



FORUM ON HISTORICAL MANUSCRIPTS AND ACADEMIC RESEARCH

Date: Tuesday 13 June 2023
Time: 13.00 - 16.00
Venue: 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) (via VC)
Dr Adele Redhead (AR), Independent Forum Member
Ms Jenny Shaw (JSh), Independent Forum Member

Others in attendance:

The National Archives (TNA)

Ms Asha Bagayat (AB) Head of Governance
Ms Clarissa Angus (CA) Joint Head of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
Mr Jeff James (JJ) Chief Executive and Keeper (ex officio)
Dr Valerie Johnson (VJ) Director of Research and Collections
Ms Rachael Minott (RM) Joint Head of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
Ms Tina Morton (TM) Head of Archives Sector Development
Ms Rachel Smillie (RS) Head of Academic Partnerships
Cultural Property Manager
Mr Sam Whaley (SW) Head of Strategy and CEO's Office
Ms Pip Willcox (PW) Head of Research

External Attendees

Mr Stefan Dickers (SD) Special Collections and Archives Manager, Bishopsgate Institute

Office of the Master of the Rolls

Adviser to the Master of the Rolls

1. Welcome, Introductions, Apologies and Declarations of Interest

- 1.1 The Deputy Chair welcomed members and other attendees to the meeting.
- 1.2 The Master of the Rolls, Dr Helen Forde and Dr Jeannette Strickland submitted apologies for absence.
- 1.3 There were no declarations of interest.

2. Minutes, Matters Arising and Action Log

2.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 20 January 2023 were agreed as a correct record subject to amendments proposed at the meeting.

2.2 Members agreed they wished to write to the Alfred Gillett Trust to request that they publish their recent work on the use of refrigerated units.

Matters Arising

2.3 Members closed items 1 to 8 of the action log.

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

Action: IS to write to the Alfred Gillett Trust regarding publishing their research.

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

3.1 JJ introduced the paper and invited questions from members.

3.2 Members congratulated The National Archives on its exhibitions and associated visitor figures for the two exhibitions it had held over the 2022-2023 year.

3.3 Members noted the update.

4. Archives Sector Update

4.1 TM introduced the paper and provided an update on The National Archives' Level 7 Archivist and Records Manager apprenticeship programme. She noted 14 organisations had committed to the first year of the new programme.

4.2 Members noted that the upcoming DCDC 2023 conference featured an in-person programme, as well as a separate online programme and were pleased to see the diversity of offering. TM said that this had been offered because some members would only be able to attend online and that it was important the online offering was high-quality. PW added that this had become more important given recent efforts to internationalise the conference, as well as taking into account the feedback from previous years.

4.3 Members noted the update.

5. Update on Research and Academic Engagement

5.1 PW introduced the paper and invited questions from members. She provided an update on the History and Archives in Practice event and noted that if members were aware of any UK-wide institutions, which might wish to partner in the event, they should encourage them to reach out to the organisers.

5.2 Members enquired about the use of the Material Culture of Wills programme. PW said that this was building on work with a previous partner and made good use of the Leverhulme funding available. Members noted that with regard to the artificial intelligence software used, most had experience with Transkribus only. AR noted she could introduce PW to a PhD researcher in this field.

5.3 Members discussed the results of the collaborative doctoral awards. PW noted that The National Archives had made large efforts in the collaborative doctoral awards this year. In spite of this, the year had not resulted in an ideal outcome as only a quarter of the doctoral proposals were successful. She noted this year had been a fallow year for The National

Archives' own Collaborative Doctoral Programme and next year the programme would resume, leading to more successful outcomes for participants.

5.4 Members noted the update.

6. The National Archives' Refreshed Offer to the Sector

6.1 VJ introduced the item and set out the steps, which had been taken since this item last came before the Forum. She highlighted that The National Archives was seeking the Forum's thoughts on how to best present the new offer. TM added there were ongoing conversations within The National Archives to ensure principles for sector leadership were embedded in the relevant areas and this would be followed with internal communications.

6.2 Members noted that during their previous discussion on this topic, the idea had been put forward that The National Archives should utilise independent archives to act as sector champions. They confirmed at the meeting that utilising these champions would ensure archives were connecting with each other and the champions would help to circulate The National Archives' new messaging more efficiently, as well as creating more involvement in any programmes The National Archives ran.

6.3 Members asked what consideration had been given to digital skills in light of this new offer. TM responded that there had been a 3-year strategy to support digital skills in the sector, which The National Archives had re-run and this had increased organisational confidence. JJ noted however, that the role of a sector leader was not to provide training for people. As a result, this was an area where The National Archives would need to utilise partnership working and carefully think about its role and presence in the sector in light of its new leadership offer.

6.4 Members noted the information.

7. 2022-2023 Sales Monitoring Report

7.1 The Cultural Property Manager introduced the item and invited questions from members.

7.2 Members asked about how the data in the report was collected. The Cultural Property Manager said they monitored 420 catalogues and 130 sources a year to compile the data. Technology had increased the number of avenues items could be sold on, but it had fortunately also increased the team's ability to automatically search for these items.

7.3 Members noted that there appeared to be a disparity between the estimate price for items and the final sold price. The Cultural Property Manager responded that this occurred due to the greater involvement of non-specialist sellers in the current market. As a result, they were offering lower starting bids either due to naïve under-valuation or deliberately, to encourage bidding.

7.4 VJ asked what impact these non-specialist sellers were having on the sale of historical manuscripts. The Cultural Property Manager responded that descriptions of items had become shorter; additionally, lead-in times where the team was notified before the items were available for sale and the time items were on sale for had also reduced. This made it difficult for institutions who might like to acquire these items to do so.

7.5 VJ asked about the role of the Friends of the National Libraries. The Cultural Property Manager said the Friends was a well-run and well-funded organisation and was very keen to promote written heritage. As a result, they had taken a large role in supporting institutions seeking to acquire material. They would likely continue to take a bigger role in this area in the coming years.

7.6 Members discussed the promotion of this work and that this would be a positive for The National Archives and the sector. The Cultural Property Manager noted The National Archives could do more to promote its work with grant-awarding bodies, which would help institutions in securing recognition, funding or specific work in this area.

7.7 Members noted the update.

8. Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Archives

8.1 CA and RM introduced the item and produced a presentation for members summarising their work as Joint Heads of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DE&I) at The National Archives. The presentation focused on:

8.1.1 The work they had done internally reaching out to colleagues;

8.1.2 The work they had carried out on behavioural frameworks;

8.1.3 The establishment of relationships with partners from other organisations;

8.1.4 Current cross organisational DE&I projects, which The National Archives was involved with, including the Black Cultural Archives and the London Metropolitan Archive.

8.2 Members asked how proactive the sector was being in DE&I matters. RM said members of the sector were keen to engage in this area, but archives were operating under limited resources, often with one person volunteering to take on additional roles in order to make progress. TM added that there was large variation in the resources, which institutions could make use of to put into this area.

8.3 Members asked what had been most successful for the team this year. CA noted it had been reassuring to see that many people were already seeking to include DE&I considerations into their work. RM noted engagement with the various staff networks had also been very positive.

8.4 VJ asked what the landscape should look like if resources were not a concern. RM noted the ideal would be that every archive could have dedicated and paid members of staff in roles focusing on DE&I. Ideally, these figures would also be at a senior level to help drive forward positive change in this area.

8.5 Members noted the update.

9. Remote and Hybrid Initiatives in the Galleries, Libraries, Archives, Museums and Academic Sector (GLAMA)

9.1 RS introduced the item and produced a presentation for members on the results of her research on remote and hybrid initiatives in the sector, summarising the ongoing work since the last Forum update. Her presentation highlighted the following key points:

9.1.1 The terms 'remote' and 'hybrid' did not have agreed definitions;

9.1.2 Digital events tended to attract more diverse audiences;

9.1.3 Staff had been expected to upskill in this area quickly during the pandemic;

9.1.4 Most audiences did not want hybrid events, with people strongly preferring either online or in-person;

9.1.5 Hybrid events took double the resources to run, compared to events taking place using only a single medium;

- 9.1.6 Audience expectations for the quality of online and hybrid events had become much higher than they were initially during the pandemic;
- 9.1.7 In order to ensure optimum success for events it was important to identify a target audience and cater the medium of the event to that specific audience, rather than attempting to cater for everyone and leaving audiences dissatisfied;
- 9.1.8 In order to achieve this, it was necessary for institutions to monitor their events and attendance and ensure feedback was being sought from all parties. This would allow organisations to organise events in the future, which could be more inclusive for all their audiences.

9.2 Members noted their own experiences of running online events and agreed there were some very successful online events being run. RS confirmed this was the case where an event was designed as online from the start.

9.3 Members noted the update.

Action: RS to provide the secretariat with slides to be circulated to members.

10. The Bishopsgate Institute

10.1 Mr Stefan Dickers, Special Collections and Archives Manager at the Bishopsgate Institute, joined the meeting to discuss the archive's experience as an inclusive and community focused archive. He highlighted:

10.1.1 The history of the archive, the archival collection, and the focus of the archives' activities;

10.1.2 Recent accessioning and collections projects carried out by the archive;

10.1.3 The archive's accessibility procedures, ownership regimes and collaborative cataloguing systems;

10.1.4 The changing definitions of archives and the types of material they are expected to hold.

10.2 Members asked about storage at the Institute. Mr Dickers noted most archives were always seeking additional storage, but that the Bishopsgate Institute had expanded its environmentally-controlled storage since his tenure began and this had left them with enough space for their current collections and ongoing collecting work.

10.3 Members asked if the Institute participated in activities outside of its own building. Mr Dickers confirmed staff actively participated in a range of events organised by others and gave between 100 and 150 talks per year. Additionally, the Institute made good use of social media to reach those further afield.

10.4 VJ asked if the Institute had any concerns regarding the legal implications of the material they held, and if there were any issues with conserving such a diverse collection. Mr Dickers said that the Institute kept abreast of the relevant legislation for its material and had a relationship with a relevant advisor in this area. With regards to conserving this material, generally much of the material was in good condition. Given the varied nature of the collection the Institute utilised external conservators with specialisms in the relevant materials rather than dealing with these in house.

10.5 VJ asked if the Institute had noticed an increase in the amount of digital accessioning it carried out. Mr Dickers confirmed that most accessions now contained a digital element, and they were dealing with new mediums of digital content on a regular basis. This raised

questions, such as how to store Facebook chat logs. Additionally, the Institute was focusing on digitising some of its most popular items so people could access those online.

10.6 Members asked what considerations were given to safeguarding by the Institute. Mr Dickers noted they took a proactive attitude to safeguarding but believed in warning people where content might be sensitive, rather than removing items from access. Additionally, the Institute was mindful of data protection and other sensitivity issues. This could cause issues with some records, such as the London Lesbian and Gay Switchboard logbooks; but where there was material like this, the Institute was still keen to allow appropriate research to take place, and so mitigations were in place to allow the utilisation of these records whilst maintaining the safety of those the records covered.

10.7 Members thanks Mr Dickers for his thoughts and Mr Dickers left the meeting.

11. Any Other Business

11.1 The Deputy Chair noted that this was VJ's last meeting of the Forum. He led all members in a vote of thanks to VJ for her service to The National Archives and her work on the Forum.

11.2 The Deputy Chair highlighted the current vacancy and open application for a third independent Forum member and encouraged members to circulate this to anyone who might be interested.

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

11.4 There being no further business, the meeting was closed at 16:00.

Date of next meeting: 20 October 2023