

arc magazine

November &
December '21

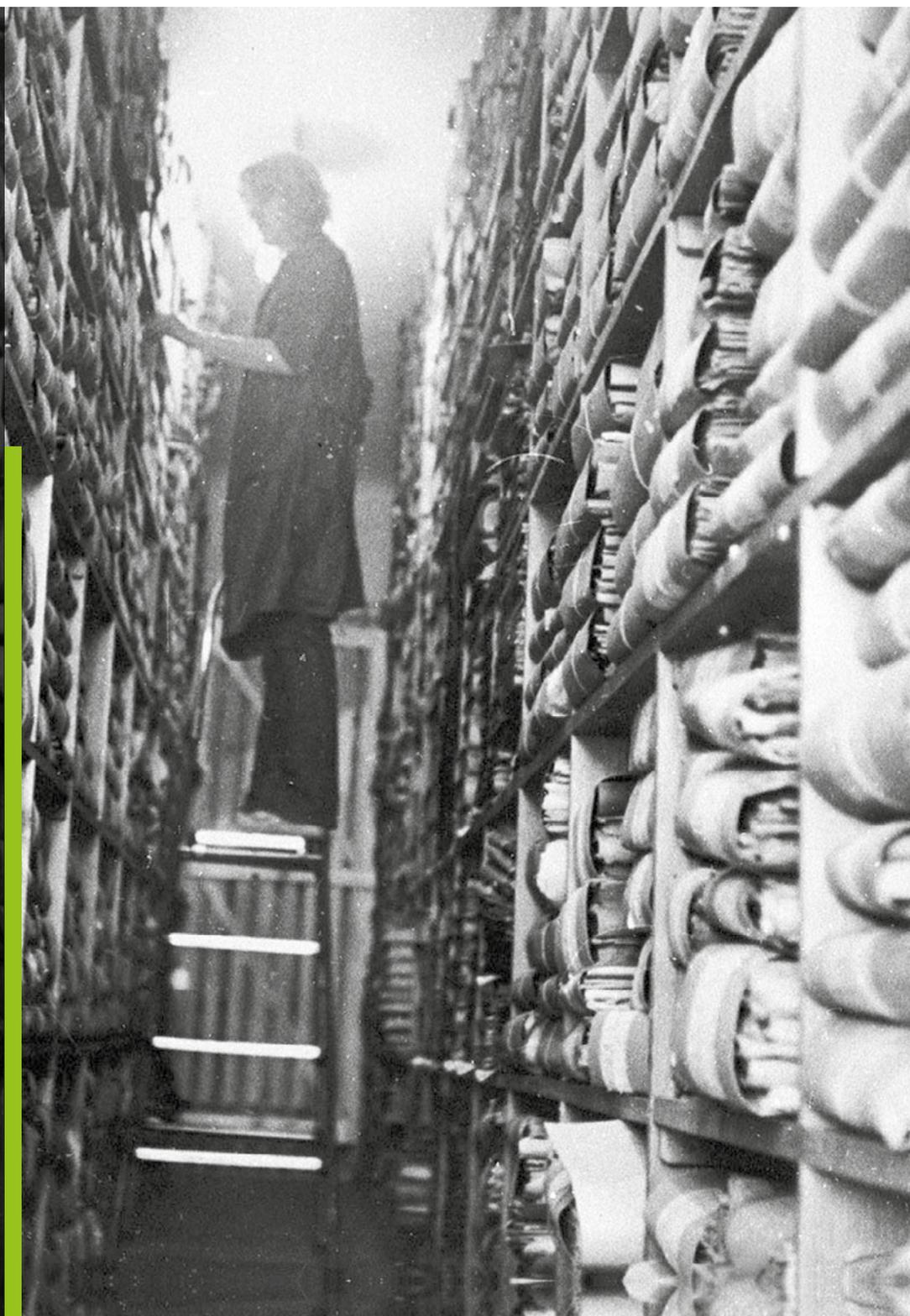
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Mountbatten
diaries:
Censoring our
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Welcome

arc magazine

November & December 2021 edition



Welcome to the November/December edition of ARC Magazine. In this last issue of 2021, we bring you new insights from across the sector, starting with a reflection on the highlights of the ARA Conference which was delivered online for the first time in its history. The conference was a resounding success in terms of attendance and the high quality of the sessions. However, I am sure we all look forward to returning to a face-to-face conference in Chester next year.

Karyn Williamson, ARA portfolio holder for Special Interest Groups and Sections, reflects on her time as a member of the Board and highlights the value of key transformational and inspiring initiatives such as the Explore Your Archive campaign and the establishment of the ARA Diversity Allies.

In a similar vein, we hear about a wide range of funding initiatives, events and resources which emphasise the dynamic and fast-moving nature of record-keeping as a profession and an industry.

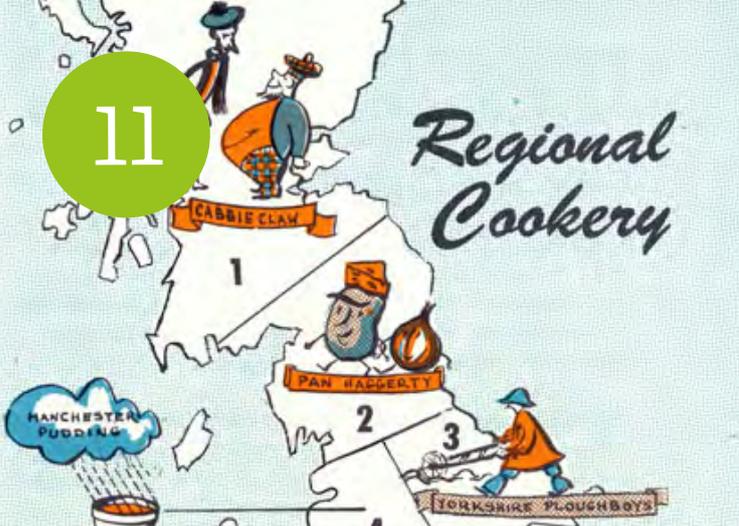
Our four features are as thought-provoking as ever and touch on a diverse range of issues - from approaching salary negotiations with employers to the

intersections between digitisation and archival materiality, the benefits of maximising archival research through keyword searches, and the ongoing campaign to make the diaries and letters of the Mountbatten family publicly available.

2021 has been another exciting year in the history of ARC Magazine. On behalf of the editorial team, I would like to thank all the contributors who have helped to make it a reality and I look forward to working with you in 2022.

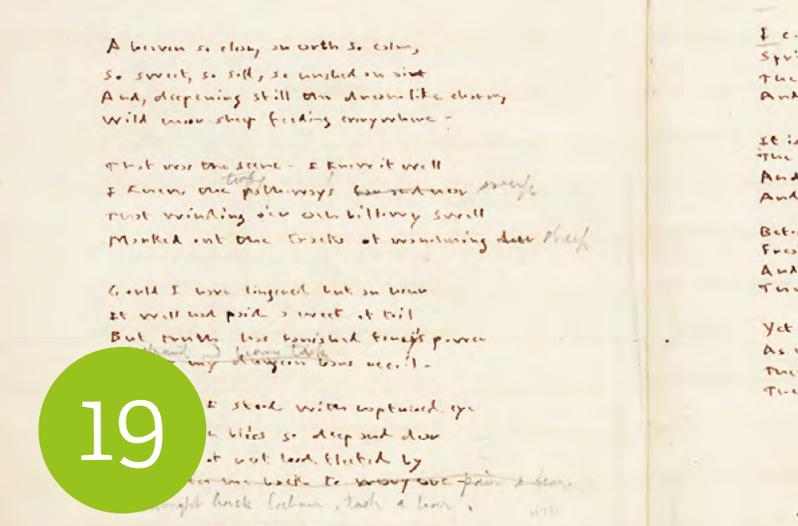
Maria Castrillo
*ARA Board, Publications
and Promotion*





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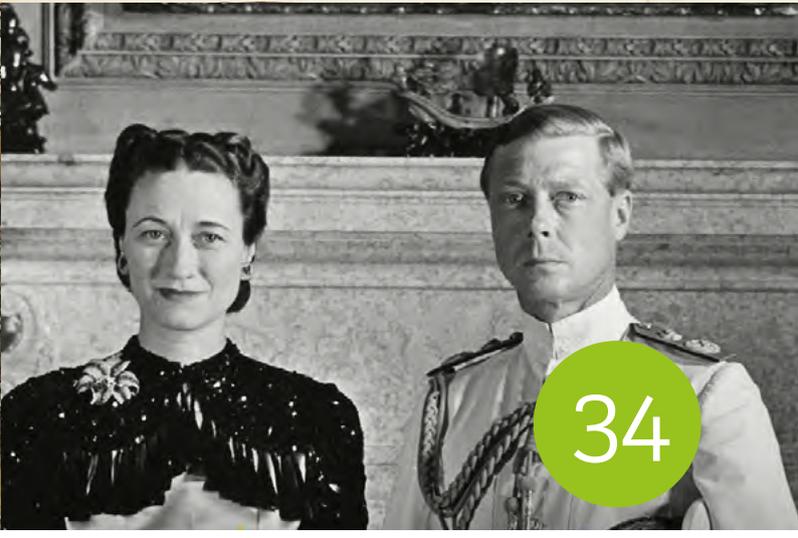
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Automated topic detection in archival research

Historian and digital humanities researcher, Marta Musso, explores the role that automated topic detection can play in archival research.

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Cover image: Woman in the archives (1978) - National Archives of Latvia (NLA) - LVVA



opening lines

Leah Johnston, Secretary of the Section for Archives and Technology (SAT), takes a look at what the current year has meant for the section and how it has impacted on the wider record-keeping sector.



As we settled into the start of 2021, and what would be the second year of living through the COVID-19 pandemic, the SAT committee looked to the year ahead and began planning a series of training events. Along with many others across the profession, it soon became apparent to us that much of our work would remain online for the foreseeable future. The use of VC (video conferencing) technology for meetings and online training sessions that had seemed very much a temporary measure in 2020 has now become a more permanent fixture across all aspects of our work.

Amid the last national lockdown, the committee prepared for our first online event of the year, a webinar on linked data led by Dr Athanasios Velios (Reader in Documentation at Ligatus, University of Arts London). Dr Velios led a lunchtime webinar on the Linked Conservation Data project, an Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded project with the aim of enabling integration of conservation records.

Linked data has been of interest to the archival field for some time, with several projects established in the early 2010s to determine its use. As a result, the SAT committee decided to take the opportunity to hold this webinar to open up further discussion about linked data and its uses in the archival community. During the webinar Dr Velios discussed his work as part of the project and shared resources that may be of use in an archival context.

The webinar was well received and was followed in April 2021 with another online session in which David Underdown (Senior Digital Archivist, The UK National Archives) led a demonstration of DiAGRAM, The UK National Archives' Digital Archiving Graphical Risk Assessment Model.

Making use of Zoom, David was able to show attendees a step-by-step demonstration of modelling. This was followed by discussions with Heather Forbes (Head of Archives Service, Gloucestershire County Council) and Catherine Jones (Energy Data Centre Lead, Science and Technology Facilities Council) about how they approached modelling their own institutions' digital preservation situation to engage with their stakeholders.

Even with the easing of government restrictions throughout May and June this year, the decision was made for ARA events to remain online. The SAT committee organised our AGM to be held online in July and this was to be followed by another online training event on web archiving, led by Kirsty Fife



“With the apparent success of these online events and of the first virtual ARA Conference, held at the start of September, is this new way of working here to stay?”



VC technology has become a more permanent fixture across all aspects of our work. © Shutterstock.

(Lecturer in Digital Information, UCL). With a vast amount of information relating to the current pandemic found on websites and social media platforms, the topic seemed particularly timely. During the session Kirsty provided attendees with an introductory background to web archiving and an overview of web archiving software, Conifer.

With the apparent success of these online events and of the first virtual ARA Conference, is this new way of working here to stay? Before the pandemic, VC platforms such as MS Teams, Zoom and Skype were used in a small number of professional settings. Over the past two years, however, they have become indispensable tools that have allowed those in the archive sector to keep in touch with their colleagues, have created opportunities for continued training online and, in some cases, have provided researchers with virtual reading room visits.

Online webinars and talks have generally been well received. There is some consensus that the format allows for greater ease of access for some, removing the time and expense required to travel across the country. With the option to record sessions, attendees also have the opportunity to go back later to view the content again, or to catch up on anything they may have missed. Another advantage

is the ability to share a variety of resources in real time. VC platforms enable trainers and attendees to share links to relevant documents, videos, websites and social media sites in a way that in-person events don't.

This is not to say that there are no downsides to the use of VC technology. It is still very much a substitute and not a replacement for face-to-face contact with colleagues. Although virtual reading rooms can provide researchers with the option to take a closer look at archival material via VC technology, it still can't replicate the experience of researchers browsing through a collection themselves. In addition, although this technology can provide greater access opportunities for some, the requirement for particular VC software and equipment such as webcams could be a barrier to others.

The use of VC technology in archives will undoubtedly continue for some time. Despite having some disadvantages, it has provided the profession with the opportunity to connect and engage in new ways. With the increase in virtual reading rooms and the move towards hybrid ways of working, such technology looks to become very much a part of working life.

From the ARA Board



Karyn Williamson, ARA Board portfolio holder for Groups and Sections, reflects on her time as a board member and what she has delivered so far.

Having volunteered in a range of roles for the ARA in the last few years, I was keen to take the step up to the Board and find out how things work from the top down. I took over as portfolio holder for Groups and Sections in 2019 and since then it has been a really busy and interesting time. A lot of change is taking place across the whole organisation, which has led to a lot of cross-portfolio working for the Board, as well as numerous standalone projects which are designed to help the ARA meet its aims and objectives. I wanted to highlight what I've been working on over the last year and what is in store for the coming months.

The last year or so

My main role on the Board is to act as the representative for the ARA's Groups and Sections. This includes the Section for Business Records, the Community and Archives Heritage Group, the Film Sound and Photography Section, the Section for Specialist Repositories, the Sections for Archives and Museums, Archives for Learning and Education and the Preservation and Conservation Group. I'm available to answer any queries about committee working, administration, funding and any other issues that may arise. However, all these groups are well established and run well with minimal input from me. This

meant I had to find some new activities to busy myself with.

In 2019, I re-designed and launched the updated Explore Your Archive [website](#) alongside a revamped social media campaign to run throughout the year. Joining the Board gave me further scope to adapt and grow the campaign and, at the time of writing, we have 11 volunteers working on various levels of the campaign – from social media to blog posting to website development. This has led to the creation of a dedicated Facebook and Instagram account to accompany the well-established Twitter account. With around 7,000 followers across the three platforms, the campaign's reach has exploded over the past year. Regular blog posts have also proved popular, with an average of 1,000 views per month. The introduction of monthly themes as well as our usual Explore Your Archive theme week in November has encouraged engagement with the campaign throughout the year and we hope to see this continue. Expanding the team has caused the campaign to benefit significantly from a range of views and opinions. However, yet again my workload slowed so I was on the hunt for a new project.

Previous feedback from the volunteers working with the ARA indicated a lack of communication



The format of the ARA Forums is changing following feedback, but they will continue to provide a platform for engagement with the Board and other volunteers.



between the Board and the volunteers working across the Nations, Regions and Sections. In an attempt to rectify this, we introduced the ARA forums, regular online meetings between Board members and the officers of each group. Three meetings per year are scheduled for Group Chairs, Admin Officers, Communications Officers and Training Officers. Each forum begins with a 10-minute Board update and then opens up into a wider discussion, sometimes with a guest speaker or training session if required. By creating role-specific forums, we are providing an opportunity for officers volunteering in similar roles to meet each other, exchange tips and ideas, as well as discuss

ARCHIVE
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DISCOVERED
FOUND
DETECTED
CONNECTED
ENGAGED
UNEARTHED
LEARNED
IMAGINED
CREATED
UNLOCKED
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REVEALED
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ARA Diversity & Inclusion

any issues they face. The forums also provide a direct link to Board members who can advise further or act on any issues or problems raised.

Engagement in the forums has led to the completion and wider dissemination of the ARA Officers' Handbook, alongside improved communications across the organisation. This communication focus continued with the establishment of the Diversity and Inclusion Allies in July 2020. Alongside ARA

Diversity and Inclusion portfolio holder Jenny Moran, we pulled together a group of more than 25 enthusiastic individuals who were as passionate about effecting change across the ARA and the wider sector as we were. One year on, the group is now a fully constituted ARA Group, with two representatives for each ARA Nation and Region and seven working groups, each focused on different areas where current diversity and inclusion practice can be improved.



The Diversity and Inclusion Allies recently formed a leadership committee who are working on an action plan to take forward into 2022.

What's next?

This coming year is shaping up to be as jam-packed as the last. The Explore Your Archive Campaign will be held again later this month, with plans in place to add an exhibitions section to the webpage early in the new year. The format of the ARA Forums is changing following feedback, but they will continue to provide a platform for engagement with the Board and other volunteers. The Diversity and Inclusion Allies recently formed a leadership committee who are working on an action plan to take forward into 2022.

And that's only the updates on previous projects! The ARA's Business Plan has many more projects in the pipeline so keep an eye on ARA Today and our new website to stay updated. I'm proud to have been a part of the Board this past year and can't wait to see what the coming months bring.

Click [here](#) for more information on Explore Your Archive and [here](#) to find out more about the Diversity and Inclusion Allies. Please feel free to get in touch with me via email at Karyn.Williamson@archives.org.uk.



ARA Annual Conference 2021 Round Up: WE LOVE RECORDS

Sustainability, Diversity, Advocacy

Our Annual Conference was held online for the first time this year. With 561 delegates attending 51 sessions delivered by 90+ speakers, the ARA's ninth conference was hailed a great success. Each day of the conference, which ran from 1st – 3rd September, was dedicated to one of three themes: sustainability, diversity and advocacy.

The opening keynote focused on sustainability, with Jeff James, Chief Executive Officer and Keeper of The UK National Archives, talking to our Chair, Lisa Snook. Jeff spoke about how The UK National Archives is working to deliver and enable sustainability, diversity and advocacy for its collections and services, and in its role as archives sector lead.

Jeff shared an inspiring update on how The UK National Archives has cut its carbon footprint by 80% since 2009/10, with a corresponding 50% reduction in energy costs. Via an online chat stream, delegates expressed their interest in seeing the results of research into the buffering effect of archive boxes, which had allowed The UK National Archives to switch off some of the plant equipment at evenings and weekends at its building in Kew.

Sustainability of the sector was as much a part of the first day's theme as sustainability of the planet. Jeff also announced that The UK National Archives would be consulting with the sector to identify what support they need from a leadership body across all three conference themes.

Other sessions on Day One expanded on the theme of sustainability, looking at how archives and records organisations could sustain communities. There were fascinating contributions from PRONI (The Public Record Office of Northern Ireland) and CAHG (The Community Archives and Heritage Group), as well as further detail on environmental sustainability – from the macro of passive archive buildings to the micro of the Science Museum Group's research into the biodegradability and recycling options for gloves. Environmental consultant, Lorraine Finch,



Jeff James, CEO and Keeper of The UK National Archives also suggested a number of easy wins for us all to implement to help save the planet.

Day Two opened with an inspiring keynote from Arike Oke, Managing Director of Black Cultural Archives, to kick start discussions on the theme of diversity. In her speech, Arike recognised that everyone working in the sector would need to ask difficult questions of themselves and the organisations they work in. She highlighted that if a shift towards equity, social justice and diversity is to take place, everyone working in the sector must be proactive and take responsibility.



Deirdre McParland, Senior Archivist, Electricity Supply Board

Arike also touched on the intersectional nature of diversity, and the sessions held throughout the second day reflected the multi-stranded nature of the diversity theme. The programme provided some really fascinating talks and workshops on reparative justice, decolonising the curriculum, connecting with and encouraging communities to be part of archives, and queering the archives.

Delegates also heard from the Trainee Archive/ Archive Assistants from 'Coming in from the Cold', a three-year project funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund to increase the existence of underrepresented groups in official records. The project has created new entry level Trainee Archive/ Archive Assistant posts specifically for people of Black, Asian and ethnic global majority heritage to help diversify the record-keeping sector's workforce.

The final day of the conference, the theme of which was advocacy, opened with a brilliant keynote by Deirdre McParland, Senior Archivist at the Electricity Supply Board. In her pre-recorded presentation, Deirdre spoke convincingly and passionately about how we, as a profession, can spread the message about the value of the work we do. She posed the question: "While we know the value of our records and our collections, how do we collectively ensure that the communities and organisations where we work know who we are and the unique value we bring?". In answer, she proposed that advocacy is integral to the fabric of our profession. The delegate chat suggested that had her speech been delivered in person in a conference hall there would have been a standing ovation. Sessions across Day Three addressed the theme of advocacy in a multitude of ways, from Instagram and elevator



Arike Oke, Managing Director, Black Cultural Archives.
Image courtesy of Adenike Oke

pitches to community engagement and health and wellbeing benefits.

The wonders of modern technology meant there was no need for the usually tricky decisions about which sessions to attend as all sessions were available online for the month of September.

Alongside the conference's themed sessions, many other fascinating talks and workshops were to be found, including participatory workshops delivered online, sessions on resilience and emergency planning, an hilarious and informative talk about the saving of the Thomas Cook Archive and a number of useful sessions on digitisation and information governance.

Despite being held online, delegates took full advantage of the virtual networking opportunities. A networking session on Day One enabled people to get to know one another by sharing stories about their favourite books. Friday night would not be complete without a trip to the pub, albeit a virtual one thanks to CXD (Conservation By Design). And delegates could also go on a virtual tour of the new Lambeth Palace Library and round off their trip with a bit of social networking.

We know, though, that there is no real substitute for the in-person, accidental networking of a face-to-face conference so we are already looking forward to and starting to plan for next year's conference which will be held in Chester from Wednesday 31st August to Friday 2nd September 2022.

The Call for Papers will go out later this year, with the programme available in spring 2022.

#ArchiveHoliday – a summer success story!

This summer, ARA Scotland ran the #ArchiveHoliday social media campaign. With many people still unable to travel very far on holiday, the team at ARA Scotland wanted to give people a chance to go on holiday via its archives!

Samantha Case at ARA Scotland comments: "While we have enjoyed past campaigns such as #ArchiveZ, 26 weeks is a very long time to be posting content, so this year we opted to run the campaign over a more condensed time frame. The campaign ran for ten weeks, and themes included various holiday topics such as #HolidayFashion and #HolidayFood. It has been brilliant to see the creative ways in which people interpreted these themes to fit their collections, and it was nice to have something cheerful to look forward to on social media every week."

"We had around 70 Twitter participants each week, and 15-25 participants on both Facebook and Instagram. Participants were mainly from the UK and Ireland, but some were from further afield as well. In future years, we will likely change up the later themes (such as #DreamArchiveDestination

M&S Company Archives' tweet for the #HolidayFood theme of #ArchiveHoliday. Image courtesy of Marks & Spencer Company Archives



and #WhyVisitYourArchive) as they did not attract as much engagement and were a bit trickier to find content for.”

Later this month, ARA Scotland will be doing something exciting for the #ExploreYourArchive launch, and will probably do something around the winter holidays as well, so keep an eye out on its [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) accounts.

#ArchiveHoliday
@ara_scotland

ARA Archives & Records Association Scotland

| | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| Week 1 (July 5-11) | #HolidayDestination |
| Week 2 (July 12-18) | #HolidayTransport |
| Week 3 (July 19-25) | #HolidayFashion |
| Week 4 (July 26-Aug 1) | #HolidayFood |
| Week 5 (August 2-8) | #HolidayActivities |
| Week 6 (August 9-15) | #HolidayWeather |
| Week 7 (August 16-22) | #HolidayScenery |
| Week 8 (August 23-29) | #ArchiveTourist |
| Week 9 (August 30-Sept 5) | #DreamArchiveDestination |
| Week 10 (September 6-12) | #WhyVisitYourArchive |

The 2021 #Archive Holiday hashtags



One of Orkney Library's tweets for the #HolidayActivities theme of #ArchiveHoliday. Image courtesy of Orkney Library.

Call for Proposals for Archives and Records Special Issue on Student and New Professional Research

Archival practice and the academic discipline of archival studies are developing rapidly and radically in response to and anticipation of social and political forces, theoretical interventions and socio-technological developments. In this exciting time for the field, student and new professional voices continue to contribute greatly.

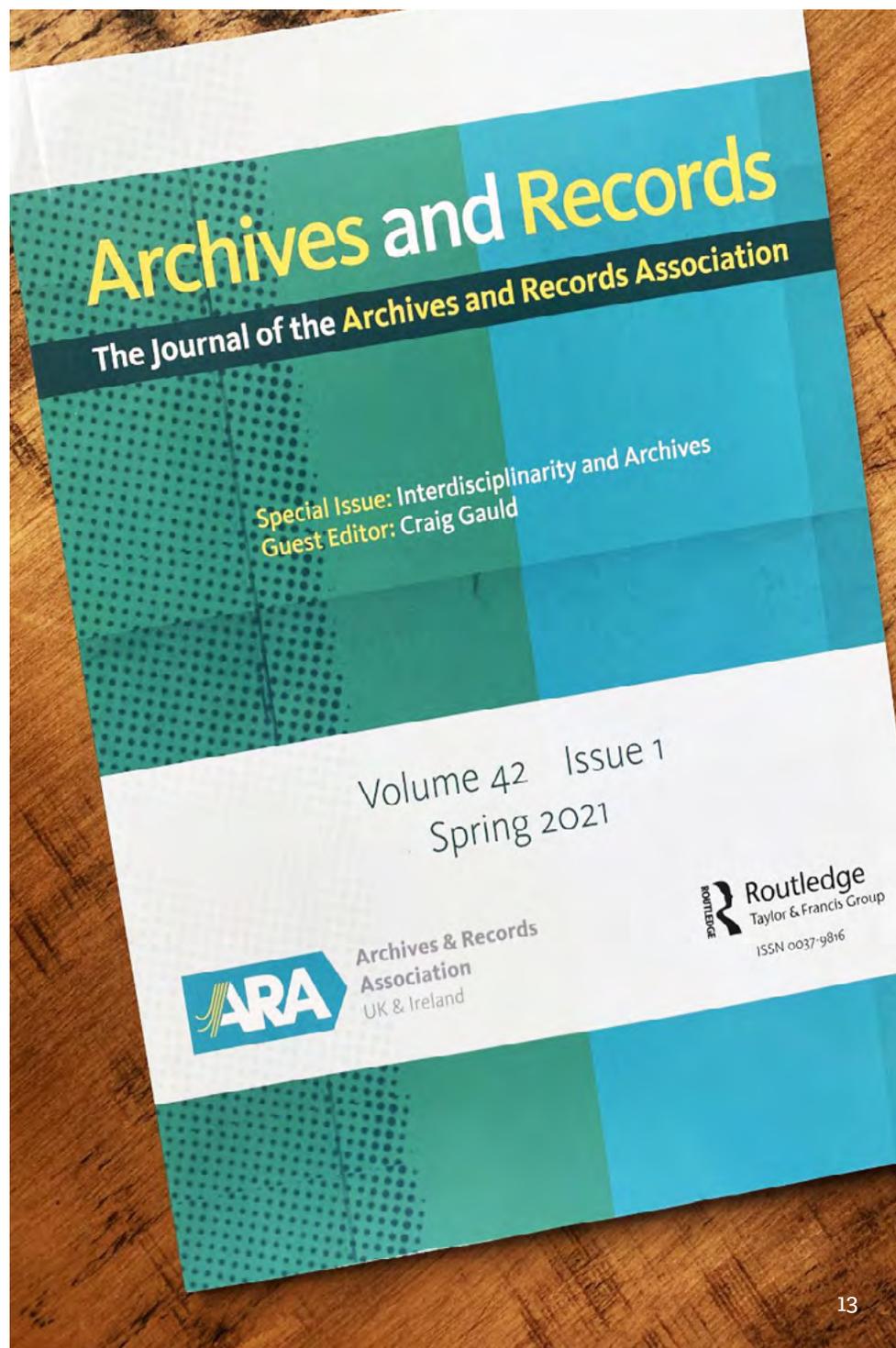
The research conducted by students in the UK and Ireland has long made valuable contributions to the literature, helping to effect positive change in how we understand records and their management, uses and impacts. Students and new professionals bring important new ideas into archival theory and practice, and Archives and Records seeks to encourage this reshaping of the field.

A special issue of Archives and Records intends to further disseminate such research and celebrate the voices of current or recent students and new professionals. We invite anyone in the UK and Ireland who has undertaken a masters or PhD in archive studies – or those who have entered the profession via any route within the past five years – to submit an article based on research on any subject related to the field which they have undertaken as part of their scholarship or practice.

Articles should be no more than 8,000 words (including footnotes and references) and written in accordance with the [style guide](#) and [reference guide](#) provided by Archives and

Records. We anticipate that many prospective contributors to this special issue will be first time authors. The guest editors will be available to provide advice to writers who are invited to submit full articles.

Click [here](#) to find out more, read the submission instructions and contributor guidelines and see the criteria for selecting proposals.



#ExploreYourArchive set to take place from 20th - 28th November



**ARCHIVE
EXPLORED**



Each year we mark #ExploreYourArchive with nine days of social media and online activity. It's an opportunity to tell the world about the wonders of your archive. The #ExploreYourArchive team has welcomed 12 new volunteers since January this year and they would really appreciate your help in making this year's #ExploreYourArchive launch a big success.

There is still plenty of time to get involved and you can find out all about the daily themes at the #ExploreYourArchives blog [here](#).

Don't forget to hashtag any posts with #ExploreYourArchive and ... tag the 'exploreyourarchive team on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#)

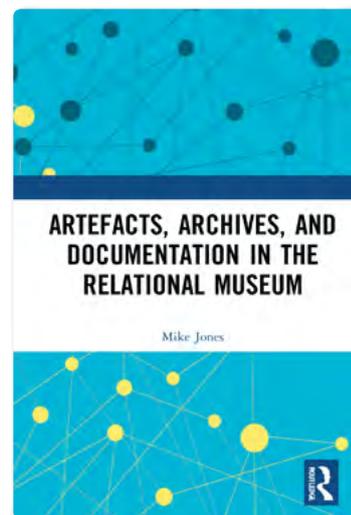
ARA member book discount: Artefacts, Archives, and Documentation in the Relational Museum

ARA members are able to take advantage of a 20% discount on a new book written by Mike Jones from the Australian National University.

Artefacts, Archives, and Documentation in the Relational Museum provides the first interdisciplinary study of the digital documentation of artefacts and archives in contemporary museums, while also exploring the implications of polyphonic, relational thinking on collections documentation.

Drawing on case studies from Australia, the UK, and the US, the book provides a critical examination of the history of collections management and documentation since the introduction of computers to museums in the 1960s, demonstrating how technology has contributed to the disconnection of distributed collections knowledge. Jones also highlights how separate documentation systems have developed, managed by distinct, increasingly professionalised staff, impacting our ability to understand and use what we find in museums and their ever-expanding online collections. Exploring this legacy allows us to rethink current practice, focusing less on individual objects and more on the rich stories and interconnected resources that lie at the heart of the contemporary, plural, participatory 'relational museum'.

Artefacts, Archives, and Documentation in the Relational Museum is essential reading for those who wish to better understand the institutional silos found in museums, and the changes required to make museum knowledge more accessible. The book is a particularly important addition to the fields of museum studies, archival science, information management and the history of cultural heritage technologies.



Click [here](#) to place your order. Enter the 20% ARA Discount code FLY21 at the checkout. The discount is available until 31st December 2021.

Please note this offer cannot be used in conjunction with any other offer or discount and only applies to books purchased directly via Routledge's website.

Desert Island Lists - The Chantry Library subject bibliographies and more!

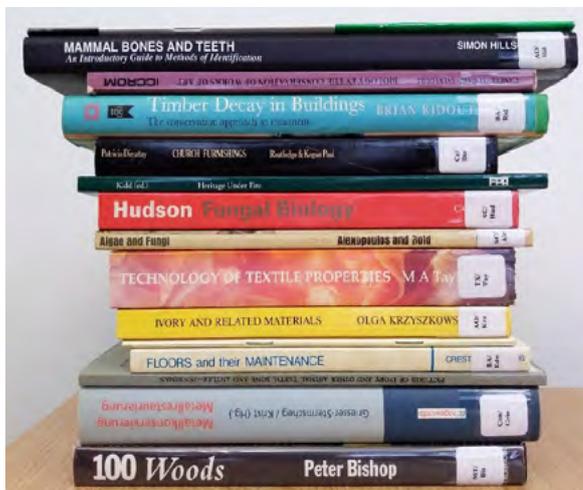
The Chantry Library is a small independent conservation library based at and supported by the Oxford Conservation Consortium. Formerly the library of the Institute of Conservation, and with roots that extend even deeper to the Institute of Paper Conservation, the Chantry holds a unique and fascinating collection of technical conservation literature, with a particular strength in paper, books and library and archive materials.

In many cases the Chantry is the library of last resort for what might be called 'grey literature', unpublished reports, early surveys, newsletters and minor publications that didn't set out to record the history and development of conservation in the UK, but do just that.

The library's collection is catalogued and available online and material will be scanned and sent within the limits of copyright. Staff have also developed a series of annotated bibliographies to get conservators up and running in areas that might be new to them. *The Chantry Library Subject Bibliographies* offer 'must reads' selected by specialists who know their subjects inside out.

Visit the Subject Bibliographies [webpage](#) to find literature reviews on conservation of photographs, Japanese prints, enamelled metals and Egyptian tomb painting, among other subjects. The latest bibliography is on Byzantine and post-Byzantine bookbinding by Georgios Boudalis, Head of Book and Paper Conservation at the Museum of Byzantine Culture in Thessaloniki, Greece.

Visit the library's [website](#), sign up to its blog where new books, bibliographies and projects are announced, and follow the library on [Twitter](#).



Part of a recent donation from conservator Bob Child's personal library



The Chantry Library

Heritage Digital resources now available online

[Heritage Digital](#) is a digital skills programme led by The Heritage Alliance and supported by Media Trust, Charity Digital and Naomi Korn Associates. The programme offers training, masterclasses and resources focusing on marketing, engaging audiences, intellectual property, data protection and online business tools and processes.

Activities have now come to an end, but a whole host of recordings and resources are available to help you get to grips with digital.

Click [here](#) to access the free recordings and resources.



Towards a National Collection: transforming online exploration of UK culture and heritage collections through harnessing innovative AI



The Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) has awarded £14.5m to the research and development of emerging technologies, including machine learning and citizen-led archiving, in order to connect the UK's cultural artefacts and historical archives in new and transformative ways.

The announcement of the five major 'Discovery Projects' forming the largest investment of [Towards a National Collection](#), a five-year research programme, reveals the first insights into how thousands of disparate collections could be explored by public audiences and academic researchers in the future.

The five projects will harness the potential of new technology to break down barriers between collections – opening up public access and facilitating research across a range of sources and stories held in different physical locations. One

of the central aims is to empower and diversify audiences by involving them in the research and creating new ways for them to access and interact with collections.

The five projects are:

- The Congruence Engine: Digital Tools for New Collections-Based Industrial Histories
- Our Heritage, Our Stories: Linking and searching community-generated digital content to develop the people's national collection
- Transforming Collections: Reimagining Art, Nation and Heritage
- The Sloane Lab: Looking back to build future shared collections
- Unpath'd Waters: Marine and Maritime Collections in the UK

In addition to innovative online access, the projects will generate artist commissions, community

fellowships, computer simulations and travelling exhibitions. The investigation is the largest of its kind to be undertaken to date anywhere in the world. It extends across the UK, involving 15 universities and 63 heritage collections and institutions of different scales, with more than 120 individual researchers and collaborators.

Together, the Discovery Projects represent a vital step in the UK's ambition to maintain leadership in cross-disciplinary research, both between different humanities disciplines and between the humanities and other fields. Towards a National Collection will set a global standard for other countries building their own collections, enhancing collaboration between the UK's renowned heritage and national collections worldwide.

Click [here](#) to find out more about the projects.

Towards a National Collection Facebook graphic. Image courtesy of Towards a National Collection

New guidance on orphan works

The UK National Archives and the Intellectual Property Office have produced new guidance to help archive services that are considering digitising their resources or using copyright materials from their collections in other ways.

The guidance suggests possible approaches to registering a collection as an 'orphan work' and, in particular, helps you to conduct a diligent search for rights holders. The guidance also explores the existing copyright exceptions and other factors that may allow an archive service to proceed with a digitisation proposal.

Click [here](#) to access the new guidance.



COPY 1/420/1895. Image courtesy of The UK National Archives (ref: COPY 1/420/1895)

Towns Web Archiving digitisation grant hits pause – but will be back with a bang in 2022!



The TownsWeb Archiving Digitisation Grant is set to return in 2022.

The TWA (TownsWeb Archiving) Digitisation Grant was established back in 2016 as a response to the financial barriers faced by organisations wishing to protect their archive collections and make them accessible. The grant has run annually for the past five years, always evolving to meet industry needs.

In 2020, TWA made the decision to open its funding window early to account for lockdown and to give organisations more time to apply. The award was distributed between three organisations, rather than the usual two, to extend its reach and impact, and it was divided equally in recognition of the adversity that everyone was facing across the heritage sector.

The last two years have given everyone a lot to think about and TWA feels like now is a good time to revisit what the

grant should look like going forward in 2022 and beyond. Its intention is to come back bigger, better and carefully tailored to meet industry needs. Full details will be unveiled later in the year, but you can read more about the grant and the decision to pause it for 2021 in this [announcement](#).

In the meantime, you can sign up for the [Funding Resource Pack](#) to help make the funding process that bit easier. The pack starts with three downloadable resources that have been heavily informed and developed by industry experts, as well as further resources which will be sent over the coming weeks, straight to your inbox, once you have signed up.



Weekend workshop on medieval records Oxford, 15th - 16th January 2022

Dr Charlotte Berry is running a face-to-face study weekend in Oxford in January 2022 for those ARA members with an interest in medieval records.

The workshop, 'Reading the Past: Introduction to Writing, Making and Keeping Medieval Records' is being run by Dr Charlotte Berry on behalf of Oxford University's Department for Continuing Education.

The weekend workshop will enable those keen to undertake research using original historical documents to begin reading the scripts used prior to 1500. This will help participants to unlock a huge wealth of material which can be used in local, family and social history. Participants will look in detail at the main scripts in use across this period.

The principal focus will be on documents written in Latin, although some in English will also be studied. The weekend will also cover the historical development of palaeography (study of handwriting) and diplomatic (study of documents and record-keeping). The course will provide the opportunity to cover both theoretical and practical aspects of reading medieval handwriting.

No prior knowledge is assumed, and those who already have some experience of medieval palaeography will also find this course a useful refresher and an opportunity to further develop their reading skills. No prior knowledge of Latin is required, although this will be useful. Places will be strictly limited to 18 participants, so early booking is advised.

Click [here](#) for more details and to register.



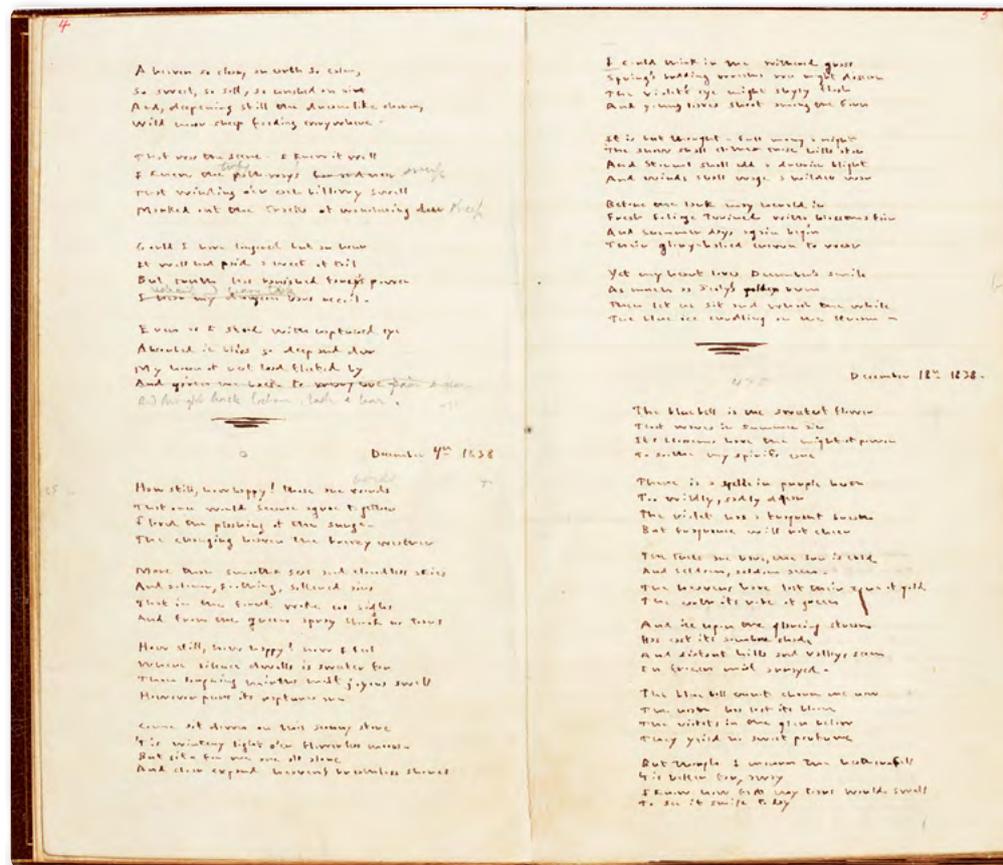
Hereford Cathedral Library MS O.1.8, f.45v. Miniature painting of St Mark by the Alexis Master, St Albans Abbey, first half of 12th century. Image courtesy of Chapter of Hereford Cathedral

Saving The Honresfield Library

The Honresfield Library is a private library of English literature which includes such gems as an astonishing set of manuscripts in the hands of the Brontë siblings, much of which has been unseen for 80 years and never properly examined. It includes seven of Charlotte Brontë's famous 'little books', each of which is a work of art; a manuscript collection of poems by Anne Brontë; some 25 letters by Charlotte Brontë; and a small but exquisite autograph manuscript diary note shared by Emily and Anne Brontë. The absolute jewel of the Brontë collection is Emily Brontë's holograph notebook of 31 poems, believed by many scholars to have been lost. This poetry notebook carries annotations in Charlotte's hand. The printed treasures of the sisters include Emily Brontë's own annotated copy of their first publication, the exceptionally rare *Poems of 1846*, and fine presentation copies of first editions of their novels in their original cloth bindings.

Jane Austen is represented by two hugely significant letters to her sister Cassandra (only three early such autograph letters are held in any UK national collection, with the bulk being held in the Morgan Library, New York).

The Honresfield Library's collection also contains the complete working manuscript of Sir Walter Scott's iconic novel *Rob Roy*, part of the autograph manuscript of Scott's verse romance, *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, a copy of *Border Antiquities* with extensive manuscript revisions, and an exceptional group of Scott's first editions in their original condition. Other Scottish material of huge importance is an early volume of poems by Robert Burns in his own hand – containing some of his earliest recorded literary works – known as the '*First Commonplace Book*', as well as individual autograph poems ('Cessnock Banks' and the 'Brigs of Ayr'), and a group of the poet's earliest correspondence, including the only extant letter to his beloved father.



A rare handwritten manuscript of Emily's poems, mentioned in the preface to *Wuthering Heights*, with pencil corrections by Charlotte. Image courtesy of Sotheby's

The library has recently been placed on the open market and Friends of the National Libraries (FNL) has announced that it is leading a bid to save it by launching an appeal to raise the purchase price of £15 million. At the time of writing, FNL has secured £7.5m and its discussions continue with private philanthropists, trusts and foundations. FNL, and the participating libraries and museums listed to the right, are profoundly grateful to the vendors and their representatives, Sotheby's, for deciding to postpone the auction of the first part of the library, originally planned for July 2021, in order to preserve the entire library as a collection to be allocated to libraries around the UK for the benefit of the public.

Taking a UK-wide approach to acquiring the Honresfield Library, FNL, along with a consortium of libraries and museums, hopes to succeed in raising the substantial funds needed for the purchase and will then pass ownership of every individual item to the appropriate national, regional and specialist institution across the UK in order to benefit the widest possible public.

The consortium of institutions that has come together to realise this vision includes:

- Abbotsford: The Home of Walter Scott, Melrose, Scotland
- The Bodleian Libraries, Oxford
- The British Library, London and Yorkshire
- The National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh
- The Brontë Parsonage Museum, Haworth, Yorkshire
- Jane Austen's House, Chawton, Hampshire
- The Brotherton Library, University of Leeds
- The National Trust for Scotland: The Robert Burns Birthplace Museum, Alloway

Find out more about the appeal [here](#).

Shining a spotlight on salaries



Pearl Quinn, Chair of the ARA's Pay Review Group, explains the role of the group's salary recommendations and provides useful guidance for ARA members on how to approach salary negotiations with employers.

It is a pleasure to have this opportunity to update fellow ARA members once again on the work of the ARA's Pay Review Group, which was established following a paper delivered by the group's first Chair, Andrea Waterhouse, at the ARA Officers' Day in October 2016.

The PRG brought together record-keeping professionals from across the sector and published its first set of salary recommendations, approved by the ARA Board, in August 2018. Since then, there have been two upward revisions of those recommendations, in 2019 and 2020, in line with Consumer Price Index increases in both the UK and Ireland. On 21st September 2021, the Board approved a further increase in line with the CPI for the financial year 2020-2021, which was 0.58% in the UK and 0.4% in Ireland.

The group's primary aim in devising the salary recommendations was to produce a tool which could be used by employers when setting pay levels and which would also empower archivists, records managers and conservators to advocate for better pay for themselves and for their colleagues, based on solid research findings. We encourage ARA members to use the recommendations – and the research underpinning them – when preparing for any engagement with their employers on the issue of pay. Our [Guidance for Freelancers](#) document is intended to help those considering a move into contract work but also provides some useful links giving further background information on hourly and daily rates in the wider heritage sector. Links to all of this information can be found on the [Salary Recommendations](#) page of the new ARA website: [Salary Recommendations](#)

The PRG has always recognised that widespread acceptance of the salary recommendations by some

“
We encourage ARA members to use the recommendations – and the research underpinning them – when preparing for any engagement with their employers on the issue of pay.
”

sectors, such as the local authority and museum sectors, was going to be challenging and would have to be viewed as a long-term project. We receive regular emails from colleagues who, despite their best efforts and the support of the PRG, have failed to secure a level of pay commensurate with their skills and experience. However, the opposite has also been true, with several colleagues informing us of the usefulness of the recommendations in improving their individual situations. Quite apart from anecdotal feedback, we know that applicants for cataloguing grants administered by The UK National Archives (Archives Revealed) and the Business Archives Council (BAC Cataloguing Grant for Business Archives) are informed about and encouraged to adopt the ARA's salary recommendations when paying professional staff funded by those grants.

As PRG Chair and someone who has worked in archives and heritage for several years, I am aware of how difficult conversations about pay can be for anyone, particularly in a sector that is not well-understood by many employers. It is one



“
 The tendency of many employers to advertise jobs without a salary is notable and is a trend that is unlikely to disappear, which makes the salary recommendations even more valuable as a negotiating tool.
 ”

| Level | Salary | Description |
|--|--|---|
| Para-professional | £20,931/€22,442 minimum | Eg: support staff, performing some tasks independently. Possibly working towards qualification as a Foundation Member of the ARA and/or towards a degree/diploma. |
| Lower Management | Level 1: Starting in the range of £28,256 - £33,488 or €30,603 - €35,703 | Eg: responsible for a discrete area of work/ delivers on short term targets. Basic level of responsibility. Recently completed a specialist degree and/or qualified as a Foundation Member of the ARA. |
| | Level 2: £33,488 or €35,703 minimum | Eg: manages some resources, people and/or services; possibly working towards qualification as a Registered Member of the ARA. |
| Experienced – Middle Management | £41,861/€45,905 minimum | Eg: service delivery and resource leadership; specialist role, e.g. sole conservator; general consultant. May have qualified as a Registered Member of the ARA and may be working towards Fellowship qualification. |
| Senior Professional - Senior Management | £57,560/€61,206 minimum | Eg: multi-role, strategic, senior leadership position, substantial sector experience in the sector; specialist consultant and/or conservator. May have qualified as a Fellow of the ARA. |

of the reasons the PRG organised a brief ‘Tools for Influential Conversations’ online training event, hosted by =mc, the Management Centre, in July this year, which provided some very useful advice on how to approach salary negotiations

with employers. Some of the tips I took away as a participant on that course, together with suggestions based on listening to colleagues in a variety of work environments, are summarised overleaf.

General principles

- Consider the interests and priorities of the organisation in any negotiation. These are not always clear. It might be necessary to do some research (mission statements and strategy documents can be useful) and ask colleagues and managers questions.
- Where is there overlap between what you want and what the organisation wants?
- What is the best possible outcome for you and what is the minimum you are prepared to accept?
- Map out a strategy ahead of time and have a range of options ready that you are happy to accept.
- Remember if the outcome is not successful or is unsatisfactory you have the right to raise the issue again.

Specific pay-related issues that may be useful to consider:

- Are there other better-paid positions within or outside your organisation that can be appropriately linked to your job?
- Where is there an overlap between your skills and those of others in the organisation who are paid more?
- It is worth examining your job description in detail to acquaint yourself with the requirements of your role at the time you were hired. Are there instances where you have gone above and beyond what was officially expected of you?
- If there is no wriggle room on salary, is your employer prepared to consider a reduction in hours for the same pay, more flexible working arrangements or extra annual leave?
- Consider examples of how your role has contributed to the overall objectives of your employing organisation.

The ARA's Pay Review Group continues to record job advertisements in the record-keeping sector at both paraprofessional and professional level. The exceptional circumstances of the past 18+ months mean that long-term trends are difficult to discern, but it is encouraging that the level of recruitment is increasing as COVID-19 restrictions lift. We recorded advertisements for 54 jobs in the sector in January 2020, a figure that unsurprisingly dropped to 20 in January 2021. Of the 120 jobs, both professional and paraprofessional, recorded in the first six months of 2021, 80 met the salary recommendations, 47 did not and 43 were unknown. The tendency of many employers to advertise jobs without a salary is notable and is a trend that is unlikely to disappear, which makes the salary recommendations even more valuable as a negotiating tool.



Conversations about pay can be difficult, particularly in a sector that is not well-understood by many employers © Shutterstock

It could be said the advent of more 'blended' working arrangements will have less impact on the record-keeping sector than many others since the operation of reading rooms and management of hard copy records clearly requires in-person attendance at a physical location. However, it would be wrong to dismiss the new work realities and their possible impact on pay. We have not yet heard of any examples of salaries being readjusted due to remote working, but it is an issue we may soon need to confront. As always, we encourage colleagues to get in touch with the PRG on this or other pay-related issues. All such emails assist us in improving our knowledge when advocating for better salaries across the sector. If any members wish to join the PRG to assist us in our work, we would love to hear from you. The group can be contacted at payreviewgroup@archives.org.uk.

Pearl Quinn is a qualified archivist and librarian currently working as a parliamentary reporter with the Houses of the Oireachtas (Irish Parliament). She previously worked for RTÉ, Ireland's public service broadcaster, in its Photographic and Document Archive. She was a training officer with ARA, Ireland from 2016-2019 and has been Chair of the ARA Pay Review Group since September 2019.





Professional Development News

Would you like to become an ARA volunteer assessor?

Developed over the past 25 years, professional registration is a real success story for the ARA. It is a great example of how the ARA recognises and rewards professional standards across the record-keeping sector. We're currently recruiting volunteers to join our team of volunteer assessors to meet an increase in applicants to our professional development programme. Are you interested in supporting the next generation of professionals?



Our volunteer assessors make a vital contribution to the work of the ARA. They assess applications for professional registration at the Foundation, Registered and Fellowship level, ensuring the required standards are met. With pass rates around 75% we can be confident that the assessment process is both robust and versatile, and able to recognise all kinds of sectoral experience. Assessors also respond to CPD Reviews, our peer-review service that provides feedback on members' continuing professional development.

The role is open to all members who hold professional registration. It is a very flexible role – as an assessor you can commit as much or as little time as you can offer. Since all assessments are carried out through our online professional development programme application and assessment platform, they can be done at a time to suit the assessor. We also provide training, hold an annual assessor meeting to share experiences and maintain standards, as well as provide individual support where required. We always ensure that there are no conflicts of interest between assessors and candidates.

We asked two ARA assessors to share their thoughts on the role and the benefits of getting involved.

Elizabeth Oxborrow-Cowan FFARA, a Consultant Archivist, qualified as an archivist in 1996 and went on to work in the museums and local authority sectors before setting up her own consultancy in 2003. She qualified as Registered Member in 1999 and has been an assessor since then. In 2020, Elizabeth became a Fellow of the ARA.



Our volunteer assessors make a vital contribution to the work of the ARA © Shutterstock

“As an assessor you get to see the breadth of professional activity as well as the emergence of new types of working and trends”, explains Elizabeth. “For my own work, it helps inform my understanding of how the sector as a whole is developing which I then apply, for example, when reviewing the current status of some aspects of the archives sector. It also provides a great opportunity to learn about what other professionals are doing, from which you can learn and perhaps make contact”.

Gavin McGuffie RMARA has been a professional archivist for more than 25 years. He is currently a Senior Archivist at the Postal Museum, a role he has held since 2017, having joined The Postal Museum’s predecessor, the British Postal Museum & Archive, in 2007, as Catalogue Manager. Prior to that, he spent six years at the Guardian and Observer where he helped set up its Archive and Visitor Centre. Gavin has been a registered member of the ARA since 2001 and an assessor since 2010.

Like Elizabeth, Gavin has benefitted from this role: “Not only has being an assessor really helped with my knowledge of the issues facing archivists in different institutions, but it’s also allowed me to recognise the commonality of the challenges facing the profession more generally. Reading and considering others’ experiences in very varied circumstances, as articulated in their applications, can help put one’s own career development into perspective and illustrate how others have coped with challenging circumstances in their work lives. Being part of a wider assessment community provides an invaluable support network for seasoned professionals”.

If you would like to find out more about becoming an ARA volunteer assessor, please contact chris.sheridan@archives.org.uk.

Why archival materiality matters



In 2020, **Alison Spence** began doctoral research to investigate the challenges of communicating archival materiality in the digital environment. Here, Alison outlines the research questions her project addresses and invites the archival community to contribute their views on digitisation and materiality.

Throughout 2020 and 2021, many archive services have depended on digitised collections to support researchers and bolster audiences yearning for cultural sustenance.

The successes and challenges staff encountered during this period, coupled with the extensive digital shift in society, have prompted services to re-evaluate their strategic plans. In July 2020, when heritage services were surveyed about their digital priorities (by Axiell in partnership with MuseWeb), more than 60% identified ‘collection digitisation’ as their key future priority.¹

The possibilities digitised collections offer for research and engagement are manifold but for me their lack of materiality is a significant concern. This is what prompted me to undertake doctoral research to investigate the challenges of communicating archival materiality in the digital environment and explore how digitised records can be conveyed as tangible artefacts.

Limitations of digitised collections

Cost-efficient digitisation methods can process archival collections economically at scale and provide effective access to textual and visual content. However, the images generated do not aid users to elucidate a document’s material properties (**Fig.1**). Size, weight and texture are difficult to judge from two-dimensional digital images. Digitisation may not include views of volume bindings, or a rolled-up court roll, for example. Intangible, decontextualised digitised images lack the presence of their physical counterparts.

During my career as an archivist, I have embraced the benefits offered by digitised collections. They support learning, engagement and enjoyment of archives. Users can examine documents at their own pace. Digital tools assist with unscrambling idiosyncratic handwriting, but digitised records

GOLD AND SILVER MEDALS
— AT —

INTERNATIONAL FORESTRY EXHIBITION, EDINBURGH, 1884.
INTERNATIONAL SCIENCE & ART EXHIBITION, EDINBURGH, 1886.
INTERNATIONAL ELECTRICAL EXHIBITION, EDINBURGH, 1890.
INTERNATIONAL HORTICULTURAL EXHIBITION, LONDON, 1892.
GARDENING AND FORESTRY EXHIBITION, LONDON, 1893.
EARL'S COURT EXHIBITION, LONDON, 1897.



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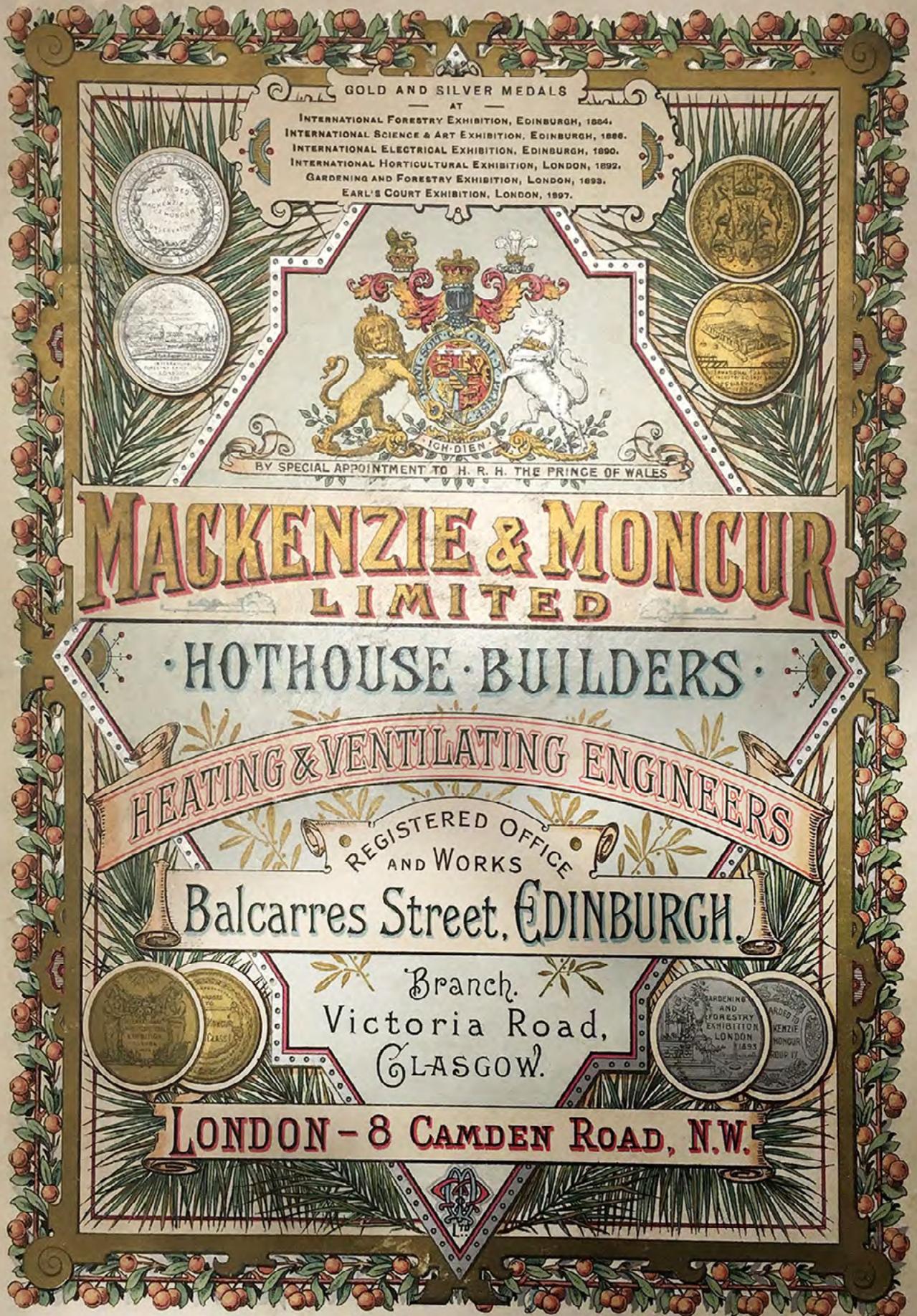
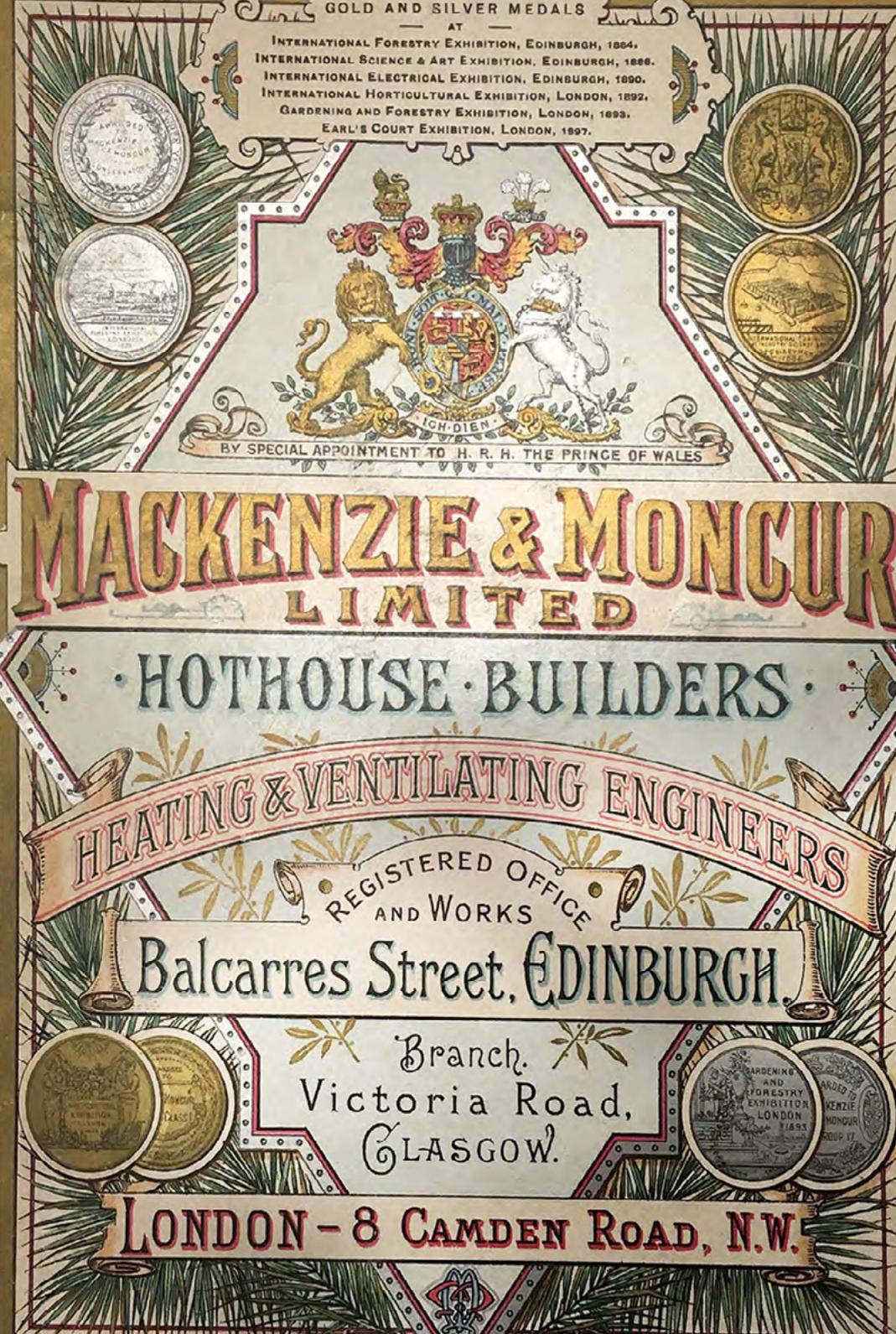
HEATING & VENTILATING ENGINEERS

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AND WORKS

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Branch.
Victoria Road,
GLASGOW.

LONDON - 8 CAMDEN ROAD, N.W.

V. McVILLIE & SONS, EDINBURGH

Fig.1.

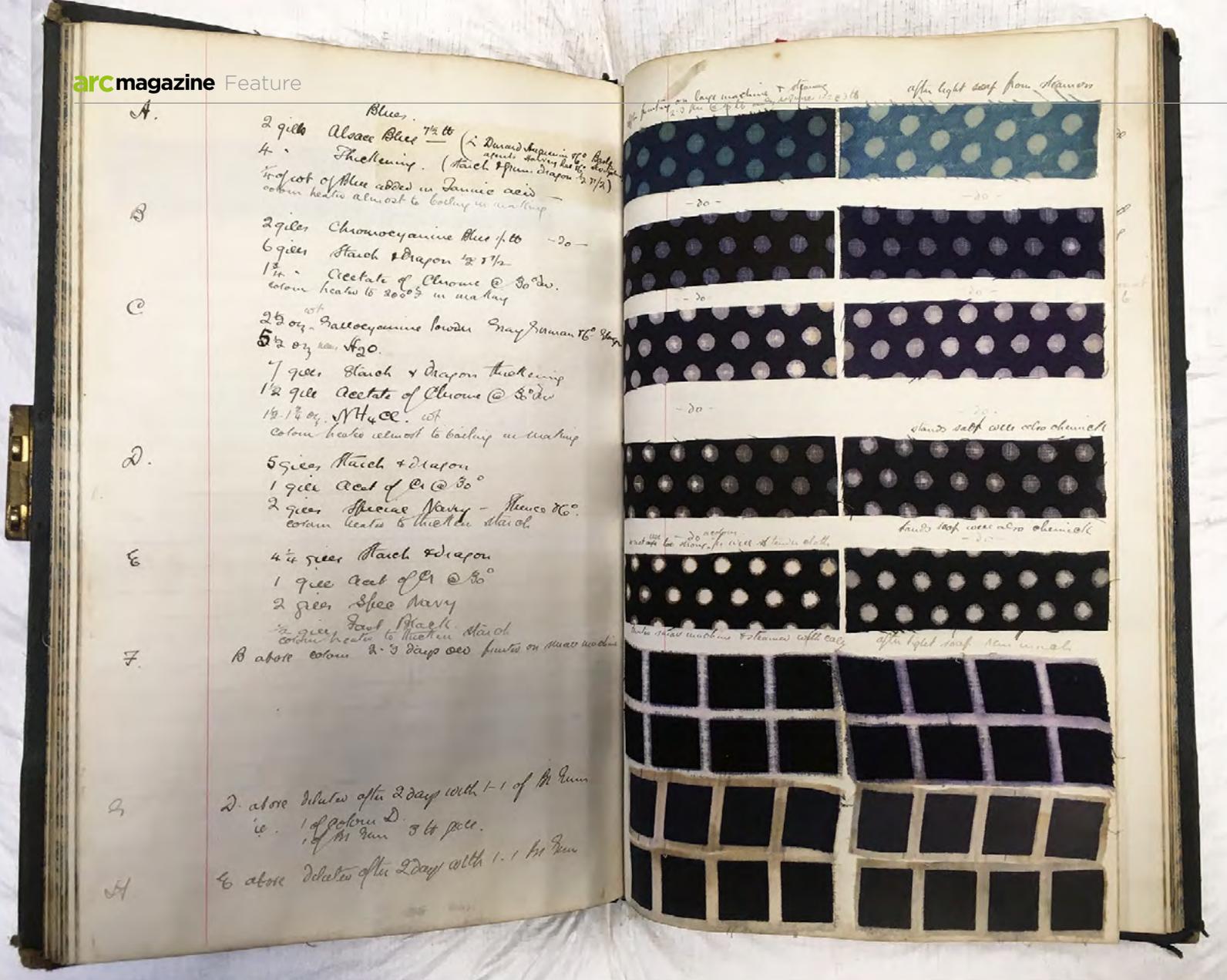


Fig.2.

also confront users with challenges. Difficulties in perceiving material evidence, which articulates how the document was created and used, impinge users' ability to critically analyse the textual content. Researchers studying documents as three-dimensional artefacts are poorly served. Devoid of substance, digitised records fail to spark sensory and emotional responses in viewers, responses which complement intellectual appreciation and connect viewers with the people and events represented. Overall, the full research and engagement potential of digitised collections are not realised.

Researching services' views on materiality

In my research, I start by asking archive services what their considerations are when planning digitisation programmes. Is communicating materiality one of them? Materiality is not often discussed within the pages of *ARC Magazine* or *Archives and Records*, especially in the context of digitisation. Are material-rich images an aspiration or not a current priority? Are key audiences for digitised records interested in material evidence? Does capturing material properties digitally seem unfeasible based on current technology?

Do services use other means such as catalogue descriptions to communicate material-related information? To determine the answers to these questions, as part of my doctoral research, I am interviewing key staff in a range of sectors and organisations and assembling a set of mini case studies. I am seeking deeper insight into the aims of organisations' digitisation programmes, how records are selected, the constraints shaping outcomes and the relationships between catalogue entries and digital images.

Factoring in user experience

User experience is another key factor in my research. I am investigating this through an in-depth case study based on textile industry dye, sample and pattern books from the West of Scotland held by the Scottish Business Archive (Fig.2).

Companies used these records as design libraries, to document dye research and for marketing, sales and orders. Textile samples were glued into volumes; handwritten notes provided contextual information (Fig.3). The material complexity of these records, coupled with industry-specific



Fig.3. terminology, make them challenging to catalogue and digitise. The collections serve a broad community of textile heritage researchers and creative practitioners who are investigating dyes and dyeing, textile design, technological innovation and economic and social history.

For my research, I am asking this community about the ways in which they access collections and use digitised records. I am also keen to evaluate the impact of recent material-focused cataloguing initiatives. Dense catalogue descriptions can be as unhelpful as sparse ones, so a key question is what type of information researchers find useful.

These textile collections also offer ideal testbeds for material-rich digital approaches. Advanced imaging techniques, such as raking light, can enhance paper texture and other material elements.² However, these techniques are slow, expensive and are generally reserved for one-off, prestige items. There are few, if any, examples of advanced techniques being applied to entire record series, so my research examines the effectiveness of more affordable digital approaches employed by archive services. For example, some services place

rulers in digital images to indicate document size and colour patches that facilitate accurate colour interpretation, while others create brief videos showing documents being handled. These videos enable viewers to gauge a document's dimensions or how stiff the paper is. Viewers perceive the document as a tangible artefact, and it regains presence.

The value of material evidence

I have first-hand experience of the environment in which many archive services operate: tight budgets, limited staffing capacity, technological constraints and dependence on project funding for digitisation are all too commonplace. Fulfilling user demand for digital access to collections while at the same time developing material-rich digital images and descriptions may seem incompatible. The scale and physical diversity of collections necessitate compromises, yet those of us who work with archive collections recognise the value of their material evidence. We observe how the most unprepossessing document can captivate users because everything it encapsulates touches them.

While digital can never replace the experience of physical archival encounters, through my research I hope to improve the potential of digitised records and assist archive services in maximising the research value of their online collections.

I am keen to hear views from the archival community. Are services interested in capturing material elements during digitisation? What approaches have staff used to communicate material properties and evidence digitally? To what extent did they achieve intended outcomes? Please share your thoughts and experiences with me by email 9138341s@student.gla.ac.uk. My [website](#) provides an overview of my project; research updates and findings will be shared there. I will also report back through ARC Magazine.

Alison is a doctoral student at the University of Glasgow where she is researching ways to communicate the material properties of archival records in the digital environment. An experienced archivist, Alison worked for a number of years at Cornwall Record Office (now Kresen Kernow). She moved to the University of Glasgow where she trialled digital preservation workflows for research data and born-digital records. She acts as an assessor for the ARA's Professional Development Programme.

¹ Axiell and MuseWeb (2020) 'Culture at a Crossroads: digital transformation in the age of COVID-19'.

² Projects employing advanced techniques include [Manuscripts from German-Speaking Lands](#), and [Manuscripts of Lichfield Cathedral](#).

Backchat



Maria Castrillo talks to **Deborah Mason**, the ARA's new Communications Manager, about the value of communication in advocating for the sector, getting to know the ARA family, and the art of embroidery.

Can you tell me about your background and your journey into the field of communications and marketing?

It has been a long and winding road! I graduated with a degree in History of Art from the University of Warwick back in 1984 when unemployment was high and jobs in the arts were hard to come by. I did a lot of very different things before retraining to be an actress in the early 90s. When that didn't work out, I decided that it would be good to work in the charity sector where at least, if I wasn't doing my dream job, I would be doing some good (hopefully). I have now been working in charities and the third sector in communications roles for more than 15 years. I started with a community fundraising and communications role in a health research charity, then moved to a health-based membership organisation and finally made my way back to the culture sector via the Charities Advisory Trust and Magic Me.

How do you see your role as Communications Manager supporting the ARA and the membership?

Even though this is a new role, I am building on excellent work done by SH Communications. I've been very glad to be able to work with the SHC team in these first months with ARA. I think that as a staff member of the ARA, it will be easier for me to connect things and people together - something that will be a vital part of my work. As I get to know all

the different Regions, Sections and Groups of the ARA I hope to be able to bring a more strategic focus to communications and messaging.

What would you like to achieve in the first 100 days in the role?

I think my number one task in these first few months is getting to know the sector as a whole. I have already had several different meetings with people and I'm keen to understand from them what they think my priorities should be and what they think the priorities for the sector are. I'm also getting to grips with the different channels available for communications, taking over the

content for ARA Today, working on the March/April issue of ARC Magazine and understanding comms channels like ARA Together and Listserv. I'm also working on creating more mutual support for all the volunteers working on comms in the Regions, Sections and Groups, as well as supporting ongoing public-facing campaigns like Explore Your Archive and History Begins at Home.

What would be your advice or top tips for record keepers to become effective communicators, so they can advocate for their sector to employers, policy makers and funders?



Deborah Mason, the ARA's new Communications Manager

My top tip is always to ask: "What am I trying to achieve? Who do I need to help me achieve it? How and what do I need to communicate to them to get that help?" People often leap in on that end question – the how and the what of communication – without really analysing the ultimate goal and who the real audience is.

My second piece of advice is to be as outward-looking as you are inward-looking. You asked me about employers, policymakers and funders – these will all have some understanding of the sector. If you look outward and particularly look to a wider general public, this will also help you to advocate to those closer audiences. We are all part of that wider public, and people are often more influenced by things that seem to have a broad public support behind them rather than a narrower sector support.

My final piece of advice, learnt from my days in the acting profession, is don't be afraid to sing your own praises. If necessary, write a list of all the good things you, your organisation and your service do. Look at how they fit into the wider picture of what is going on in the world – there's your message!

For me, archives and records are part of the fundamental underpinnings of democracy and human rights. The work of this sector is essential and important to everyone in the UK, Ireland (and beyond) so I'm really pleased I can be a part of that and do my bit.

In your view, what is the greatest challenge facing the record-keeping sector at present?

Decades of underfunding to DCMS and Local Government have etched away at any margin of comfort for many services (if I was being bold, I'd say 'all services'). This has a knock-on effect in terms of workforce, salaries, organisational resilience and the ability to keep doing essential work. I'd include in essential work

ongoing and active acquisitions and accessions and community and public engagement which are often the first things to get cut.

The climate crisis is another challenge – whether it is the challenge of making buildings that house records and archives more energy efficient and carbon neutral or managing and dealing with climate threats such as rising temperatures and increased risk of flooding.

In what ways do you think the world of communications has changed in the past two years? Do you see any of those changes as becoming permanent?

Communications is an area that is always very fluid. One of the biggest changes in the last three or four years has been increased scrutiny of social media presence, a much closer analysis of what you say as an organisation, how you say it, the past record of any spokespeople you use and scrutiny of how your external communications match your purpose and aims. In some ways this is a good thing – perhaps when we all leapt onto social media and online platforms back in the last decade, we should have given more thought to this at the outset!

In terms of the direct impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, I think organisations have realised the value of having good communications channels across a range of platforms. The general public as a whole has been drawn into using online communication more frequently and it seems that many people have overcome their initial reluctance. Online meetings and events have become widely accepted and it makes holding smaller events, such as roundtables and seminars much more cost-effective and, importantly, inclusive. Replacing in-print and in-person with online versions saves money too, but I think, depending on your audiences, it will be important to reintroduce some face-to-face meetings and, for some people, in-print communications.

Can you describe your first encounter with records and how did it affect you?

I started doing some family history research, building on work done by cousins of my parents and I used the usual online tools. Then I came upon a record I couldn't quite understand and had to get the hard copy of the marriage certificate of my great grandparents. From that I discovered that my great grandmother had been divorced and I was able to go to The UK National Archives at Kew and find the original divorce papers. I've also explored the Lambeth Parish records from the early 19th Century in quest of mentions of the kindly workhouse employee who gave my founding great-great-grandfather his surname. I love all the side-stories you find in old records and, inspired by my family history work, I completed a two-year long art project on the history of the street I lived in London, using census records and local history records housed in the Lambeth archive (and discovering in the process that the workhouse my great-great-grandfather grew up in was just round the corner from my flat!).

Finally, what do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

I have two great passions: art and gardening. In the spring and summer, you will mostly find me at the allotment trying to coax vegetables out of what was, in March 2020, a bramble/nettle/bindweed patch. When it gets to the dark and rainy months, I'm more likely to be inside working on an art project. Last year, over the course of several lockdowns, I embroidered a social-distancing crinoline with the opening words from Daniel Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year*.

Deborah welcomes any suggestions or feedback on ARA communications. She can be contacted at deborah.mason@archives.org.uk

Automated topic detection in archival research



Historian and digital humanities researcher, **Marta Musso**, explores the role that automated topic detection can play in archival research.

There is a widening gap between the perception and the everyday reality of archival research. The stereotypical image is of labyrinthine warehouses with floor to ceiling files waiting to be opened in clean, well-lit reading rooms, while in reality, more and more archives are moving online due to advances in digital technologies.

Today, all types of archive records are gradually shifting online, whether they are born-digital records or those that have been digitised from the pre-digital archival heritage of the world. This process of digitisation, which has been ongoing in many countries for quite some time, if at differing paces, has opened up whole new strands of historical research and opportunities for archive users and professional historians. However, the understanding of archival research in a digital environment is not evolving at the same pace – and neither are the tools that can help 21st century archive users navigate the digital historical archive and enjoy the myriad of possibilities it offers.

Among these tools, one of the most exciting is automated topic detection – the ability of computers to extract meaning from archival descriptions and assign archival collections to specific topics.

Physical vs virtual archival research

Archives are traditionally organised not by subject, but rather by the entity (person, organisation or body) that created and/or collected the documents. Finding aids normally start by describing the record's creator and then move on to describing the documents.¹ Subsequently, the starting point of archival research is also traditionally based around the record's creator. If I wanted to search for documents on Napoleon, for example, I would start at the Archives Nationales in Paris, where the majority of the documentation about Napoleon is meant to be held. Similarly, if I wanted to study

Henry Moore, I would start with a trip to the Henry Moore Foundation.

However, research that is based solely on records' creators doesn't take full advantage of the opportunities offered by new tools for online archival research. Whereas searching by a record's creator in an online archive may only throw up limited results, in a physical archive one often experiences the joy of finding something you didn't know you were looking for or something you didn't know even existed. We are all familiar with the pleasure of indulging too long in reading a paper catalogue!

The value of a keyword search

On the other hand, online research doesn't involve scrolling through catalogues and papers. Even in online archive portals that simply 'virtually' replicate the documentary inventories available in the physical archive institutions, the first step of online research remains the keyword. Searching by keyword, arguably the most intuitive and most frequently used feature of any online search, has made searching by subject (rather than just by the record's creator) one of the most exciting developments in online archival catalogues. Searching by keyword very often means searching with a specific topic in mind.² So, to use the example of Napoleon again, if I search for 'Napoleon', I want to retrieve documents related to Napoleon, not necessarily produced by Napoleon.



Among these tools, one of the most exciting is automated topic detection – the ability of computers to extract meaning from archival descriptions and assign archival collections to specific topics.





Woman in the archives (1978) - National Archives of Latvia (NLA) - LVVA

Explore our topics:



View all our topics

The topic cloud in Archives Portal Europe – www.archivesportaleurope.net

A keyword search also facilitates one of the most exciting features of online archival research: the ability to search across different collections, different archives and even different countries for documents related to the same research subject. If I use a multi-institution, international archival portal such as [Europeana](#) or [Archives Portal Europe](#), for example, I can find information about Napoleon that I didn't know existed, in archival institutions that I wouldn't even have considered including in my research. A keyword search makes it possible to research a topic without any prior knowledge of the subject, its references or its creators.

The benefits of automated topic detection

Topic tagging – the manual assignment of archival collections to a topic by archivists – is both expensive and time consuming, and it would be an impossible task to undertake in an already extensive To-Do list related to the digitisation of historical archival heritage. However, research in automated topic detection is giving promising results for archival research. Archives Portal Europe, for example, an online aggregator that gathers the archival descriptions of thousands of institutions across more than 30 countries, is developing a multilingual automated topic detection tool. The tool will allow the identification of topically-relevant materials across different languages (without employing a machine translation pipeline), working both for entities (e.g. 'Napoleon') and concepts (e.g., 'revolutionary').

Rather than just searching for the keyword – for example 'Napoleon' – automated topic detection

also searches for related keywords (and phrases) that it judges relevant to your search. For example, a document may not have the word 'Napoleon' in its archival description e.g. 'Exile in Saint Helena' but may well have information about Napoleon within the record.

In automated topic detection, the algorithm is trained by human input related to searches and correct results. Much like the original idea of the web being like a social machine, this human/computer collaboration can open exciting new doors to researchers looking for certain topics. It can allow them to start not with a predefined set of collections and archives, but with the idea of finding new and unexplored collections, in new and unexplored archives, and with the possibility of running comparisons about documental production on a given topic in very different geographical and linguistic areas.

Automated topic detection is potentially a way to redesign and have a renewed understanding of the content of archival heritage produced over the centuries and made available online. And if research in this field continues, 21st century historiography has the potential to become a whole new discipline compared to what it was in the 20th century and, again, before then.

Marta Musso is a historian and digital humanities researcher working on digital methodologies for history and archival research. She is currently the Research and Engagement Manager for Archives Portal Europe, and the President of Eogan, the energy archives network.

¹ The National Archives (UK). 2016. Archive Principles and Practice: an introduction to archives for non-archivists. Retrieved October 29, 2020 from cdn.nationalarchives.gov.uk

² For a study on keyword-based research in information retrieval, see: Thomas Mann. 2008. Will Google's Keyword Searching Eliminate the Need for LC Cataloguing and Classification? *Journal of Library Metadata* 8, 2 (June 2008), 159–168. DOI and Caroline Williams. 2006. 2 - Principles and purposes of records and archives. In *Managing Archives*, Caroline Williams (ed.). Chandos Publishing, 3–33. DOI.

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Research in automated topic detection is giving promising results for archival research.
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History Begins at Home Volunteering Opportunities

Since launching in May 2020, [History Begins at Home](#) has been fortunate in benefiting from the input of a small group of volunteers who meet regularly to assist the campaign. Their contributions have encompassed gathering social media content, discussing and making suggestions for new themes, looking out for potential collaborations with other campaigns and organisations, and generally providing different perspectives on how best to take the campaign forward.

If you are interested in using archives to promote intergenerational conversations, counter loneliness and improve wellbeing, and would like to join this group, please email christopher.tracey@norfolk.gov.uk. Meetings are on the first Monday of every month at 11am.



The Missing Mountbatten diaries: Censoring our Past



Historian, British biographer and literary agent, **Dr Andrew Lownie**, highlights his ongoing campaign to make the diaries and letters of the Mountbattens publicly available.

Documents are the lifeblood of historians, providing the bricks to build our picture of the past. So, when I started to research my joint biography of Dickie and Edwina Mountbatten in 2015, I was looking forward to reading their diaries and letters which I knew would be crucial to understanding what they did, who they met, how they felt, etc.

The diaries and letters had been extensively quoted in books about the couple by Philip Ziegler and Janet Morgan and were available to researchers until 2011 when they were bought by The Hartley Library, Southampton University, under the Acceptance in Lieu scheme and with grants from the Heritage Lottery Fund and Hampshire County Council for £4.5 million. Imagine my surprise, therefore, to discover that the archivists at Southampton University claimed to know nothing about the diaries or letters or how I might access them.

I began to put in a series of FOI requests which eventually led in December 2019 to the Information Commissioner ruling that the diaries and letters should be made publicly available. Southampton and the Cabinet Office, who had played a role in withholding the material, appealed the decision and a hearing has since been set for November 2021.

Along the way, both Southampton and the Cabinet Office have been evasive, repeatedly missing statutory, regulatory and self-imposed deadlines for responding and ignoring correspondence from me, my lawyers and the ICO to the extent that the ICO took the unprecedented step of commencing High Court proceedings against Southampton for contempt. I also discovered that the very same individual at Southampton who had incited the Cabinet Office to 'close' the diaries and letters had then proposed an arrangement with the Cabinet Office to himself edit a 'scholarly' edition of the 1947 diaries.

My book on the Mountbattens was published two years ago so if the material is made available later this year it will be too late for me, but I have continued my fight on the basis that the diaries and letters are important historical documents which should be open to researchers, and in support of the principles of academic freedom, access to archives and against abuse of state power.

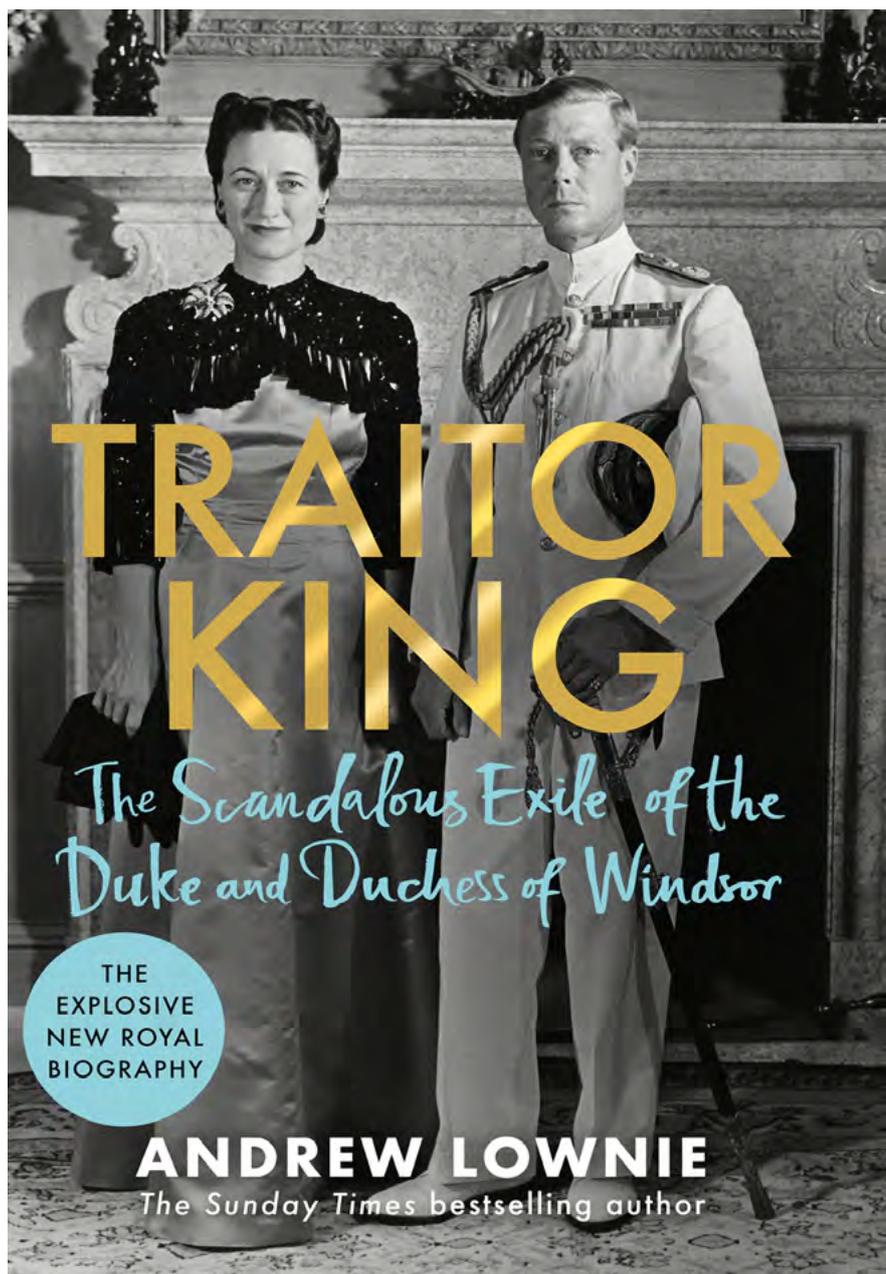
I covered my own legal costs for six years, but my money ran out this summer. However, through the commercial crowdfunding platform CrowdJustice I was able to raise the £50,000 necessary to take the case through to November 2021. At the same time, the media began to take an interest and questions began to be asked in Parliament, leading to an Early Day Motion signed by more than twenty MPs across the political spectrum.

In response to enquiries, the Cabinet Office first claimed they were bound by undertakings signed by Mountbatten in 1969, until it was pointed out that those undertakings did not relate to private diaries and letters but to public documents Mountbatten had accrued in the course of his service career. They then argued – incorrectly as it’s a civil not criminal case – that the matter was ‘sub judice’, meaning MPs and Lords are prevented from referring to a current or impending court case.

However, having argued earlier this year that it would take years to vet and digitalise the diaries and letters, Southampton has, over the last few months, quietly made available most of Dickie’s diaries up to 1968 and Edwina’s up to her death in 1960, in addition to his letters up until 1960 and hers until 1949. There are still redacted pages and missing years but it’s a start.

This whole episode raises many questions. Why is the Cabinet Office trying to censor our history? What is in this couple’s personal diaries and letters which remain ‘closed’ that is so sensational it justifies the Cabinet Office racking up such a large legal bill? Is trying to suppress private diaries and letters - some from a century ago and bought with public funds - really what governments should be doing? Why has the Cabinet Office been so uncooperative, not just with me and my lawyers but also with the ICO and the courts – simply not responding to important requests for information, only partially releasing material and obscuring the genesis of the ministerial direction? A failure to comply with my subject access request under the Data Protection Act led to the Cabinet Office – that is, the taxpayer – having to pay my associated legal costs.

Southampton has questions to answer, too. Why is it blocking access to archive material which, according to its own claims, is of international historical importance, purchased with public money and for which public tax income was forfeited? Why is it censoring private letters and diaries ostensibly on behalf of the Government for which there is no legal justification in what seems an unquestioning relationship between an academic institution and the state?



I believe the Mountbatten diaries and letters are an invaluable source for 20th-century historians and important principles are at stake relating to censorship and the abuse of power. There is an important role for all of us – not just parliamentarians and the media – in trying to uncover the truth of the missing Mountbatten diaries and letters and in ensuring such an episode never happens again.

Dr Andrew Lownie is a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society, President of the Biographers Club, a trustee of the Campaign for Freedom of Information and the author of the Sunday Times top ten bestsellers 'The Mountbattens: their lives and loves' and 'Traitor King: the scandalous exile of the Duke and Duchess of Windsor'.

Dr Andrew Lownie's biography Traitor King. Image courtesy of Nina Hollington



And finally...

arc magazine

Our next edition of the **ARC Magazine** is due out in January/February 2022 so look out for it in your inboxes. If you have any content suggestions for future editions, please email ARC Magazine arceditors@archives.org.uk



aratoday

Meanwhile, **ARA Today**, our electronic members' bulletin which contains all the latest ARA and industry news, is circulated on the first Wednesday of each month. Please send any content suggestions for future editions of ARA Today to deborah.mason@archives.org.uk.

Our **ARA Together Online Community** calls also continue on Discord, with regular calls hosted by representatives from across the sector covering a wide range of topical content. If you haven't yet joined the community, it's free and very easy to do so. Simply click [here](#) to sign up.

Once registered, you will be able to access a number of different content channels covering topics such as sustainability, digital record-keeping, diversity, keeping connected and professional registration – among others.



ARA 2022 CONFERENCE CHESTER

31st August to
2nd September 2022