

Date of Meeting: 02/03/2021	Location: By video conference	THE
Title: User Advisory Group Meeting	Subject or Purpose: Minutes of the regular meeting held on the 2 <sup>nd</sup> March 2021	NATIONAL ARCHIVES
ATTENDEES		
Sue Adams (Independent Researchers)	Nadine Chambers (Students)	
Amelia Clegg (Students)	Stephen Daghish (On line)	
Angela Graham (County/external Archives)	Mike Grahn (On site Personal Interest)	
Grace Ioppolo (Academic)	Sophie Kay (Diversity)	
Susan Moore (Map Room)	Will Reid (Diversity)	
Pat Reynolds (Family History and On line)	Jone Garmendia (TNA - Head of Cataloguing, Taxonomy and Data).	
PH (TNA - volunteer)	AJ (TNA - Senior Archivist, Future Catalogue).	
Valerie Johnson (TNA - Director of Research & Collections) Co-Chair	Roger Kershaw (TNA - Head of Strategic Operations and Volunteers)	
Lee Oliver (TNA - Head of Venue Management & Services)	Caroline Ottaway-Searle (TNA - Director of Public Engagement), Chair	
GvM (TNA - Senior Archivist Standards and Workflow)	AV (TNA - Personal Assistant), Minutes	

### 1. Welcome and apologies for absence.

Sadie Jarrett and Jennifer Aston sent apologies.

Amelia Clegg has given notice of her resignation but has kindly offered to stay in post until her replacement is recruited. This will be in the next campaign due in the summer of this year.

### 2. Minutes, Matters arising (VJ)

2.1 The minutes from the meeting of the 1st December were approved.

2.2 Page 2, item 3.4. VJ to provide an update on TNA's work with the Crisis Management Group, and the number of archives saved. The note from TNA had been circulated. MG noted that the Treasury funding for the Covid Archives at Risk fund was due to be allocated under tight deadlines - it would be good to have an update on this given the tight timescales.

**Action: A report to be given to the group at the June meeting on awards made from the fund.**

2.3 Page 3, item 3.5. VJ to pass SM's suggestion regarding contacting auditors onto the Business Archives representatives - action complete.

**Action: VJ to forward further details on the 'Engaging Crowds' project as requested by PR.**

### 3. Update on TNA's COVID response (VJ, LO and COS)

3.1 Archive Sector update (VJ).

After the December meeting it had been confirmed by HMT that they were to award £500k of funding to support Archives at Risk. The monies were to be distributed by the end of March 2021 with awards having to be spent by recipients by March 2022. Despite the tight deadlines, many

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applications were received, a panel was formed to assess the bids and their decisions have now been communicated. Grant agreements are being signed off prior to the monies being disbursed. An announcement detailing the successful bids will be made once the agreements are finalised. The recipients included businesses, charities and arts organisations and TNA and ASD have been delighted to be able to support the sector in this way.

- 3.2 TNA has been successful in a bid to AHRC's 'Capability for Collections' fund and has been awarded £264k to purchase equipment to digitise the collection and for collection care.
- 3.3 With regard to sector support, a number of sessions have been run including wellbeing, how to set up on line education resources and how to demonstrate impact.
- 3.4 Recent PR activity has included: an employee from Collection Care featuring on the front page of 'The Museum's Career Guide' and a number of blogs for 'International Women in Science Day' including one on bio molecular analysis of documents, the author having developed a proof to demonstrate if a document had been kissed - this was widely shared on social media.

**Action: VJ to share links relating to these updates with delegates.**

3.5 Public Engagement (COS).

Since the first lockdown nearly a year ago, the Public Engagement team have pivoted their efforts from onsite to online, delivering a number of successful and innovative events to a wide range of audiences, including schools' programmes, young people's projects and SEND educational programmes. The need to respond to a changing environment at pace and with little notice has been very challenging – TNA reopened briefly in December and received encouraging user feedback but had to suspend services just before Christmas as the country re-entered Tier 4, and then a further national lockdown.

- 3.6 The Prime Minister has announced the steps to ease the nation out of lockdown and TNA is seeking clarification from DCMS on whether we will be required to follow the timetable for Step 2 (libraries and community centres) or Step 3 (museums). If TNA is to follow Step 2 it is planned to restart on-site services in April. Safety measures will continue to be in place as long as the need to be Covid secure is required and services will expand in line with these.
- 3.7 COS confirmed that this will be her last UAG meeting – her replacement as Director of Public Engagement, Emmajane Avery, has been appointed. It is planned that Emmajane will join UAG as Co-Chair in June. A press release giving further details about this appointment has been released and COS was sure delegates would give Emmajane a warm welcome. GI gave a vote of thanks to COS for making the delegates feel very welcome and supported.
- 3.8 LO spoke to the plans for onsite services. The government's guidance requires that reopening must be in a Covid secure manner. This will require document quarantining and therefore advance bookings only. The plan is to resume the level of service offered in December, i.e. for 100 seats a day, with 80 on the first floor and 20 in the map room along with bulk orders and pre-booking.
- 3.9 It is planned that an entirely new booking system will be available, based from the Kew site to give a simpler user experience. It will interface with the advance ordering system - it will be possible to amend an order without the need to email the team up to the cut-off date. This is likely to be four or five working days ahead of the visit, rather than no changes being permitted after an order has been placed. COS asked that delegates keep these details confidential as they are not yet confirmed.
- 3.10 SM asked whether documents were quarantined before users received them. LO replied that a reduced quarantine is used before production and full quarantine afterwards. A controlled handling protocol is used in the Document Services Department – staff do not open papers and wear gloves and face coverings at all times. Once a document has been opened it is put into a 3 day quarantine before being handled by anyone else. By exception only, where errors are made, a gloved same day production will be made. SM asked if the time to amend orders could be increased from 4-5 days if the records aren't being quarantined beforehand. LO advised this timeline was determined by a combination of quarantine, the production resource available and the location of the document (i.e.

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whether at Deepstore or at Kew). SM asked if Mondays and Saturdays are included as working days. LO confirmed that they are, excluding those on Bank Holidays.

3.11. LO. Per the Prime Minister's statement on easing, the reading rooms will be open *not before* the 12th April or the 17th May depending on TNA's tiering. It is unlikely that there will be more than seven days' notice as to whether the next step may occur and TNA will require time to mobilise, open the ticketing system and process bookings. The relaxation of controls and the expansion of service will be dictated by government guidance and user feedback on how comfortable they feel with changes in social distancing etc.

3.12 SM asked if it was known why the British Library had been able to make an announcement regarding reopening. COS confirmed this is because it is in the library group in Tier 2. LO confirmed that TNA would not be able to open its own library as it is on open access rather than on production. TNA is not a library.

3.13 SM thanked TNA's Marketing team for the update published on TNA's website on the day of the Prime Minister's speech which noted TNA was consulting on next steps – the improved communication was appreciated.

**Action: COS to pass on these comments.**

#### 4. Update on Cataloguing (AJ, JG, GVM, PH, and RK)

##### 4.1 The State of the Catalogue project (AJ)

4.1.1 The content of TNA's catalogue is a kind of metadata, (i.e. data about data). Collections cannot be discovered using electronic search tools unless they have an electronic representative description. Not all of TNA's catalogue meets the threshold of a representative description - the catalogue reflects decades of work by many contributors and began in paper format. The main paper catalogue was turned into the first online catalogue but in the 20 years' work on it since then it has become apparent that paper does not always translate well on line.

4.1.2 The vision for the catalogue is: a) continuous improvement in catalogue data; b) everything catalogued to the bare minimum standard c) do better than the minimum where we can. The mission for the State of the Catalogue project seeks to address (b) by assessing what data is inadequate, addressing this where we can and aiming to influence the direction of cataloguing work generally. TNA measures adequacy quantitatively every three months by counting instances where the description or date is blank or where the catalogue reference is incomplete. We can demonstrate that these are declining, as in the past 8 years countable instances of data issues have fallen by 2.84 million and nearly 86% of them have been resolved in that time.

4.1.3 We know by series where the largest pockets of inadequate data are but deciding which ones to tackle relies on a knowledge of TNA's collections and how they work. One influence is the plans for digitisation by TNA's licensing partners, as it is preferable to have clean cataloguing data prior to digitisation. The pandemic has been the biggest barrier to data cleaning as it has prevented the physical investigation of box contents. TNA's current technical infrastructure is outdated but is to be updated as part of project Omega. Improving catalogue data meaningfully is hard work but combining data manipulation techniques with traditional cataloguing projects will often yield the best results.

##### 4.2 Project Omega (JG)

4.2.1 Project Omega is developing what we call a pan-archival catalogue, an all-encompassing single catalogue to hold a canonical set of metadata for all records, regardless of medium. This goes far beyond the replacement of our old catalogue management system. The idea is to consolidate gradually a number of systems used to manage catalogue data and to open up our data, making use of modern standards and technology.

4.2.2 There are 12 catalogue systems at TNA, including PROcat which has been used for the last twenty years to edit, process and release new descriptions daily generated by cataloguing projects, researchers and the descriptions transferred by government departments when records are

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accessioned. Twenty years ago the first on line catalogue PROCat was released, afterwards TNA engaged in a process to improve the user experience and the user interface. After a number of iterations this led to the launch of Discovery in 2013 but the same catalogue management system has been used throughout. TNA is now able to invest in updating this.

- 4.2.3 There are several other catalogue database systems - one is specific to born digital records and another for access regulation about closed records including Freedom of Information exemptions. A record in Discovery may use a combination of information from these sources. Another system, EPRO, was developed when TNA started to digitise the most popular records. The databases are resilient but the points where they join are becoming leaky. The image library has its own catalogue and TNA holds catalogue data for records in other institutions.
- 4.2.4 For us to gradually consolidate these systems and introduce more efficient processes and workflows for accessions, enhancement and enrichment, we needed to come up with an intellectual structure, a data model, and a technical schema (ontology) and make some database technology choices.
- 4.2.5 The first phase of the project ended in Spring 2020 and the decision was made to move to a linked data catalogue based on the International Council of Archives conceptual model 'Records in Context' using mature existing standards. The backend database will be a graph database, which stores both the record, the information about it, their representations and their multiple relationships. This will enable the data to be better linked and will allow TNA to hold a better record of changes to the metadata and create audit trails.
- 4.2.5 JG recommended that delegates view a video from last November's Catalogue Day which gives an overview of the project by a data analyst in the team. The link to this is in her presentation [circulated post meeting].
- 4.2.6. There are four work streams going forward:
  - i) Catalogue Data Model and Ontology Development;
  - ii) Data extraction and transformation into the new model in Resource Description Framework;
  - iii) Building a catalogue management system for all the catalogues;
  - iv) Building an application programming interface to enable the transmission of data with other systems.

### 4.3 Prisoner of War project (RK and PH)

- 4.3.1. RK. Volunteers have been working on this project relating to the series of records WO416 for around four years. The records were transferred to TNA by the MoD in 2014. In 2017 the records needed to be catalogued and rehoused. The series comprises records for nearly 200,000 individual British and Allied servicemen from the Army, Royal Navy and RAF who were captured in Europe in WW2. The series consists of personnel records and cards but also includes cards for several thousand Merchant Seamen, civilian internees and deceased airmen whose remains were found on the ground.
- 4.3.2 The records include those relating to living people in archival terms, i.e. those born less than one hundred years ago. This has presented challenges in term of what data can be displayed in the catalogue. The cards provide photographs, fingerprints, X-rays and sometimes sensitive information. Occasionally metal id tags are included. Some of the cards are wrapped in slips but many are loose risking mis-sorting and loss.

We believe the youngest PoW was born in 1927 (i.e. 18 in 1945) and the youngest internee in 1929 (i.e. 16 in 1945). The series was closed after transfer to TNA as there are access conditions – this meant only the Freedom of Information Centre had access. It was established that most cards had a date of birth or age which allowed most of the collection to be opened under the hundred year requirement. The records connect to other PoW series such as WO344, the camp liberation questionnaires and WO208 which are the evasion and escape reports.
- 4.3.3 The project required a skilled volunteer force – the cards were in German, the cards per person ranged from 1 to over 20 and where the dates of birth or death were missing, identities had to be established using resources such as the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. Staples had to be

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- removed and cards placed in acid free envelopes. The volunteers TNA looked for needed to have a keen interest in military history and be able to take on complex tasks.
- 4.3.4 PH. PH is a spokesperson for a number of volunteers who have worked at TNA for some 20 years, working on twelve major series of documents. Training was given on Data Protection legislation, and Collection Care gave training on the care of documents and the removal of staples. The team worked alongside the TNA team as equals which was very satisfying.
- 4.3.5 The cards include records for BAME servicemen. Also included are those for celebrities such as the actor Peter Butterworth, and for members of The Guinea Pig Club who volunteered for plastic surgery for facial disfigurement injuries. The learning gained during the project should be useful for other work and PH thanked COS for her support to the volunteers over the years.
- 4.3.6 RK. Outcomes from the project include the enhancement of the records descriptions and the enhancement of the catalogue, e.g. service numbers and places of services have been added in many places. For closed records there is a restricted description – these are expanded once the 100 years since date of birth rule is satisfied. There is a paid search service for those records which have not yet been catalogued. Two blogs are published each year. A popular public event ‘War Behind the Wire’ was held in February 2020 showcasing the behind-the-scenes work, The team has now catalogued 129,000 records out of 200,000. 80% of these are open – the remaining 20% can be opened if proof of death is supplied. The surnames ‘N to Z’ are to be tackled but Covid restrictions have reduced the space for 23 volunteers to 7 meaning that the target completion date is now Spring 2023. Digitisation will take place when the work is completed. It is hoped in future to be able to use the great skills acquired by the volunteers to open up other collections. RK passed his thanks to all the volunteers on and off site.
- 4.4 Language and the Catalogue (GVM)
- 4.4.1 GVM has been working on language in the catalogue, particularly offensive terminology used in archive descriptions. In 2002 internal cataloguing guidance was published by TNA after consultation with the User Advisory Group for Social Inclusion. This stated that ‘language should be accurate, inclusive and guided by objectivity’. When using original file titles for descriptions any harmful or pejorative terms should be put in quotation marks to indicate a quotation rather than an endorsement. Mention could be made of the harmful term by adding a note in the description.
- 4.4.2 Due to the time since its publication, in Spring and Summer 2020, GVM began a review of this guidance. GVM also reviewed external research into descriptive methods used by other collections and archives. There is a dearth of public statements by UK institutions so GVM looked at statements issued by Princeton and Yale Universities amongst others. In terms of professional bodies, GVM looked at statements by The Archives and Records Association in the UK, the Society of American Archivists and the Association for Canadian Archivists. Events in support of The Black Lives Matter protests in summer 2020 have led to wider societal discussions around racism and discrimination; however these coincided with the review and were not a driver. That said, the events demonstrate that there is a demand for the research and review.
- 4.4.3 A key theme seen in the research review was the need to balance preserving the context of a record’s creation against causing offence. Including original terms is a reflection of the time in which the record was created and therefore of historical importance. There was a call for ethical, inclusive and transparent approaches, and that the archive profession has a duty to be aware of their own biases although it is not the archivist’s role to ‘clean up history’. There was an acknowledgement that the process would need to be iterative due to the scale of the issue and because society’s view of what is acceptable terminology will change and evolve. There was a recognition that wider community input would be needed to help drive improvements.
- 4.4.4 Suggested approaches included avoiding the replacement of offensive terms with modern language because this can change. There was a strong bias towards the use of quotation marks to capture and mitigate offensive terms and some sources recommended adding an editorial note.

Community engagement was also recommended. A benchmarking mitigation measure against a 'Good', 'Better', 'Best' framework was also suggested.

- 4.4.5 GVM's findings were circulated amongst the Catalogue, Taxonomy and Data team and colleagues across TNA. Subsequently, discussions on this research area were held with archivists across the sector. GVM then drafted a statement which it is planned will be shared on TNA's website. The statement aims to transparently inform users why certain descriptive practices are used whilst acknowledging the hurt some users may experience when encountering terminology. It affirms TNA's commitment to work proactively and actively on evolving practice and to develop inclusive archival terms.
- 4.4.6 The draft is now being reviewed prior to publication. The existing cataloguing guidance will be reviewed to update it in line with these findings. GVM has compiled a glossary of terms to assist with an audit of the live catalogue descriptions, for example to ensure terms are in quotation marks.

## 5. Delegate questions and pre-submitted items:

- 5.1 On behalf of the delegates and the TNA team VJ thanked COS for her many years of service to UAG; comments from individual delegates showed how much COS' work and support has been valued. COS thanked UAG for their participation and contribution to TNA.
- 5.2 SM was pleased to note that many of the classes of document referenced in AJ's presentation were from the Map Room and would like to share this with other Map Room users – the presentations will be circulated. AJ noted that medieval, early modern and legal records tend to have larger numbers of data problems and have been more difficult to fix.
- 5.3 SM. Will JG be talking to users about their experiences of the catalogue and look to retain existing browsing features and archival structures? How will regnal years be handled? JG: it will be crucial to plan the switch from the old to the new catalogue system carefully. Project Etna will be looking at the front end of the catalogue which users experience and JG will pass on SM's feedback and request to the Etna team. There will be no change in the regnal year data but processes for the new catalogue management system may result in improvements in the regnal date's data. LO reminded delegates that the team working on Project Alpha, the predecessor of Project Etna, had attended UAG on a couple of occasions over the last 18 months to run workshops to explore delegates' requirements from TNA's online presence. The team had found their input useful and LO is sure that they will attend again in future.
- 5.4 NC. The Prize Papers have been catalogued according to the taxonomy for the Admiralty Court but could they be re-catalogued to reflect the geographic provenance and destination of the letters? JG advised that the existing catalogue descriptions will contain the correspondent data. A filter in Discovery enables users to select results by the creating body. A further taxonomy filter allows users to search on other terms.
- 5.5 SM asked if there is a date for the release of the new catalogue. LO clarified that Project Alpha is looking to update TNA's entire online presence (of which the catalogue is a part) to meet current user needs. This large project is a work in progress and no dates have been confirmed.
- 5.6 NC has been pointing postgraduate students to TNA's online research and training materials – feedback indicates that they have found these very useful.

### **Action: VJ to pass this feedback to the team.**

- 5.7 The following answers to pre-submitted delegate questions were circulated afterwards due to lack of time:

Q: 'Why was payment made to testing panel members by means of an Amazon voucher rather than a voucher for the TNA bookshop?' (SM)

A: There are lots of rules around offering incentives. The institution offering the incentive cannot be the beneficiary of them, so we have to offer alternatives to our own goods/services. This is why we always offer a choice of either an Amazon voucher or a TNA bookshop voucher.

- 5.8 Q: 'The zoom function is no longer available for the Palaeography tutorial on the TNA website. The

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zoom/enlargement feature may have particular value in maintaining accessibility for partially sighted users. (SM, SK and GI)

A: Many of our legacy sites such as the Latin and Palaeography tutorials were developed over fifteen years ago by an external agency and during that time technology and accessibility standards have moved on. The reality is that we cannot change the legacy code to meet today's standards so we need to archive the resources and look to redevelop them when budget, resource and organisational priority allows. With a site the scale of The National Archives, we understand that there are pockets of content which are very important to specific groups and we try our best to understand and cater for their needs. However, In terms of overall popularity, users of our Palaeography resource per month equate to only approximately 0.37% of our total users. When Flash was decommissioned in December 2020, the team looked at each resource on a case-by-case basis. Rather than archive the whole Palaeography resource at that time, we agreed to remove or disable the parts of the resource that were reliant on Flash, one of which was the zoom function. TNA is exploring new ways to redevelop the Latin and Palaeography tutorials using the online learning platform, Moodle. This is however a long-term project which is only in an early phase. In the meantime it is suggested that users either:

a) Enlarge the images using their browser zoom function (we appreciate this will not be to the resolution that was previously offered);

b) Download the printable PDF versions, which contain high-resolution versions of the images which can be zoomed in on using Adobe Acrobat

5.9 Q: Will photocopying be speeded up until normal opening hours are resumed, with quicker turnaround than there was during the earlier partial reopening? (SM)

A: We will resume our normal record copying services as soon as we are able to do so, turnaround times depend on the number and type of order. Copying orders have increased due to people's limited movement, and we receive orders from around the world.

5.10 Q: How long do you plan to continue to offer free downloads of documents? (SM)

A: We are making digital records available on our website free of charge for the time being, while access to our reading room service is restricted.

## 6. **Forthcoming Events and Any other Business.**

There was no AOB. The next call will be held on Tuesday the 8th June 2021 at 10.30 am.

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