.

The collections held at Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service are certainly helpful for overseas users researching their Worcestershire ancestors and the places they came from, but remote customers were not the target audience of the services website when it was originally designed. It was therefore not surprising that, in the Archives and Records Associations Distance User Survey results for 2015, overseas enquiries represented only 6% of those who responded to Worcestershires survey.

These results led the archive to investigate ways in which they could reach out to the overseas research community and explore new ways of presenting information and services to those who are unlikely to visit in person.

The result was the publication of an information guide which walks customers through the most-used collections, including wills, trade directories, electoral registers, census, maps and church records. Each section explains the records and provides links for the customer to find out further information from catalogues, guides and indexes on the website.

This guide has been designed by Connecting Element, a Birmingham-based digital marketing company, and is being sold as a downloadable PDF via the website explorethepast.co.uk.

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IF SUCCESSFUL, THIS IS A MODEL THAT COULD BE EASILY ADOPTED BY OTHER ARCHIVE SERVICES, HELPING THE SECTOR AS A WHOLE TO WIDEN OUR AUDIENCE.

LISA SNOOK, WORCESTERSHIRE ARCHIVE AND ARCHAEOLOGY SERVICE

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DIGITAL

Our biggest challenge is creating and sustaining archives in the digital age.

READ project to tell us more about Jeremy Bentham

As part of University College Londons Bentham Project, an interdisciplinary enterprise to produce a new scholarly edition of the works and correspondence of the legal philosopher Jeremy Bentham, academics at the university partnered with the Linnean Society of London on a Handwritten Text Recognition (HTR) programme.

Funded by the European Commission, the READ (Recognition and Enrichment of Archival Documents) project uses developing technologies to enable computers to read and search handwritten documents through a process of machine learning. Given the sheer diversity of handwriting, from different styles to uncommon abbreviations, technology needs to be trained to understand such complexities.

Through the Transkribus platform, (transkribus.eu), users can upload digital

images of manuscript pages and supply a short transcription. The Transkribus team then generates an HTR model for the collection, with a possible accuracy rate of 95%. By supplying the platform with images of the manuscript collections of Carl Linnaeus (1707,1778), the Linnean Society is helping further refine the HTR software through their use of a collection which features Linnaeus, notoriously poor handwriting in Swedish and Latin. UCL then hopes to utilise the HTR software in their efforts to transcribe and make available Bentham's writings.

The two organisations have also worked together by holding a joint event, asking archivists, librarians, researchers and other heritage professionals about their digital toolbox, in the hopes of encouraging more archives to use HTR software to make their collections digitally accessible.

HANDWRITTEN TEXT RECOGNITION TECHNOLOGY COULD POTENTIALLY REVOLUTIONISE THE WAY MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ACCESS HISTORICAL RECORDS.

DR LOUISE SEAWARD, RESEARCH ASSOCIATE, BENTHAM PROJECT, UCL

RESILIENCE

We are building the sectors capacity to meet future challenges.

The South West Heritage Trust has negotiated a brighter future for the North Devon Record Office

A consortium of councils and community support now helps to fund a service which is focusing on outreach and developing volunteer opportunities.

This partnership has been the result of a shared wish to create an innovative and cost-effective archive service for North Devon. The region has a strong local identity but is geographically isolated, so there was a widespread desire to keep and enhance the local service.

Facilities have been transformed, with a refreshed search room, improved strong room facilities, new IT system and bespoke photographic store. New engagement opportunities are being developed and it is hoped that there is now a long-term future for this service, which will celebrate its 30th anniversary in 2018.

North Devon is a testament to how forming partnerships with local communities and organisations can transform services at risk and give them a sustainable future, contributing to bringing greater benefits to the surrounding area and its people.

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THE NORTH DEVON RECORD OFFICE IS A VITAL PART OF LIFE IN THE NORTH OF THE COUNTY. WE GREATLY VALUE OUR HERITAGE AND IT IS IMPORTANT THAT IT REMAINS ACCESSIBLE IN NORTH DEVON. OVER 30 TOWN AND PARISH COUNCILS, AND OTHER ORGANISATIONS ACROSS NORTHERN DEVON, HAVE WORKED WITH THE SOUTH WEST HERITAGE TRUST AND DEVON COUNTY COUNCIL TO MAKE THIS POSSIBLE.

WILL AUSTIN, CLERK, BARNSTAPLE TOWN COUNCIL

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IMPACT

We need to demonstrate the impact of archives on society.

Unilever is part of our local and global business heritage. Every day, two billion people use a Unilever product.

Archive staff within Unilevers Global Marketing and Communication function are prominent in sourcing material from Unilevers extensive archive holdings. By providing copies of original archive material, the team are able to help the company raise revenue through licensing opportunities, as well as ensuring that its brand and company heritage are promoted and used in the best way.

Claire Tunstall, Head of Art, Archives and Records Management at Unilever, knows the huge impact her team is making on a regular basis. A clear example includes a time when Claires team was approached by the Global Marketing Manager for Ponds Unilever Asia (Singapore), with a request for copies of a particular oral care television commercial from 2001, showing a whitening shade card in use. They were facing a challenge from a

major competitor on the use of the shade card in a new market, Unilever needed evidence showing it was the first to use this innovation. Most of the staff at Unilever involved in the launch of the shade card had moved on to other roles, and so the brand team were finding it difficult to locate documentation surrounding it. Claires team searched their database of records and found an advert that was broadcast in Morocco in 2001, it clearly showed the use of a whitening shade card.

The business in that market was worth 15,000,000 Euros at the time, and Unilever stood to lose 10 to 20% of their market share if the challenge from their competitor proved successful. The archive collection was vital in influencing this significant commercial outcome; Unilevers Global Marketing Manager informed Claires team that he could not imagine how he could have obtained this evidence without their help.

FEW ORGANISATIONS CAN BOAST THE WEALTH OF MATERIAL AND HISTORY THAT WE HAVE HERE AT OUR FINGERTIPS. THE WORK OF THE ARCHIVES IS NOT JUST ABOUT THE PAST BUT TO HELP US BETTER FACE OUR FUTURE.

WILL AUSTIN, CLERK, BARNSTAPLE TOWN COUNCIL

A Year in Archives 2017 brings together stories from organisations across the country, showcasing the fantastic work happening in the sector.

2017 was an important year for us at The National Archives. With the support of The Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport ministers, we launched our strategic vision for the archives sector. The ambition of Archives Unlocked is to release the full potential of archives. Archives should inspire trust, enrich our lives, and be open to all. In order to do this, we are focusing on key areas of opportunity and challenge for the sector: increasing digital capacity, building resilience and demonstrating impact. Our case studies show how much

archives are doing already to realise these goals.

People may think archives are about the past but these stories show that archives are about the future. We want to show the innovative ways archives work to collect, and to make their collections accessible, for now and for the future.

Isobel Hunter
Head of Archives Sector Development

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AS CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND KEEPER, I SEE FIRST-HAND HOW THE ARCHIVES SECTOR IS INNOVATING, AND ENGAGING PEOPLE WITH THEIR COLLECTIONS AND SERVICES, REINFORCING WHY ARCHIVES MATTER FOR INDIVIDUALS AND SOCIETY.

JEFF JAMES, CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND KEEPER, THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

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