



## FORUM ON HISTORICAL MANUSCRIPTS AND ACADEMIC RESEARCH

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- Date:** Monday 13 June 2022
- Time:** 13.00 - 16.00
- Venue:** Learning Room 1, The National Archives
- Chair:** Professor Leon Litvack (LL), Deputy Chair
- Minutes:** Isabel Saunders, Senior Governance Coordinator and Secretary to the Advisory Council
- Members:** Dr Nigel Fletcher (NF)  
Dr Helen Forde (HF)  
Dr Adele Redhead (AR), Independent Forum Member  
Ms Jenny Shaw (JSh), Independent Forum Member  
Dr Jeannette Strickland (JSt)

### **Others in attendance:**

#### The National Archives (TNA)

Mr Jeff James (JJ) Chief Executive and Keeper (ex officio) (via VC)  
Dr Valerie Johnson (VJ) Director of Research and Collections  
Dr Tina Morton (TM) Head of Archives Sector Development  
Mr Sam Whaley (SW) Head of Strategy and CEO's Office (via VC)  
Media Manager

### **1. Welcome, Introductions, Apologies and Declarations of Interest**

- 1.1 The Deputy Chair welcomed members and other attendees to the meeting.
- 1.2 There were no apologies for absence.
- 1.3 AR noted that she was a lecturer at the University of Glasgow and noted discussions with the University of Glasgow was included as part of the Archives Sector Update report.

### **2. Minutes, Matters Arising and Action Log**

- 2.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 24 January 2022 were agreed as a correct record subject to amendments proposed at the meeting.

#### Matters Arising

- 2.2 Members closed items 1 and 2 of the action log.

**Action:** IS to amend and upload the approved minutes and to update the action log.

### **3. Keeper and Historical Manuscripts Commissioner's (HMC) Update**

- 3.1 JJ introduced the paper, highlighting the implications of Civil Service 2025, and invited questions from members.
- 3.2 Members asked about the withdrawal of FCO 141 from circulation. JJ confirmed the collection had been withdrawn to allow for testing of historic insecticides on the records and also exploring the options for safe handling of the records. Members shared similar experiences from other institutions they had worked with.
- 3.3 Members noted the update.

#### **4. Update on Research and Academic Engagement**

- 4.1 PW introduced the paper and invited questions from members.
- 4.2 Members congratulated The National Archives on hiring three people under the Our Heritage Our Stories programme. PW noted this had been due to The National Archives, promoting the opportunities available under the programme and being very active in promoting the opportunity through its networks.
- 4.3 Members discussed the implications around the use of Artificial Intelligence in document tagging by researchers; they noted the advantages of using artificial intelligence but also the risks of inherent bias.
- 4.4 Members noted the update.

#### **5. Archives Sector Update**

- 5.1 TM introduced the report and invited questions from members.
- 5.2 Members noted that CIPFA was proposing to stop its archive survey. TM noted this was correct and that The National Archives was having discussions with the Arts Council around data and benchmarking for the archive sector.
- 5.3 Members asked about the inclusivity research The National Archives had carried out. TM explained The National Archives had been looking at current practices across the sector, current gaps and where there might be opportunity for The National Archives to add value. She noted this was the initial research phase of a larger piece of work.
- 5.4 Members noted they were still aware of concerns from researchers that archives had not reopened to pre-pandemic levels. TM noted The National Archives remained in contact with archive services, but noted that archives were now having to balance enhanced demand as researchers were expecting digital provision to be provided at the same level it was during the pandemic whilst also expecting services to provide the same level of physical access.
- 5.5 Members noted the update.

#### **3. Manorial Documents Register Advisory Panel Update**

- 3.1 The Deputy Chair gave a brief summary of his work on the Manorial Documents Register Advisory Panel. He noted the future of the Panel, after the register's digitisation, was currently under consideration.
- 3.2 VJ noted it was felt the Panel could continue to have a role in advising the Forum and the Master of the Rolls on manorial documents but that this presented an opportunity to review and refine the Panel's work.

- 3.3 The Deputy Chair also took the opportunity to highlight the manorial documents centenary celebration event occurring on 29 June and requested members be provided with a briefing on manorial documents in advance of this event.

**ACTION:** IS to circulate a briefing to members in advance of the manorial documents celebration.

- 3.4 Members noted the update.

## **7. Raising Awareness of the Forum's Work**

- 7.1 IS introduced the report and invited questions and comments from members.
- 7.2 Members discussed the possibility of holding external meetings. Members agreed they would like to explore this and it might be possible for venues to be linked to those who successfully gain collections under the Acceptance in Lieu Scheme, or other archives they were updated on as part of their work.
- 7.3 Members noted they may wish to be more active in writing to Acceptance in Lieu institutions after a work has been granted to them. They also explored being able to congratulate successful applicants under the Archives Accreditation Scheme.
- 7.4 Members discussed the limitations of promoting the Forum.
- 7.5 Members also discussed including a short item on every agenda to allow members to raise any concerns they have picked up within the wider archiving and research sector. The National Archives noted they currently operate a User Advisory Group so the Forum would have to ensure there was no duplication of work. It was suggested members might like to work thematically focusing on a different aspect of the private archive sector.
- 7.6 Members confirmed it would be useful for short biographies of Forum members to appear on the website, together with an email contact point for the Forum.
- 7.7 The Media Manager gave members a brief summary of the current relationship that the Forum has with the Advisory Council on media inquiries and how these are dealt with. JJ highlighted it was important for members of the Forum to maintain their independence from The National Archives whilst carrying out any promotion.
- 7.8 Members of the Forum discussed their own links with the wider sector. Members agreed they would like a refresh of the skills audit to allow them to update it with new connections. Members also agreed they should be more active in mentioning the Forum where appropriate in their various networks.
- 7.9 Members agreed IS should return to the Forum with a paper considering all the points made by members, discussing their feasibility and practical approaches to these.

**ACTION:** IS to return to the next meeting with a paper covering the topics discussed.

## **8. The National Archives Sector Leadership Role**

- 8.1 VJ introduced the item and invited questions and comments from members.
- 8.2 Members discussed the current perception of The National Archives as supporting archivists but clarified they felt it was better positioned to provide support for records services. They noted however there were issues, such as digital skills which straddled the divide between services and individuals.

- 8.3 Members noted there were existing organisations which could, and would be better placed, to take on some additional responsibilities. VJ asked if it would be helpful for The National Archives to clarify what its role as sector leader was not. Members agreed this was the case.
- 8.4 Members suggested The National Archives might find it useful to have conversations with some of the larger bodies to clarify roles and responsibilities going forward. This would assist in avoiding duplication and overlap and may assist in creating agreement within the sector.
- 8.5 VJ highlighted to members that The National Archives was a government arms' length body and so was also politically limited in the sector advocacy work it could undertake; as a result it may be more appropriate for someone else to deliver this aspect of sector leadership. Members noted there might be difficulty in clarifying this to the sector as the roles of advocate and sector leader could often be used interchangeably. The National Archives thanked the Forum for this point and agreed to consider this when it defined its role.
- 8.6 Members agreed it was important for The National Archives to focus on the most valuable areas of its offer as sector leader and this would mean that The National Archives would need to be explicit in its remit and clarify what it would not be able to focus on.
- 8.7 VJ asked members what more The National Archives could or should be doing to communicate what it was offering and doing. Members agreed that more communication would always be desirable but that often providing more communication did not satisfy an audience's desire for more information. Members specified that ensuring audiences are kept aware that items were being considered and progress was ongoing should be effective. They agreed however that overall The National Archives' current approach to communication was very effective and well managed.
- 8.8 The Deputy Chair summarised the conversation for the benefit of The National Archives. He noted the discussion had been useful and welcomed further updates from The National Archives on this topic as the work progressed.

## 9. **Any Other Business**

- 9.1 The Deputy Chair thanked everyone for attending the meeting and for their work.

There being no further business, the meeting was closed at 15.48pm.

**Date of next meeting:** 12 September 2022