



FORUM ON HISTORICAL MANUSCRIPTS AND ACADEMIC RESEARCH

Date: Friday 1 March 2024
Time: 12:30 - 15.30
Venue: Swan Room, The National Archives
Chair: Professor Leon Litvack (LL), Deputy Chair
Minutes: Jenna Birley (JBi), Governance Manager and Secretary to the Advisory Council
Members: Mr Stephen Hawker (SH)
Dr Nigel Fletcher (NF)
Dr Helen Forde (HF)
Dr Adele Redhead (AR), Independent Member
Mr Bill Stocking (BS), Independent Member

Others in attendance:

The National Archives (TNA)

Ms Emmajane Avery, Director of Public Engagement and Sector Leadership
Senior Digital Researcher (Item 8)
Mr Jack Butterworth (JBU), Head of Grants and Funding
Head of Digital Research Programmes (Item 8)
Heritage Manager, Mercers' Company (Item 9)
Dr Jeff James (JJ), Chief Executive and Keeper (ex officio)
Mr Jonathan Ladd, Head of Advocacy and Partnerships (Item 9)
Ms Gemma Maclagan Ram, Director of Research and Commercial Development
Ms Tina Morton (TM), Head of Archives Sector Leadership

1. Welcome, Introductions, Apologies and Declarations of Interest

- 1.1 The Deputy Chair welcomed members and other attendees to the meeting. An especial welcome was extended to Stephen Hawker and Bill Stocking as two new Forum members, and to Jenna Birley who had recently joined The National Archives as the Governance Manager and Secretary to the Advisory Council.
- 1.2 The Master of the Rolls and Ms Jenny Shaw submitted apologies for absence.
- 1.3 Forum members noted with sadness the recent passing of Dr Jeanette Strickland and wished to pass their condolences to her family.
- 1.4 There were no declarations of interest.

2. Minutes, Matters Arising and Action Log

- 2.1 Members reviewed the minutes of the meetings held on 13 June 2023 and 20 October 2023. Subject to minor amendments, both sets of minutes were agreed as a true and accurate record.
- 2.2 Members reviewed and agreed the strategic priorities of the Forum, as outlined by the discussion in October and noted in the minutes of that meeting.
- 2.3 Members reviewed the action log. It was agreed that actions 9, 10 and 11 can be closed.
- 2.4 Members discussed action 12, and provided some ideas as to what might be useful to have access to in a document library. They also discussed how it would be useful to have a visual representation of the roles and responsibilities of the Council, its subcommittees, and how and where these report or provide advice to.

Action: JBi to progress this action as advised.

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

- 3.1 JJ introduced this update which was taken as read and invited questions from members.
- 3.2 Members congratulated The National Archives on its 'Great Escapes: Remarkable Second World War Captives' exhibition. Those who had not yet seen it were encouraged to do so.
- 3.3 Members noted the update.

4. Terms of Reference (ToRs)

- 4.1 LL introduced this item and explained that, as the previous meeting had not been quorate, the refreshed ToRs for the Forum had not been approved.
- 4.2 The ToRs were originally to be rolled over for approval at this meeting; but a number of further points had been raised subsequently. Two amendments were proposed: the insertion of a reference to the Manorial and Tithe Documents Panel, and the detachment of the autumn Forum Meeting from the Advisory Council meeting, so that they need not occur on the same day. The view of the incoming Keeper on the ToRs will also be sought.
- 4.3 Members felt it would be valuable to discuss the ToRs more thoroughly at an Advisory Council Working Group meeting; these could then be redrafted for approval at the October Forum meeting. They would then go to Advisory Council for ratification.

Action: JBi to add to the next Advisory Council Working Group agenda.

5. Verbal Update on the Storage of Wills

- 5.1 LL provided a verbal update on the storage of wills, which had been discussed by the Advisory Council on National Records and Archives at its February meeting.
- 5.2 Members were informed that the Advisory Council had written a letter to the Secretary of State for the Department of Culture, Media and Sport on the issue.
- 5.3 Members noted the update and Forum member NF was thanked for bringing the subject to the attention of the Advisory Council.

6. Archive Sector Update

6.1 TM introduced this item, which was taken as read. She highlighted for particular note the review of 'Archives Unlocked', the government's vision for archives, and the launch of The National Archives' first ever sector survey, which would close later in March.

6.2 Members thanked TM for her paper and noted the update.

7. Research and Academic Update

7.1 JBu introduced this item which provided a general update on The National Archives' research and academic activity.

7.2 Members were pleased to note the team's efforts in writing funding bids and looked forward to receiving updates on the outcomes of these in due course.

7.3 Members thanked JBu for attending and noted the update.

8. Artificial Intelligence – AI Building Blocks

8.1 Members received a presentation on the subject of artificial intelligence and the part its development can play in the archives sector.

8.2 Members were interested to hear about the potential for AI in records management, particularly around handwriting recognition and record selection. They also discussed the risks associated with the use of AI.

8.3 Members were grateful to The National Archives' digital team for attending the meeting and leading an interesting discussion.

9. Level 7 Archivist and Records Manager Apprenticeships

9.1 Members received a presentation on the level 7 Archivist and Records Manager Apprenticeships which provided an update on this National Archives initiative. Members then heard from the Heritage Manager at the Mercers' Company, a sector leader who was participating in the scheme, having hired an apprentice in their team.

9.2 Members were encouraged to hear the beneficial impact of the apprenticeships on the organisations who employ them, and on the apprentices themselves. They asked questions about sector take-up and the potential impact on workforce diversity.

9.3 Members thanked the Head of Advocacy for providing the general update, and Mercers' Heritage Manager for providing additional context. They were pleased to note the progress made in this area.

10. Any Other Business

10.1 Members had been asked to consider potential external archives to visit as part of their October meeting in advance of a discussion on the subject.

10.2 TM offered to provide a list of potential places.

Action: TM to send this list to JBi for Forum members to consider.

10.3 Suggestions by members and attendees included: Mercers' (City of London), the BBC, the Hive (Worcester), the Bodleian, the Rothschild archives, John Lewis, Marks and Spencer, and Lambeth Palace.

Action: JBi to approach places of interest to organise Forum members' visit.

10.4 There being no further business, the meeting was closed at 15:30.

Date of next meeting: 5 June 2024