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Conference Issue 2017



Archives & Records
Association
UK & Ireland

CONFERENCE 2018

Grand Central Hotel, Glasgow
29th – 31st August 2018

Welcome to ARC Magazine November 2017

Some of you reading this will have been at the ARA conference in Manchester. Once you've finished checking the photographs please do go back and read the thoughts of your fellow delegates and speakers. Conference is a time when we can come together as a profession to talk, to think, perhaps even to moan with sympathetic colleagues facing similar struggles. But conference isn't a holiday, sealed off from the real world. The theme of the conference asked that we 'set the agenda' and we can only achieve that goal if we maintain the enthusiasm and commitment felt in Manchester. I hope the following pages will contribute to that ongoing work.

Ordinarily, I would at this point thank a coordinator for their help in gathering together the issue's articles. On this occasion, the coordinator was me but that isn't to say thanks aren't due. To everyone who contributed content - and who didn't run for the exit when they saw the ARC editor heading their way: I'm grateful. And of course, that there was anything to write about is down to the many speakers, delegates and conference organisers who all played a part in creating an environment where ideas could be shared and discussed. For those of you who were unable to attend the conference, I hope the following pages encourage you to consider a trip to Glasgow next year. In the meantime, enjoy the issue.



Richard Wragg
ARC Editor

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opening lines



It may seem premature to be focusing on our next annual conference - 2018 in Glasgow - in an edition that showcases the highlights of this year's outstanding ARA Conference in Manchester. But there's no better opportunity to thank Andrew Nicoll for his strong stewardship of the Conference Committee over the past three years. Manchester was testament to how far the ARA conference has come under his leadership and remains the best-value event of its kind in our sector.

Andrew's metaphorical shoes are going to be very hard to fill but I started by thinking about some of the key elements that the conference should offer: relevant, practical, thought-provoking, engaging, participatory, and even fun. Most importantly, and this comes across strongly in the feedback, it is the premier event for networking. We will continue to make the conference the go-to place for the latest in techniques, ideas and innovations. Conference keynote addresses will continue to focus on our collective challenges and be controversial: there is no sense in delegates coming to be told that everything is great. The pace of change and the challenges we all face are not going to slow or diminish.

The new ARA Conference Committee was keen to identify a theme for 2018 as soon as possible after Manchester, and to issue the Call for Papers between November and December 2017 so as to give potential contributors time to plan. And the feedback from delegates in Manchester (where we had a record attendance) backed the idea of maintaining and developing momentum and marketing 2018 much earlier.

Our theme for 2018 is 'People Make Records'. Well we couldn't possibly go to Glasgow and ignore its famous strapline and claim to fame: people-driven industry, innovation, culture and heritage; a meeting place of people from all cultures yet distinctively Scottish. Our venue for 2018 - the Grand Central Hotel - encapsulates all of these virtues. A refurbished 19th century railway hotel in the heart

of the city, it positively oozes history. In 1927 it was the Glasgow destination for John Logie Baird's first-ever broadcast of television pictures in the UK - sent over 400 miles on telephone lines from London. The list of famous guests includes Laurel & Hardy and John F Kennedy.

How to interpret 'People Make Records'? Well, it covers everything from community cohesion, ethics, skills, trust and authenticity (a major take-away from Manchester), diversity, outreach, advocacy, and much more. For Glasgow, we'll also look to create:

- three distinctive 'day themes' for delegates who want to attend just one day
- a 'big debate', where leading speakers can argue about a controversial or challenging issue
- expansion of online video-streaming following this year's experiment (details on how to access selected content from Manchester will be announced soon)
- greater use of social media tools - a real hit this year thanks to the hard work of Zoe Fullard
- local engagement in the programme so that delegates can find out the best of what is happening in our sector in Glasgow and more widely in Scotland
- more marketing of the unique conservation elements in our programme.

Expect the successful model of Digital, Conservation and Archives/Records strands, perhaps tweaked as our planning develops and as we assess speaker submissions. But do send us your thoughts and ideas on how to improve the conference directly (or via social media).

Finally, because it keeps coming up, do remember that the ARA conference is the best-value three days (or one day) on offer in our sector every year. Unlike some others, we budget to break even. Others may offer full packages of programme, food and accommodation but come in at least 50% more expensive than ours. Those that offer cheaper registration - like certain budget airlines - leave you to pick up the cost of food and accommodation. That means more hassle, cost and the potential loss of networking opportunities. You end up paying more in practice and get less out of it. And if you're thinking about CPD, the conference compares very favourably with the costs of more mainstream training.

Just so that you can plan now, we expect attendance fees for 2018 to be roughly the same as 2017.

Looking forward to seeing you all in Glasgow - and bringing even more ideas and colleagues with you!

Mike Anson

ARA Conference Committee

Collecting Matters

Legislative changes to the Public Records Act in 2015 introduced a new 20-year transfer point for public record transfers. This has required records created by certain public bodies to be transferred earlier than under the previous '30-year rule'.

The ten-year transition phase for implementation affects around 1200 courts, NHS organisations and prisons around the country, which transfer to more than 100 archive services that are appointed as 'places of deposit'.

In the past, local transfer has often been sporadic and unplanned. Responding to this challenge, The National Archives' 20-year rule project team created a new e-learning tool for assisting with public record knowledge and transfer, an online directory of where transfers should go, and updated guidance.

Monitoring of record holdings in the Record Transfer Survey of public bodies has helped to identify transfer opportunities, with results showing significant evidence of increased understanding of public record responsibilities in locating, preserving and transferring records.

The team also distributes 'New Burdens' funding to local authority archives and coroners, totalling £710,000 in each transition year, to assist with the accessioning of certain types of public records.

Archives and transferring bodies are rising to the challenge: from 2015 to 2016, public record transfers doubled to 2.1km, with the number of archive services taking in records eligible for funding having increased by a third.

Places of deposit have used the funding in a variety of ways to assist with 20-year rule implementation in their service, including investment in physical/digital storage solutions, and recruiting project staff to assist with access.

A short questionnaire will be circulated shortly, to monitor funding further and share good practice.

For more information, please see:
<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/archives-sector/our-archives-sector-role/legislation/20-year-rule-and-records-of-local-interest/>

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ARA Conference 2017

ARA President, Alex Buchanan, reflects on some of the key themes to emerge from the conference.

"Archivists are heroes of the people". This opening statement by Dr Alan Billings, Police and Crime Commissioner for South Yorkshire, provided a rousing opening to the 2017 ARA Conference in Manchester. 'Setting the Agenda' was the theme and, as President of the ARA, I was proud to hear how - despite straitened times - our members are doing just that, in many different and exciting ways. Our keynote speakers identified key elements



Photography by Mills Media Creative

of the agenda: ensuring records can be used to foster trust and accountability. Whether by providing the means to challenge existing narratives of 'The Battle of Orgreave' in the 1984 Miners' Strike, or exposing the dubious provenance of artefacts from war zones in the Middle East, good record-keeping (or the identification of meaningful gaps) offers a means to speak truth to power.

There is no room for complacency, however, and some papers emphasised areas which remain problematic. Encouraging equitable participation was a recurring theme in the Archives and Records strand, highlighting an ongoing lack of diversity within the sector, in terms of records, record-keepers and users. It is clear that many



Andrew Nicoll, Conference Committee Chair; photography by Mills Media Creative

services are trying to address these issues, nevertheless there remains work to be done. Moreover it was suggested that in relation to meaningful engagement, perhaps the agenda should not be set by record-keepers but by the communities we are trying to serve. They need to be empowered to take the lead, with professionals acting as facilitators for what they are trying to achieve, rather than we invariably aiming to advocate our own vision.

2017 was the last conference organised by Andrew Nicoll, under whom the conference has gone from strength to strength, making Manchester the best attended ever. The Digital Record-Keeping strand, introduced last year, continued to flourish - now needing the biggest room, showing that archivists and records managers are both responding to the challenge of the digital age and helping to set the agenda for preserving and exploiting records within this fast-evolving environment. Digital participation was also an important feature of the conference, with numerous papers eliciting vocal responses via Twitter #ARA2017. Andrew hands on to Mike Anson, Bank of England, and I look forward to seeing how things develop under his direction. Roll on Glasgow 2018!

Alex Buchanan

ARA President

A delegate's view

Barnaby Bryan looks back on his first time at an ARA conference.

I was excited and trepidatious in equal measure to be attending my first ARA conference (a fact of which my green name badge constantly reminded me), and things kicked off in glamorous style on the Hilton's twenty-third floor at the 'Meet the ARA Board' reception. This afforded not only the opportunity for some chat and light 'networking', but also fabulous views across Manchester and beyond, prompting intense debate as to whether 'those distant hills' were the Peaks or the Lakes.

To be surrounded by literally hundreds of fellow record-keepers brought home more than any other event the fact that we are all part of something greater than our immediate, quotidian concerns. This was reinforced by the excellent first keynote, in which Dr Alan Billings underlined the vital and concrete importance of archives as a repository of 'truth' - or, at least, the closest approximation thereof.

As we, like so many others, are facing up to the question of digital preservation, I concentrated on the Digital strand. The papers by James Mortlock and Jennifer Febles of HSBC, and Elisabeth Thurlow of the Royal College of Nursing (RCN), while on vastly different scales, were equally inspiring and helpful. Elisabeth's articulate outline of the RCN's pilot scheme raised salient points about the importance of prioritisation and adaptability, as well as a reminder of the old maxim: be respectful and flexible when it comes to the IT department. It was a great opportunity for those of us who are just dipping our toes to learn from those who have wholeheartedly taken the plunge.

Hazel Menton's paper on digitisation was similarly thought-provoking. It is crucial to think carefully about why we digitise, and the consequences of



Barnaby Bryan listens to a presentation; photography by Mills Media Creative



William Kilbride presents his paper on protecting digital collections; photography by Mills Media Creative



Elisabeth Thurlow presenting her paper; photography by Mills Media Creative



Robert Athol was the lucky winner of a bottle of champagne courtesy of Preservica; photography by Mills Media Creative

too cavalier an approach. Archive services can be landed with the long-term challenges of storing and maintaining heaps of digitised material, making the questions of long-term benefit and accessibility all the more pressing. We must above all be considered, cautious and forward-thinking - put simply, embrace 'intelligent digitisation'.

As I plan to engage with the ARA's new CPD programme at the earliest opportunity, I couldn't miss its launch. This crowded session clarified a number of points, and raised interesting questions about the programme's nature, scope, and intersection with the accredited qualifications.

Stimulating talks aside, the opportunity to meet, catch up, raise the odd glass and dance atrociously with so many colleagues from such interesting and diverse institutions was an inspiration and a pleasure. I look forward immensely to Glasgow 2018.

Barnaby Bryan

The Honourable Society of the Middle Temple

Dr Alan Billings, Police
and Crime Commissioner,
South Yorkshire;
photography by Mills
Media Creative



Are records important?

We all know that the answer is ‘Yes’, but how do we convince our colleagues in the workplace, apart from telling them they would not be happy if their pension file were lost? Dr Alan Billings, a Keynote Speaker at the recent ARA conference, gave us food for thought.

I could only attend the conference for one day (the first day) but was fortunate to hear Dr Billings speak. In his role as Police and Crime Commissioner for South Yorkshire, he gave an account of the ‘Battle of Orgreave’ in June 1984. This was where striking miners tried to prevent the delivery of coal to the Orgreave coking plant during the midst of the Miners’ Strike of the mid-1980’s and the subsequent confrontation between miners and policemen, resulting in many injuries on both sides.

What really struck me was how, all this time later, there are still lots of questions about the pre-planning of the operation, a potential organised attempt to break the national strike by the police, which could be answered by looking at the records at the time. However, these records

seemed few and far between and were scattered across several areas. ‘The Orgreave Archives’ have been brought together and are, at present, closed to the public and are currently being catalogued by a qualified archivist, thanks to Alan’s intervention, with hopefully an enquiry of some form in the future to help provide answers.

It seems crazy to me, as a qualified records management professional, for formal records of such an event not to be kept. This is a very good example of why records are important. There have been a number of high-profile public inquiries in the news recently, with the Independent Inquiry for Child Sexual Abuse and Grenfell Tower being just two. All the inquiries will rely heavily on boxes and boxes as well as gigabytes and gigabytes of formal records which will need to be closely scrutinised in the search for evidence.

So in my quest to get colleagues to appreciate the importance of formal recordkeeping, I shall be recalling Dr Billings’ speech and pointing out the ongoing struggle

“Formal records do have value and sometimes on a very real and personal level”

of the Orgreave Truth and Justice Campaign. I will reiterate that despite the exponentially increasing volume of data that is generated on a daily basis through the use of modern technology, formal records do have value and sometimes on a very real and personal level.

Records can, quite literally, provide the truth and hopefully result in lessons being learnt to prevent the unthinkable happening again in the future.

Jason King

Chair, Section for Records Management and Information Governance

Whatever happened to my #12MonthChallenge?

Mike Anson looks at the progress made by conference delegates.

Back in 2015 I was having a summit meeting with John Chambers and Jon Elliott when they talked me into submitting a paper for the ARA conference at Wembley the following year. What they wanted was a lively session with audience participation, something that would make people think and had the potential to be continued at subsequent conferences. I readily agreed to this - there was some beer involved, and obviously I was also keen to tell people that I had played at Wembley! Anyway, the result was the session ‘My #12MonthChallenge’.

On the day I encouraged people to think about the value of having objectives or a vision of what they wanted to do and I asked them to write their own personal #12MonthChallenge on a post-it note. Everyone held up these bits of paper while I live-tweeted a photo. There were 35 varied challenges including cataloguing, digital preservation, personal development, outreach, and strategic developments. My favourite was probably ‘Make records management sexy’. After the session I spent an hour before the Gala Dinner tweeting all of the individual challenges.

This was followed up in Manchester this year with ‘Whatever happened to my #12MonthChallenge?’ Before the conference I asked people how they had done and I received responses



Jane Stevenson presenting a paper; photography by Mills Media Creative



Mike Anson and delegates; image courtesy of Mike Anson

from over half of those who were at the original session. I was impressed that some had taken the challenge seriously and there were a few quite lengthy replies. Of these, half had achieved and the other half had not (or in a couple of cases only partially achieved). Time, money, lack of staff, and other competing priorities were the most common reasons for failure.

I then asked those present to come up with a new challenge, this time drawing upon the conference theme of 'setting the agenda'. This produced another 35 pieces of paper, and if these challenges are all achieved there will be several more accredited archive services, shelves of additional cataloguing, scores of archivists undertaking CPD, and lots of digital preservation.

My 2016 challenge was to say 'no' more often. I'm afraid to say that I clearly failed in that! And what about my new #12MonthChallenge? I really am going to be setting the agenda as I have taken over from Andrew Nicoll as Chair of the ARA conference. Actually, it's a three-year position, so I had better make that a #36MonthChallenge...

Mike Anson

Bank of England

Football and feet...?

Ruth Honeybone gives a conservator's view.

I've been to the last few ARA annual conferences and they have delivered the kind of professional development that I can't find anywhere else - and this year's was no different. I'm a paper conservator by training and now manage a health archive, so the opportunity to move between the various streams on offer is something that I highly value. But this year was a break from the norm in that I spent slightly more of my time in the Conservation programme than I have in previous years, and I attribute that to a higher proportion of papers that had wider appeal. I do enjoy the classic 'before and after case study' paper but more recently have found that this has limited application to my current work, and instead get much more out of papers that cover broader topics that we can all relate to in some way. And I use 'we' to include the archivists and records managers too!

The presentations this year were well informed, well delivered and, more importantly, addressed issues that I could engage with fully, and take lessons and inspiration from. Some were particularly practical like Chris Woods' paper on the move from PD5454 to EN16893 which I can apply to the management of our current repository as well as plans to develop a new store, and Nic Rayner's insights into using Excel for quickly and efficiently presenting environmental data. And some were thought-provoking like Shirley Jones on CPD and Jonathan Rhys-Lewis on curatorial responsibility and our sector resistance to commercial solutions to collections storage.

I got the professional, interesting, stimulating, sociable conference that I was expecting but there were a few surprises too... I learnt that I enjoy football when it comes in cultural heritage form - the tour of Manchester's National Football Museum, as part of the Wednesday evening reception, was a real highlight. I hadn't anticipated ending the conference peeling an orange with a scalpel, but it all made sense in the context of Zoe Kennington's look at the overlap in skillset and approach between her twin careers of conservation and podiatry!

Ruth Honeybone

Lothian Health Services Archive, Centre for Research Collections, University of Edinburgh



A bursary winner's perspective

Vera Orschel sees a connection between the conference keynotes and her work as an information professional.

As one of the lucky bursary awardees, I was delighted to attend my first ARA conference this year. Every one of the 24 papers and workshops I attended got my professional antennae buzzing, so to speak. However, the most thought-provoking talk for me was that by Elizabeth Denham, UK Information Commissioner.

I did not expect to be so taken by a keynote about records management because presumably I adhered to the same prejudices as Denham's colleagues in Canada who, when she changed from archives to legal compliance early in her career, thought she had "moved to the dark side". After all, in my work so far I have been nurtured by linguistics and the aesthetic side of handling documents, and am one of that league of archivists who wanted a career in history without the need to present and publish papers so many times a year! But Denham struck a chord, as did another keynote speaker at the conference, Dr Allan Billings, Police and Crime Commissioner for South Yorkshire, because they both spoke of record minefields whose preservation and cataloguing mean facing the double-headed hydra of "right to know" and "right to privacy".

Twice in my career did I catalogue private papers of men acting as peace-makers in the Northern Irish 'Troubles', where one person's right to be forgotten was another's right to proclaim wrong done to him or her. Conservative interpretations of the Irish Data Protection (Archives & Historical Research) Regulations, 2008, led me to redact or close a large number of documents in both collections, many of which were seemingly innocuous but potentially damaging to private persons. Only future access requests will show whether these conservative decisions will hold fast.

Speaking from a governmental and FOI platform, Denham's talk was therefore highly interesting to me. She informed us of the Canadian Duty to Document legislation, brought about because of evidence that emails were triple-deleted by government officials in order to skirt freedom



ARA Chair, Geoff Pick;
photography by Mills
Media Creative



Delegates listen
to a presentation;
photography by Mills
Media Creative

of information laws. She is advocating similar legislation in the UK and I would say she had each of us circa 300 listeners hanging on to her every word and converted to the cause.

Besides other talks which had us know that as records managers and archivists we can - with or without formal training - act as curators, digital information specialists, information governance leaders, and research data

“I arose from the talk energised and intent on learning more”

managers - Denham might have added legal compliance officers to the list. I arose from that talk energised and intent on learning more, even in the absence of formal CPD training courses for information compliance in Ireland and the EU.

And here is the biggest elephant in the Hilton Deansgate over the course of those three days: Brexit. Where Denham and others did their best to make May 2018 and the arrival of GDPR less worrisome, the word Brexit was not spoken. The only speaker I heard alluding to it was originally Polish. I suppose that was just because, let's face it, we are all tired of Brexit speculations. And maybe our UK colleagues are just quietly assured that either Brexit won't happen, or that local UK legislation in parallel to GDPR will be adopted when everybody has worked hard to comply, to name just one of the issues. As Brexit negotiations rumble slowly along, only time will tell how the ARA as a body can deal with the dreaded split in the middle.

I am very grateful to the ARA for giving me this wonderful opportunity to attend conference! I'll do what I can to get to Glasgow next year.

Vera Orschel

National Archives, Ireland

A delegate's view

Karen Watson found that the conference challenged her perception of the archivist's role.

My first ARA conference provided food for thought and reinforced some ideas that had been bubbling under in my own professional brain. The big theme that came across in the talks I attended is the relevance of the archivist. We are pitched against IT professionals, information managers and museum curators and how we can work together and remain distinct as a profession. The panel 'The role of the heritage professional - are we all curators now' opened a debate about archivists and curators and whether we are one and the same. The argument against hinged on the role of interpretation which archivists don't do; we facilitate access, explain, present, look after, preserve but not interpret. We are detached from the narrative and I think we should interpret as part of our opening up of access to archives. We want people to know what we have in our collections and to use them so why not provide some ideas, outputs and stories that can encourage use? We should provide that interpretation to get people interested in archives and I completely agree with Iain Watson when he said of archivists and curators, "we are working together to make sense of the world through information knowledge and science, the coalition of the willing". There has been discussion recently and at the conference about the need for archivists to learn new skills to deal with the digital era. I suggest that going forward, acquiring new skills is not just about knowing about the DIPS/SIPS/APIs/RDFs but also being open to new ideas and ways of working and this is how we will continue to be relevant.

Telling stories was a strong theme at the conference and one that we feel duty bound to do, but it is slightly out of our comfort zone as archivists. It may be helpful to put where we are now into context. The archival profession has changed: passive custodians, taking in all the stuff from the record creator; archivist as historian, preserving the past 'how it really was'; active archivist, plugging the gaps in that traditional historical record and preserving the memories of individuals and communities. Maybe we need to embrace post-custodialism, helping what Richard Cox calls the "citizen archivist". Laura Yeoman and Victoria Hoyle debated post-custodialism in their talk 'Out of the strong room and into the street'. Laura emphasised the need to focus less on getting groups to deposit their archives and more on the archivist helping find ways to promote them in their own space. This



Karen Watson; photography by Mills Media Creative

“Telling stories was a strong theme at the conference”

was a great talk full of good ideas, provocative calls for change in archive services and a real need to look at what we do and who we do it for - challenging our assumptions about what engagement with archives really is. Victoria also had some great ideas from her PhD research about emotional cataloguing, helping people find those records through the experiences contained in them, rather than the administrative system that created them. This really interested me and is an idea I hope to pursue. I'm definitely going to open up about what document I find the most interesting/sad/uplifting/challenging when I'm talking to the students and visitors this term. I'm looking forward to reading Victoria's PhD when it's finished.

Karen Watson

University of Sussex

Mark Allen spots some essential reading; photography by Mills Media Creative



Delegates at the drinks reception; photography by Mills Media Creative





Thinking about values

Isilda Almeida-Harvey reflects on how her time at Conference will influence her work.

Values are greatly important to me. They have been at the core of my choice of career, as I discovered half way through university that my interest in culture and heritage was rooted in widening the access and understanding of how human beings have interacted with each other, their surroundings and the stories and experiences that result from that dynamic.

I believe that if we do anything at all, we must do it with excellence and respect. And that was the vision I took with me to the ARA conference. My first, and as a contributing delegate. I am an Archives and Outreach Learning Officer for East Sussex Record Office. Before writing about the deep sense of enrichment and inspiration I brought back with me, I must let you know I only attended the first full day of the conference.

My aim was to learn, network and put the finger on the pulse of the sector, to take stock of where we both are in our journeys. Coming from a museum studies

“My aim was to learn, network and put the finger on the pulse of the sector”

and practice background, I confess my aspirations for archives are that we continue to follow museums in their hard climb up to the top of the mountain of audience engagement and participation, and place our flag next to the museum sector’s before moving forward to the next stage of ascension in the eyes and minds of communities.

“If you want to go fast you go alone, if you want to go far you go together,” quoted Professor Duranti, discussing the reframing of the identity and the paradigm of the archive profession. The Professor’s view of the sector presented our community of practice as exactly that: a community, meaning its dynamics mirror the tensions, challenges and anchors of other groups with shared identity and culture.

As humans, we generally crave certainty. Equally, we need uncertainty to thrive and survive. The pressures of

globalisation, interdisciplinarity, financial resilience and technology bring fear and opportunity. Fear will remain fear if we go it alone. It will be an opportunity if we hunt in packs and negotiate our journey as a network. That can mean, as Sarah Wickam put it, “we must be comfortable with being uncomfortable”. As we interact with stakeholders, collections are incredibly, growingly important through their power to connect, inspire and support knowledge. There is recognition of the need for a change in discourse. Knowledge is a conversation and collaboration between communities of history recording practice and communities of lived experience. Fulfilling that means taking risks and looking at collections as the ignition for understanding, identity exploration and insight. Dr Alan Billings’ keynote speech illustrated that, as well as how archives and heritage may support building institutional trust, social justice, advocacy and transparency, particularly in a post-truth society.

Opening up to the paradigm shift in the archival profession will empower us to unlock the role of archives beyond their intrinsic value because, truly, their significance is relative to communities and society and how they help make sense of self and place for global citizenship.

That is where the projects and programmes we pilot and develop sit. In my job, I am only as good as the experience of the last group. I aim to create opportunities for people to experience what Arlette Farge refers to as the, “excess of meaning that provokes users in an intense and unconscious manner” and make a lasting impact.

Isilda Almeida-Harvey
East Sussex Record Office

Photography by Mills Media Creative



The Information Village gave delegates the opportunity to learn more about various services, including those provided by the British Library's digitisation team; photography by Mills Media Creative

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Challenge the past, set the agenda

Holly Waughman reflects on the theme of the conference.

This year I was fortunate to attend the ARA conference for the first time, and apart from providing an excellent opportunity for networking, the conference also raised some interesting questions about professional identities and who, as professionals, we want to be.

As someone who is currently studying part-time on the MA in Archives and Records Management course at UCL, I found that many of the talks based around this year's theme of 'Challenge the Past, Set the Agenda' linked in to discussions taking place in lectures and seminars. In particular, I was interested in the themes of trust, ethics and collaboration which ran through many of the talks which I attended.

One speaker who tackled these themes head on was Alan Billings. In his keynote speech he spoke about South Yorkshire Police records concerning the Battle of Orgreave, and highlighted the importance of trust, not just in the integrity of the record, but also trust in those who manage the records and in the record creators. Another interesting talk was given by Elizabeth Lomas, who discussed whether archivists and records managers are becoming Information Governance leaders. She

Delegates at the drinks reception; photography by Mills Media Creative



James Mortlock and Jennifer Febles talking about an holistic approach to digital preservation at HSBC; photography by Mills Media Creative

argued that archivists and records managers have an important role to play in this area, particularly in the area of information ethics. Similarly, Adrian Steele, Charlotte Berry and Iain Watson discussed the future directions of the profession with their talk entitled 'We are all Heritage Professionals now', looking at the relationship between archives and museums, archivists and curators.

Delegates listen to a presentation; photography by Mills Media Creative



Photography by Mills Media Creative



Delegates had the chance to hear about the work of ARA sections, including the Film, Sound and Photography Section; photography by Mills Media Creative

Interestingly, few members of the audience wished to embrace a more encompassing title, such as heritage professional, however many agreed on the value of collaboration and working more closely with colleagues with similar remits.

Talks such as these confronted assumptions about our profession, and provided possible ways of adapting our identity and remit to meet both current and future challenges. I think it is interesting that many of the answers provided about how to deal with challenges were less about the specifics of what professionals should be doing, and were more about embracing the flexibility to both respond and to proactively identify and address challenges. Through doing this, we can ensure that we

decide for ourselves who we want to be and that we highlight to others the importance of records and archives as an asset.

The conference provided an excellent forum through which these ideas could be discussed and a great place to meet other professions with which to discuss them. I hope that in the future I am able to attend further conferences, and that I will not only be able to contribute to setting the agenda through creating my own professional identity, but that I will also be able to contribute to the progression of the profession as a whole.

Holly Waughman
Bank of England

A delegate's view

Ruth Benny is inspired by the conference.

Imbarrassingly admit that it has been a good few years since I attended a socially orientated archive and information management event. At conferences and learning days it is all too easy to dash off once the last portion of the day is over, and so spending the better part of the week at a non-stop event did frighten me a little and pre-conference I swore to brush up on my 'archive banter'!

Needless to say any confidence I initially lacked quickly grew! The enthusiasm from the conference attendees was infectious and it was wonderful to hear their stories about current and future projects and past successes (and even some failures!). I had often taken for granted how important it is to talk to a group of people who actually understand the profession and the daily challenges we face; challenges which can seem overwhelming seemed achievable in the company of fellow professionals. Yes, we are all facing issues, but it appears the defining quality of the archivist and information manager is to endeavour to continue in the face of adversity.

I have to say (without 'fangirling' too much) the highlight of the conference for me was the Information Commissioner, Elizabeth Denham's key note speech. The new General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) is at the forefront of my work this year, as the Information Management team at the Natural History Museum have been hard at work preparing for the GDPR enforcement date in May 2018. The Information Commissioner's

“ *Pre-conference I swore to brush up on my 'archive banter'!* **”**

speech was both inspiring and uplifting. I was fascinated to learn about Elizabeth Denham's background in archives and how this developed her commitment for access to information and at the same time the protection of privacy. As only a 'true archivist' could convey, it is about getting the correct balance to maintain a transparent and justified government whilst protecting the public's privacy. The UK is lucky to have her as the Information Commissioner!

I came out of each session full of inspiration, bursting with ideas of how we, as Information Management professionals, can tackle the road ahead. Even sessions such as Professor Sherry Li Xie's brilliant 'Competing with Robots - can the Records Management Profession withstand the challenges' was not met by the audience with cynicism or fear of losing our jobs but with a keen interest in how such technologies could assist with record keeping. The digital sessions were by far my favourite and I was delighted by the wide ranging options provided. I was impressed at how well attended these lectures were, demonstrating the profession's growing appetite to learn and expand knowledge of digital record keeping.

Ruth Benny

Natural History Museum



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The Section for New Professionals were well represented at conference; photography by Mills Media Creative



A new professional's perspective

Karyn Williamson discusses the contribution made to conference by new professionals.

As a new professional, it can be daunting walking into an event like the ARA conference for the first time. Three days filled with over 60 papers and workshops, drinks receptions, a gala dinner, an information village and around 300 people (most of whom you don't know) ready to discuss and debate the issues facing the sector is enough to make even the most established sector professional run for the hills. However, after taking a deep breath and diving into the middle of it all, it becomes apparent that the conference is a goldmine of information, opinions and networking opportunities that new professionals in particular can benefit from.

I've always found the record keeping and conservation sectors to be particularly supportive of those taking their first steps into the professions. Before the conference began, this was proven true when the crowd funded bursary to allow a new professional to attend conference for the first time raised enough money to fund not only

one full conference place, but also a second day delegate place less than a month after being launched. This encouraging culture continues throughout the conference in a number of ways. In between presentations I witnessed many new professionals making the most of networking opportunities and not only learning from their peers but offering their own opinions and ideas on the talks they had just attended. The conference programme was also speckled with new professionals, such as Elisabeth Thurlow and Skills for the Future Trainee Penny Wright presenting at conference for the first (and hopefully not the last) time. With the launch of the new ARA CPD scheme, there has never been a better time for new professionals to be taking control of their own learning and development, and attending the ARA conference is one way of meeting more established professionals who can help throughout your journey. An opportunity not to be missed by those in lone-working roles or in small teams with little time for career development.

“The number of newly qualified record keepers and conservators attending their first conference was as high as it's ever been”

The theme of this year's conference was setting the agenda. It became clear as the conference progressed that the archive sector is evolving and that there is a place for new professionals to become involved and share their opinions and ideas. The number of newly qualified record keepers and conservators attending their first conference was as high as it's ever been and the social media engagement from new professionals, particularly on Twitter, throughout the conference was dynamic and interesting, even for those not attending in person. As the outgoing Chair of the Section for New Professionals, I found it really encouraging to see this level of involvement from the Section's members and hope this commitment to making the record keeping and conservation sectors a great community to be part of continues.

To any new professionals reading this issue of ARC and wondering if the ARA conference is for them - it most definitely is. The opportunity to meet so many archivists, records managers and conservators in one place and discuss the issues and developments that really matter to the sector is not to be missed. I hope to meet as many of you as possible at next year's conference in Glasgow.

Karyn Williamson

Outgoing Chair, ARA Section for New Professionals

Diversity in archives: growing pains

Jasspreet Thethi's time at Conference prompts her to think about diversity in the profession.

This year I attended my first conference in the recordkeeping sector with a bursary courtesy of Kevin Bolton. Among the varied sessions was an exceptionally thought-provoking talk from Kirsty Fife and Hannah Henthorn. They shared the findings from their unfunded and independently conducted survey, 'Marginalised in the UK Archives Sector', which recorded the experiences of under-represented groups in the Archives sector.

Many participants felt marginalised in ways I had not considered. For example, one participant did not feel comfortable attending conferences beneficial to their professional development due to fear of being mis-gendered or experiencing other transphobic micro-aggressions.¹ I began reflecting on how we could create a welcoming, supportive and safe space² where all under-represented individuals feel welcome. I concluded that to achieve this, each person in the sector must be willing to engage with the topic of diversity with a sensitivity that will legitimise the feelings of the under-represented and result in changed behaviours and policies.

To explain this fully I will use my experience as an example.

As a British Asian in the heritage sector, I work with a majority of white British or European colleagues and have repeatedly experienced being the only BAME person in an entire building. When micro-aggressions occur in these settings I have two options: speak out or let it go. Speaking out is an empowering option if I am confident I am in a safe and understanding environment. Letting it go is more preferable when I am unsure of my surroundings. The latter is more common in a workplace setting.

When these micro-aggressions occur, I am overcome with an array of feelings including hurt, vulnerability and belittlement. Often, I make a joke of what has happened as a protective way to discuss a sensitive topic. The more I learn to articulate myself during stressful situations in a clear, concise and kind manner, the more I can discuss these transgressions with my colleagues. I expect my conversational partner to mirror my respectful and understanding approach but often their embarrassment and hurt leads to misdirected anger and/or a dismissive attitude. This in turn causes me to feel invisible and upset.

“Each person in the sector must be willing to engage with the topic”

If we intend to dismantle all barriers to under-represented groups and fully embrace diversity into the workplace we must be sensitive to those highlighting discriminatory behaviour: accepting our ignorance and discomfort and turning this into understanding and acceptance. This is a complex, sensitive topic but we can begin with four steps.

1. Understand there is mutual discomfort: challenging someone about micro-aggressions is intimidating and uncomfortable
2. Accept the discomfort: do not immediately dismiss or defend micro-aggressions, because implicit bias is universal and no one has full understanding of other peoples' life experience
3. Do research: learning about the life experiences of minority groups will increase understanding and inform positive interactions
4. Forgive yourself for making mistakes: if you are following these steps to create a more welcoming environment for everyone, you're doing your best.

By doing this we can make a truly safe space for those under-represented groups. As the sector's diversity grows, so will our discomfort when mistakes are inevitably made. However, this is not a negative prospect. Growing pains are necessary when changing the status quo and this is an exciting and important part of creating a fully diverse and integrated profession.

Jasspreet Thethi

John Rylands Library, The University of Manchester

¹ Indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalized group.

² A place or environment in which a person or category of people can feel confident that they will not be exposed to discrimination, criticism, harassment, or any other emotional or physical harm.



Photography by Mills Media Creative



Delegates during a break from the panel sessions; photography by Mills Media Creative

A bursary winner's perspective

Malcolm Mathieson highlights some recurring themes that emerged during his time at Conference.

Arriving at the Manchester Hilton on Friday morning for my first experience of the ARA conference, I was unsure of exactly what to expect. The majority of chat over coffee centred around the previous evening's dinner and drinks. There were even whispers of archivists and records managers dancing. Oh, the humanity. Despite the previous evening's entertainment, a healthy audience was treated to a fascinating keynote speech by University of Oxford Senior Research Fellow Dr Neil Brodie on the study of unprovenanced ancient manuscripts from North Africa and West Asia. Dr Brodie encouraged us to consider the potentially harmful consequences of acquiring collections of dubious origin and the serious impact decisions made in the comfort of academic and institutional offices can have on the lives of individuals living in conflict zones. It's probably fair to say not many archivists are likely to hold records dating from thousands of years BC, or are in a position to purchase collections for many thousands of pounds, but the overarching themes of trust, transparency and accountability which underpinned this presentation hold resonance for all records professionals. Plus, I now know what cuneiform is, which is an added bonus.

A recurring theme within the day's strong Digital strand appeared to be the numerous ways in which archive organisations are harnessing the development of digital technology to promote their services and reach new audiences. Claire Skinner of Wiltshire Archives provided an engaging insight into how her service has engaged with college students through the development of a mobile phone app as part of a Heritage Lottery Funded project cataloguing the papers of the Lacock Abbey Estate. There was also a reminder of the unique role our profession plays in shaping national discourse in relation to complex events, particularly in the digital age.

Staff from a number of Irish archive organisations examined how their organisations had responded to Ireland's 'decade of centenaries' taking place between 2012-2022 through online platforms and projects, such as the preservation of a number of websites under the 'remembering 1916, recording 2016' banner.

The Archives strand also provided a forum for a number of creative and dynamic papers. Victoria Hoyle's challenge for professionals to "shed their power" and "always be the incomer" when undertaking community outreach projects drew approving reactions, as did her call for archivists to cast off their inherently risk averse nature and be willing to see themselves as participants, not leaders, in such projects. There may however have been a sharp intake of breath amongst the conservators in the audience when taking original documents to the pub was suggested as an outreach activity! The final session of the day from Jenna Ashton of Digital Women's Archive North ended with a rallying call for archivists to use their position to "disrupt" traditional power structures. It was heartening to see presentations on such a diverse range of topics, the passion on display from so many fellow professionals and the pride they take in their work. I left with a better understanding of my role as not just an employee of one particular archive service, but as a member of a wider professional network, which is undertaking a phenomenal range of diverse and inspirational work. I would recommend attendance at conference to any ARA member.

Thank you to the ARA Section for New Professionals who sponsored my bursary

Malcolm Mathieson

West Yorkshire Archive Service



A panel session from the Digital strand; photography by Mills Media Creative

ARA conference impressions

Roland Quintaine shows how conference can help with the exchange of ideas and knowledge.

Although I have been working in archives for well over a decade, I only qualified for my archives Masters recently and so this was my first ARA conference. I was certainly looking forward to swapping Jersey's traditional pink granite for Manchester's red brick for a few days, and wondering what other changes in perspective the conference might bring.

When you live on an island with one archives service it's easy to feel a little outside the loop when it comes to current developments. Even having an informal chat with colleagues from other services is a rare opportunity, so just being able to attend an event like this is a great help. This is where the social side of the conference comes into its own, with lunch hours and the gala dinner providing plenty of opportunities for setting the world to rights.

Most of the conference sessions I attended were from the Digital stream. It almost seems received wisdom that the challenge of digital preservation is the big new development that is shaking the archive sector up, but I found many points made during these sessions were already familiar from my own experiences and training.

A number of speakers shared their experiences of setting up and running digital preservation projects. When dealing with these issues it's easy to convince yourself that your service will never catch up with the practices and standards of the leaders in the field. What I took from these sessions was reassurance that we are not alone in facing these issues and that the solutions we are arriving at are in a similar vein.

In a profession where we are used to stretching limited resources to the maximum and punching as far above our weight as we can manage, sometimes I think we panic when we feel that we can't do all that we'd like. It's good to have a reminder that this is actually okay. Hearing from colleagues and peers about their own experiences, successes and even failures can really help in this regard.



The Ancestry stand in the Information Village; photography by Mills Media Creative

Many of the points I found the most thought-provoking came from the Archives and Records stream, particularly some really interesting presentations around the theme of community engagement. My overriding impression was of the importance of opening up archives, our expertise and access to our profession to those who have been traditionally excluded. I was struck by the contrast of needing to value and raise awareness of our professional expertise (particularly in an age where people are accustomed to quickly finding answers on the Internet), while also stepping aside from the role of record/knowledge gatekeepers and redefining ourselves as equal partners who have as much to learn as we do to teach.

I returned home with plenty to think about both in terms of practical projects, and more theoretical ideas that will hopefully bear fruit at some point in the future. I must admit though, I was faintly disappointed that none of the speakers on digital preservation (at least that I heard) got in a last-minute reference to Terry Pratchett's steamrollered hard drive...!

Roland Quintaine
Jersey Heritage

A conservator's view

Carrie Farnell discusses how the conference contributed to her professional training.



Mike Anson keeps smiling as the ARA's Jon Elliott reminds him that next year he's the Conference Committee Chair; photography by Mills Media Creative

It was the first full conference I had attended as a student on the ARA Conservation training scheme. I work at the Highland Archive Centre, Inverness as a trainee archive conservator and have been on the training scheme for just over three years. I really enjoyed all of the talks over the three days - here are a few that I found most useful and interesting.

The first presentation I enjoyed was 'Curatorial Responsibility - is this a reality?' by Jonathan Rhys-Lewis (National Conservation Service). He discussed in what ways the profession is changing in regards to how more archive services are looking towards saving money on things such as energy consumption to run archive repositories and cold storage systems; restricted budgets; and even how income generation is affecting collection care. Jonathan made quite a difficult topic fascinating and highlighted some key themes that could be even more problematic in the near future.

The second workshop I have chosen is 'Identification and characteristics of popular 19th century photographic processes' held by Tony Richards (University of Manchester Library). This workshop looked at old photographs that had been produced through different photographic processes. I learnt that there were a lot of photographic processes that can produce similar results making some types of

photographs hard to separate. It was great looking at the examples Tony brought in. I found it very useful and I look forward to applying some of the things I learnt in practice.

The last presentation I have chosen is 'History of papermaking and early use of machines' by Phil Crockett (British Association of Paper Historians). I thought Phil's talk was a great refresher. He discussed the key papermaking dates and he showed some fascinating videos of traditional Japanese papermaking. Phil brought in some paper making moulds with watermarks and some examples of handmade papers. It was one of my favourite talks of the week!

Overall, the conference was a great experience. The Gala dinner and the tour around the football museum were also highlights. I got the opportunity to catch up with old work colleagues and some of the instructors on the training scheme.

I really enjoyed staying in the venue, listening to all the speakers, meeting and networking with other professionals in the sector.

Carrie Farnell

Highland Archive Service, High Life Highland

Conference reflections of a first time delegate and new professional

I was certainly one of the happiest people on the morning train. Yes, my post-Bank Holiday working week was one day long; but far better - I was off to Manchester for ARA Conference 2017 that evening! This was only possible thanks to the generosity of my fellow ARA members through the wonderful New Professionals Bursary - so my sincere thanks to everyone who contributed to the crowdsourced award.

Looking back on my conference experience, I have a renewed sense of professional purpose, expertise and belonging. The conference allowed me to reconnect, not only with colleagues and former course mates, but with the ideas and concepts that underpin what I spend my days doing, as well as the reasons why I became interested in this profession in the first place.

The conference keynotes and many of the sessions I attended emphasised, for me, that being able to 'challenge the past' and 'set the agenda' in our workplaces relies heavily on knowing what we are trying to achieve, why it is important and how we can communicate this effectively to all those whose help we need.

Managing current records, as I am at present, I think gives a very keen awareness of the centrality of people to effective record-keeping - creators, users and colleagues in allied professions. This is especially true in the transience of the digital era. For the last two years, I have been part of a small records management team at the ombudsman service for the financial services sector. It is a large organisation that has been going through a major restructure and revolution in roles and ways of working, with a focus on multi-skilled case-handling, knowledge capture and sharing techniques, underpinned by an evolving information governance framework. This has been a great personal learning and development opportunity, not least in applying seemingly firm and familiar RM theory to a changeable reality full of people (as life generally is!). The conference broadened my understanding of how we collaborate and engage with those around us as professionals, and also emphasised

“Conference emphasised the importance of continuing to put the building blocks of trust in place”

the importance of this in building trust. Aiming to set any agenda without the trust of those around us, we risk subtly undermining everything we do.

One of the sessions that developed my thinking on this point was the update on the revised ISO 15489 given by Rod Stone from Royal Bank of Scotland. We all know that standards provide us with a common framework and language within which we can develop the most effective RM agenda and give our approach the stamp of quality that an ISO provides. Some of the changes made in this latest revision are not insignificant; neither, as Rod explored, are they uncontroversial nor universally agreed - how we define 'record', for instance ((how) does it differ from 'documented information' as used in ISO27001? Are both 'assets'? Define 'asset'!), or how we term the method of identifying what records need to be created, captured and kept and for how long (labelled 'appraisal' in the standard but perhaps better understood in the UK sector as business process or function analysis). These concepts sit at the heart of 'record-keeping' as a whole, and changes to terminology in one of our central professional standards is relevant to us all, since it guides how we communicate and collaborate with each other and with colleagues in related professions. As Professor Giovanni Mitchetti from the Sapienza University of Rome pointed out in the first session of the conference addressing the globalised profession, standards do help us to cohere around a set of professional principles, but they are also value-laden social and political constructs, to the extent that the best standard or revision does not necessarily always win out. As such, we shouldn't be afraid of considering them critically.

As archivists and records managers, we are in a key position of stewardship which requires that we are trusted by those

Delegates play 'guess the archive'; photography by Mills Media Creative



“Managing current records gives a very keen awareness of the centrality of people to effective record-keeping”

Archives & Records Association
UK & Ireland

Bill Stocking discusses a new standard for archival description; photography by Mills Media Creative



we interact with, as a profession and as individuals. This is partly why, a few months before the conference, I began my ARA CPD for Registration assessment (and attended the soft launch event at Conference). Good professional standards serve a similar purpose for the profession as good CPD does for the individual: both ensure we are effective, reflective, reliable, relevant and trustworthy as professionals.

A similar point can be made about the regulatory framework we work within: whilst FOI, EIR and data protection rules can seem burdensome and restrictive (especially when they change!), I think we should always try to see them as allies which together give us a route

map for creating safe, secure and effective spaces for the creation, capture and accessibility of records. Information Commissioner Elizabeth Denham, an archivist by profession, made a similar point in her Thursday keynote address: the digital world offers unprecedented opportunity for transparency, access and retrieval, but having such a clear window of access opportunities is only meaningful if the right things are being kept and preserved on the other side of the glass.

For me, this emphasises that digital preservation must go hand in hand with good records governance if it is to be meaningfully accessible in the future. If we do not have effective ways of managing electronic information in the environments in which it is being created, then complying with legislation and preserving the right records will become an even larger challenge than it is now.

ARA Conference 2017 emphasised to me the importance of continuing to put these building blocks of trust in place: effective use of professional learning and development; the standards at our disposal; the rules that shape how we work, and the regulators who help interpret them. Only on this foundation can we effectively convey the importance of the agenda we advocate, and ensure the effectiveness of any business operation or archive service of which we are part.

Vanessa Platt

Financial Ombudsman Service

ARA Conference - an old hand writes...

Melinda Haunton finds that even a seasoned attendee can find something of interest at conference.

I think the experience of conference changes a lot over time. I remember being new and anxious, though also keen to go to every session and meet lots of new people. Then came the world of social media: meeting in person people whom I had met online became a huge part of the attraction for me. Now, in a job which takes me all round the UK meeting archivists in their workplaces, conference is a sea of familiar faces. It's also still a great place to learn and meet new people, though, and 2017 was no exception.

I was at conference for only one day, but it was a very full one. I arrived early to set up the Archive Service Accreditation stand in the Information Village (ours was the one with all the shiny sweets, a blatant bribe which worked pretty well in enticing people to talk to us). I'm very glad that ARA has been able to offer us a stand in recent years, as it's a great opportunity to talk with people face to face, especially to tackle any queries about their Accreditation applications. We also had programme updates to share, particularly on the refresh which Accreditation is undergoing, to incorporate more digital preservation content, and to update the guidance and application process. I was especially glad to see so many trainees from Transforming Archives and Opening Up Scotland's Archives sharing their work and coming to conference.

With a stand to staff, I didn't see many of the morning talks, but I did follow them on Twitter and talk about them with people who had been in the room. I also sneaked in to sit at the back to hear the Information Commissioner's inspiring keynote about the power of archives, and the ways in which she is advocating for changes to current information law. In the afternoon, I had my own workshop to run, with Simon Wilson and Susan Corrigan, discussing the different ways in which a simple self-assessment tool (the NDSA Levels of Preservation) can help to improve digital preservation.



Multi-track programming always means you miss out on some tantalising options. I was sorry not to be at the launch of ARA's new CPD programme, having been a part of its development for a long time. But I was attending to my own CPD - hearing about the Digital Preservation Coalition's new advocacy activities (making my own nominations to the #BitList), and finally facing up to the Records in Context Conceptual Model. I hoped that hearing Bill Stocking talk about it would be a help in disentangling my thoughts about this major new descriptive standards development - and I wasn't disappointed!

I stayed on for the gala dinner for the first time in years, as I was invited to receive my award as 2017 Record Keeper of the Year. I'm not terribly good at accepting praise, and am very conscious of just how many people working together have made possible the archive programmes I was congratulated on. But thank you, ARA, for this recognition. I'm hugely proud of what we've been able to achieve with Archive Service Accreditation, ARA CPD and the Registration Scheme, the Archive Volunteering awards, and many more. It's been a pleasure!

Melinda Haunton

The National Archives (UK)

A bursary winner's perspective

Jan Grace writes about how Conference highlighted the importance of archives.

I want to say a big thank you to Ancestry for the bursary that enabled me to attend ARA Conference in Manchester this year. 'Challenge the Past, Set the Agenda' is a provocative title and as a first time conference attendee I was hugely impressed by the quality and diversity of the talks. It was also a real pleasure to be able to chat with fellow professionals working in such differing circumstances, an alternative sort of learning experience. It was serendipitous that there was a visit to the National Football Museum included in this year's activities, great to see Dixie Dean lauded as deserved but I was surprised to see Michael Jackson in there with the exhibits!

We are all experiencing challenges as central government funding cuts impact upon local authorities and public services. Something that was reinforced in several talks was the need to raise awareness of the intrinsic value

of archives; they contribute much more to society than is generally perceived. As Dr Alan Billings (Police and Crime Commissioner for South Yorkshire) stated, 'records have the power to enable people to see what is there'. They add to knowledge and truth; they allow public bodies to be held to account.

This can only happen if the records have been kept and are available to access, as the UK Information Commissioner Elizabeth Denham pointed out, and it is impossible to foretell which records are going to be needed in the future. The many records related to Grenfell Tower may well have been considered a low priority in terms of retention, but events have made these records of extremely high significance - as they reveal the decisions made that contributed to the tragedy. There is a general need for greater transparency and availability of records. It is now

“*Something that was reinforced in several talks was the need to raise awareness of the intrinsic value of archives*”

Elizabeth Denham, the Information Commissioner, gives her keynote address; photography by Mills Media Creative



possible to detect wilful triple deleting of digital records, but many digital and paper records are also destroyed through negligence as their importance is not realised.

In terms of my own practice, preserving and working with digital records is an area I need to gain knowledge of and develop. The main message of many of the speakers was, again, to make management and IT departments aware of just how much archives matter (their importance to the organisation) as until this is established it is unlikely that the needed support will be given. IT has to be included in any digitisation project before it begins, and as Jason King pointed out, it is preferable to have IT personnel working in the same room, as their support is integral to success. The other overriding message was to begin with a small scale project with realistic expectations. This can then be built upon and expanded when needed, as to start with a large scale project is unlikely to succeed.

There were some excellent and thought provoking speeches about increasing engagement with local communities and the value ascribed to the archive by its local community. Passing original records around in a pub to engage with local groups may be too risky for their conservation, but I can see the argument that interested groups may well be put off by search room rules and limited opening hours in our 24/7 Google informed world. We do need to broaden our audience and become more inclusive; it was useful to hear some practical advice on working with people with learning disabilities. Commemorating contentious anniversaries addressed the role and responsibilities of the archivist when the anniversary is not one to be celebrated, some challenging questions to consider, and the opportunity to demonstrate the significance of archives in adding factual accounts to local histories.

To conclude, I found the conference to be both enlightening and enjoyable, with some truly innovative and interesting ideas being put forward. I would highly recommend applying for a bursary for the opportunity to take part in any future ARA conference.

Jan Grace

Liverpool Record Office

www.archives.org.uk

A delegate's view

Ben Taylor considers how Conference helped to set the agenda.

This was my first ARA conference, and I wasn't quite sure what to expect. I turned up on Tuesday night, rode the lift to the 23rd floor and headed for the bar. Then, a little apprehensive but determined to make the most of the opportunity to network with my fellow professionals, I turned to the person next to me:

"Hi, I'm Ben, I'm the archives assistant at Magdalen College in Oxford. How about you?"

"I'm Geoff..."

Too late, I recognised the Chair of the ARA Board from his picture in the conference programme. Not the best start.

By the end of the conference, though, I felt that even if my preparation could have been better, I had at least had the right idea. A key message of so many of the sessions seemed to be: good archivists have to be prepared to communicate.

The conference title challenged us to 'set the agenda', but as Elizabeth Thurlow noted in her paper on the first day, archivists can't set the agenda on their own. Collaboration is imperative. In Elizabeth's case, that had meant collaboration with IT staff on a pilot digital preservation project at the Royal College of Nursing. A key insight from the project was that sometimes problems which appear to be technical actually stem from misunderstandings between professionals with different backgrounds. Once this had been established, good communication cleared the path for progress.

Dr Victoria Lemieux also had some reassuring words for archivists who might feel out of their depth where IT is concerned. She encouraged us to have faith that archivists' training and expertise gives us valuable things to say to IT professionals, and advised that just getting involved, perhaps with a hackathon or an online coding course, could alleviate much of the nervousness and mystery surrounding IT.

“*Good archivists have to be prepared to communicate*”

Other speakers focused on how we could best collaborate with users. Alex Miller and Margaret Myerscough's paper on the 'Greater Manchester Method' related how they had embraced their users' desire to be a part of the archives they use. Through engaging with their research community, they built themselves a corps of skilled and motivated advocates to help communicate the value of their work.

Sarah Wickham of Huddersfield Archives built on the theme, challenging us to use our collections to inspire a creative response from users. Victoria Hoyle and Laura Yeoman from Explore York also spoke compellingly about the importance of listening to users and engaging them on their terms, as partners rather than just customers, and about how we could exploit, not overlook, the emotional impact of the records we hold.

For me, the importance of communication and collaboration was crystallised in Dr Sherry Xie's paper 'Competing with Robots'. On the face of it, Dr Xie seemed to be the bearer of bad news: archives and records work is increasingly likely to be automated. She added, though, that in tasks requiring creativity and social intelligence, flesh and blood still trumped silicon. If we want to avoid being replaced by robots, then, it seems we need to concentrate on the things which make us most human.

Ben Taylor

Magdalen College, Oxford

Day Tripper

Penny Hutchins finds plenty of good reasons to attend conference.

This was my fourth attendance at conference, and I could only manage a day in Manchester this time. Nevertheless, I knew enough about conference to plan carefully and sort out the complexities of the programme and make the most of my attendance! The big draw for me, and the reason I chose to attend on the second day of the conference, was the keynote presentation to be given by Elizabeth Denham, the Information Commissioner. I was very eager to hear what she had to say about GDPR and her role as a professional archivist before making the change to the 'dark side' into information governance! The Digital stream of the programme was the main reason for my application for funding for the conference, and I was hoping to take away thoughts on making progress for NAM on our own digital preservation strategy and processes.

The keynote presentation by Elizabeth Denham did not disappoint: it was powerful, engaging and advocated the importance of good records management in a time of change in the world of information governance (GDPR) and threats to cybersecurity. She is a great advocate of the need for transparency as a default status for public bodies, and made calls for the 'duty to document' to be built into the Freedom of Information Act. She also claimed that those public bodies which were flexible in their approach to transparency, i.e. in providing information in response to an ever evolving context, are those that are most successful in their activities and functions. This took me back to my notes made at last year's conference, when I wrote that organisations should publish information to meet the needs of their users and not of those of the organisations - a tricky balance to meet! The ICO's support for positive archive derogations within the GDPR Bill was well received - this will be important for all public and private archive collections and how they treat personal data, and it is important that DCMS get this right from the beginning.

The Digital stream of the programme tackled the challenges of adapting traditional cataloguing practices in order to meet the requirements of unstructured born-digital documents, often found in multiple folder levels. In particular, I was interested in Jone Garmedia of the National Archives (TNA) and her overview of TNA practices (do you choose date of creation? date of ingestion? date of modification?), and Jane Stevenson's message to archivists to think globally when cataloguing and not in terms



Jone Garmendia exploring the evolution of cataloguing practices for digital records at The National Archives (UK); photography by Mills Media Creative

of just one website, in order to help users to discover archives.

As part of a service which is working on its submission for Archive Service Accreditation, I couldn't miss the session on the new requirements of digital preservation to be found in the accreditation form. We took part in the pilot for this earlier this year, so it was interesting to hear how the pilot had informed final changes made to the form. From this session, I took away the message that inactivity in terms of digital preservation would not lead to a successful submission, and also got (slightly) excited by the University of Hull's approach to using the NDSA levels for digital preservation to annually benchmark their progress in all things digital! For me, this is what conference is about - hearing about the initiatives of others, and taking inspiration away and seeing what we could implement ourselves.

I could go on and on about the day in Manchester - the hotel was great but I didn't get a chance to visit the roof top bar which apparently gave breath-taking views of the city! I guess the main things I brought away with me, pondering away on the train back down to London, were:

- There is a misconception that publishing data for transparency is easy, and it is a skill (and requires the organisation to have the right resources) to publish data that sits within a context to make it meaningful for users;
- The foundation of Archive Service Accreditation is to ensure that the archive service works for its community;
- Sharing data helps users discover archives, and this is only possible through consistent and structured cataloguing;
- Digital preservation can be tackled immediately in small steps - it is a mistake to wait and do nothing.

And lastly, as I was looking through my notebook on the way up to Manchester, I found something that I had jotted down from a previous conference which really resonated with me and has become my new mantra: 'Good archive services can improve museum services.'

Penny Hutchins
National Army Museum

Lessons from PRONI

Fiona Keates finds that a particular paper at Conference has a direct relevance to her work at the NSPCC.

I am very grateful to ARA for making my attendance at the conference possible through the bursary; I would not have been able to attend without their support.

I was particularly keen to attend this year as I wanted to hear from Graham Jackson (PRONI) and Gareth Mulvenna (Inquiry Researcher) on the archival challenges of the Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry in Northern Ireland. When I started as records manager at the NSPCC, the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) was in its early stages, and has dominated much of the work of the records team, so I was keen to compare our experience against PRONI's.

The presentation outlined how the Inquiry and PRONI worked together, including the introduction of a memorandum of understanding early in the process. This very sensible approach balanced the needs of the Inquiry against the considerations of the archive. It became apparent that as a charity rather than statutory place of deposit we have a very different relationship to IICSA, but we can still learn lessons from this successful and co-operative undertaking.

The research team did find that records were missing, and that institutions were unable to supply explanations as to why this was the case. This served as a reminder that we

must ensure that our retention policies are always kept as part of the organisational memory. I have previously researched the NSPCC's past retention practice and the session convinced me of the value in conducting this exercise.

As recognised in a question from the audience, this doesn't just raise questions about the past for records managers and archivists. We must also consider what to do with our retention policies once the work of the non-recent abuse inquiries has finished and destruction holds are lifted. I found some comfort in knowing that other institutions were battling with these questions. Although IICSA will not be reporting imminently, I am hopeful that the report will include recommendations on recordkeeping, reminding institutions of their responsibility to engage actively with records management. It would also help to establish consistency between public and private institutions, making it easier for those whose histories are captured within the record to find and process their stories. As Graham reminded us at the heart of the inquiries should be the voice of the victims and survivors. We as record keepers can help to preserve this on their behalf, as well as for our employers.

Fiona Keates
NSPCC

Delegates during a break from the panel sessions; photography by Mills Media Creative





Joe Chapman discussing archives and the democratisation of knowledge; photography by Mills Media Creative

A bursary winner's perspective

Emma Hancox found that Conference provided her with the space to ask some big questions.

My attendance at this year's conference was down to the generosity of the Archives and Records Association who awarded me a bursary. I was keen to pick up useful bits of information to take back to my colleagues at the Library of Birmingham and get an insight into the sector as a whole, which can be difficult when dealing with the day to day tasks involved in running a busy archive service.

This was the first time I had ever attended an ARA conference and it surpassed my expectations in terms of the quality and range of talks. It gave me the valuable opportunity to step back from my everyday role, think about why I am an archivist and question what I do.

The talks covered a variety of themes. Inclusion and diversity came through in a number of talks including Sarah Wickham's 'Cutting the Record' and 'Challenge

the Future - how do you want the profession to grow?' presented by Emma Stagg and Audrey Wilson. Both talks acknowledged the lack of diversity in the archive workforce and encouraged us to think about how to deal with this. One of the key points I took from Sarah Wickham's talk was that if we want to be a diverse profession we need to promote diversity in every single aspect of our work. It applies to the material we take in and the opportunities we provide for people to engage with collections; everything is connected and we should be positive about the future.

In 'Challenge the Future' the speakers raised issues about the level of accessibility in the profession, for example, the fact that the cost of a Masters qualification prevents members of certain social groups becoming an archivist or records manager. This means that as a profession we are not representative of society as a whole. This prompted



Photography
by Mills Media
Creative

“The talks raised important questions for me about my role as an archivist”

me to consider what the archives and records profession will look like in twenty years' time. How might I like it to adapt and how could I impact this?

Another theme of the conference talks that stood out was access to collections and how archivists should facilitate this. Laura Yeoman and Victoria Hoyle from the York City Archives gave a particularly thought-provoking talk about the new approach they implemented for engaging with community groups. Laura explained how they had decided to shed assumptions about what people wanted and instead listen to them.

They had discovered that there is often a mismatch between the pace at which community groups wanted to engage with archives and the pace at which archives acted. Victoria Hoyle gave us three challenges based on what they had learnt. These were firstly to 'shed your power' for example making contact in the community's own space and at their convenience. Secondly, to 'value the now' because archivists tend to defer archival value to the future instead of living for the now. The possibility of allowing people to engage with archives in familiar settings such as the pub was even proffered. The third challenge was to 'get emotional' as people are often interested in finding material that relates to feelings.

Another talk dealing with some similar issues was Joe Chapman's "Archives and the Democratisation of Knowledge in the 'Post-Truth' Era". He mentioned that our collections need to be used in order to be and that in these times what people look for in an expert is not just knowledge but a demonstration of expertise, integrity and benevolence. This has positive implications for archivists who tend to show benevolence in their wish to help

people access records and also integrity in preserving the authenticity of records. These talks raised important questions for me about my role as an archivist. Am I here primarily to make material available in the present or to preserve it for the future? How many people are put off accessing archives because of the importance we place on the reading room environment? How can we get round this? How can I build good relationships with users through showing expertise alongside integrity and benevolence?

I also attended many interesting talks in the Digital strand of the conference and was keen to take away useful snippets for my colleagues at the Library of Birmingham. Like many other archives, we are working on improving our capacity for dealing with born-digital archive material. It was encouraging to see a range of speakers from different types of repositories (including professional bodies, charities and business archives as well as national institutions). Finding out more about the NDSA Levels of Digital Preservation was particularly useful. This tool enables archives to self-assess their capacity for digital preservation and will form part of the accreditation application and review process from spring 2021 so is worth being aware of. I will certainly be mentioning it to colleagues at the Library.

I left the conference with much inspiration and food for thought. I am grateful to the ARA for the bursary that made it possible for me to attend the conference and hope that I will be able to attend another conference in the future!

Emma Hancox

Library of Birmingham

A delegate's view

Rachael Merrison writes about how Conference has helped her to think about day-to-day activities.

Working as a sole archivist and records manager usually requires you to be a jack-of-all-trades. On a day-to-day basis you might wear numerous hats - cataloguer, curator, retention expert, pest manager - and the range of duties can be overwhelming. I was, therefore, looking forward to the ARA conference this year. It is a chance to catch up with old colleagues, and also to step back from my daily routine, consider the bigger picture, and take advantage of the expertise of others.

This was my first year at the conference and, although I was only able to attend on the Thursday, I appreciated the variety of the sessions on offer. With occasional stops at stalls for cataloguing systems and storage providers, I took full advantage of the Digital strand. The morning sessions were very informative and a common theme was the importance of critically reviewing our descriptive practice. With talks including Jone Garmedia's report on changes to The National Archives (UK)'s digital cataloguing approach, and Jane Stevenson's summary of the challenges associated with importing multiple archives' catalogues into a single, searchable discovery tool (Archives Hub), I came away with an improved awareness of how our use of various digital systems and tools greatly benefits from high quality, consistent description.

I also enjoyed meeting other delegates working within under-resourced organisations. The conference allows us to engage in blue sky thinking: if we had the resources we could purchase that digital asset management system; build a fully PD5454 compliant store; acquire a digitisation suite. But for many of us these goals are aspirational in

“With occasional stops at stalls for cataloguing systems and storage providers, I took full advantage of the Digital strand”



Chris Sheridan at the launch of the ARA's CPD programme; photography by Mills Media Creative

the short-medium term, rather than attainable. Simon Wilson's practical task for delegates, during his and Susan Corrigan's talk, to mark off our organisations' progress towards the National Digital Stewardship Alliance's (NDSA) Levels of Digital Preservation was a very positive exercise. The majority were far from achieving best-practice, but it was a reassuring reminder that we are working together towards a common goal, and even those at the forefront of digital preservation research still have some way to go!

Despite the wide variety of tasks and responsibilities we are required to tackle on a daily basis, I've left the conference feeling more refreshed than when I entered. Consider your objectives, but take small, regular, manageable steps to reach them. None of us have the ideal set of resources, and I thoroughly enjoyed my day finding out how colleagues elsewhere are working towards their goals.

Rachael Merrison
Cheltenham College

Imposter syndrome and how we became an archive

Hannah Niblett discusses the experience of speaking at conference.

Much as we enjoyed the ARA conference, it didn't feel like our natural environment. We're more at home at community heritage forums, library events or in the classroom; no-one on our staff team can genuinely call themselves an archivist. We are fairly new to archiving, and came to doing it almost by accident.

The Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Relations Resource Centre was established in 1998 as a small black studies library based at the University of Manchester. It was an open-access collection, whose primary purpose was to support anti-racist education and community outreach work; both our own and other people's. The outputs of this work, such as oral history interviews, teaching packs, exhibition material, creative work and donated ephemera were added to the collection, where they could be used for future projects, and so the virtuous circle continued...

This wasn't a formal 'accessioning' back then; we put the material in a labelled box on the library shelves with an entry in our library catalogue.

But as the library grew we did begin to call these boxes 'archives', and then a large donation of 'damp-yet-important' anti-deportation memorabilia from local activist Steve Cohen (who assured us the material would go to the tip if we didn't take it) made the issue of archiving much more urgent. The library team hastily learnt basic conservation and documentation to create our first fully itemised historic collection.

In 2014 we moved to Manchester Central Library, where for the first time we had strong room facilities. Finally we could describe ourselves as a 'repository for the story of Black, Asian and minority ethnic Manchester'. We researched best practice and drew on the expertise within Central Library and the University to develop all the paperwork a proper archive needs; donation forms, accession registers, catalogues, movement control and access procedures.

However, as Jennie Vickers and myself discussed in our paper, we still do the sort of 'project-based collecting' described above, only now the projects are bigger, more complex and with an explicit aim of generating material



Coffee breaks gave delegates the chance to network and exchange ideas; photography by Mills Media Creative

for the historical record. And we have found our shiny new processes, which are based on traditional modes of donation, aren't fit for purpose. Our donors are often our project partners and co-creators, with varying motivations, and are sometimes more interested in the story they want to tell, than the material that tells it. Projects are by nature exploratory, organic and serendipitous, so the resulting archive will reflect this; full of oddities that only have meaning in context of the project. Transforming this material into a coherent collection with future research value, whilst still telling the story of the project, is proving to be a substantial challenge.

So just when we thought we had archiving all figured out, and could confidently take our place in the sector, we're needing to think again. But despite a tangible sense of imposter syndrome at the ARA conference (knowing we weren't quite using the correct terminology, and with our job titles that came under 'Other, please specify' on the registration form), we did learn that these issues aren't unique to us. It seems there is always a tension between how people want to interact with archives and the standardised processes used to manage these interactions. We are indeed fortunate that as a relatively small, new and autonomous archive we have the flexibility to design practices to suit the communities we represent. Perhaps this Johnny-come-lately archive will one day have some best practice to offer back to the sector.

Hannah Niblett

Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Relations Resource Centre, University of Manchester

A bursary winner's perspective

Tania Parker considers how archivists might interact with colleagues working in related sectors.

I was enabled to attend the conference for the first time through receiving an ARA bursary. One theme that emerged from the first day of the conference in the Archives and Records stream was the way in which archivists can productively work alongside allied professions such as records managers and museum curators.

John Benson, archivist at the Canals & Rivers Trust, presented a paper entitled 'A Happy Marriage?: A Future for Archives in Museums' which raised some interesting points about how archives and museums can be complementary. His observation about the need to communicate the specific role of an archivist and value of archives to colleagues from different professions and volunteers resonated with my experience as a library and archives assistant at the National Railway Museum. This paper elucidated the continuities between archives and museum objects by noting that they both hold material and informational value. For me this underscored the need to look beyond the archive stacks and to work to build beneficial connections between archives, records and heritage objects.

Giovanni Mitchietti, from the Sapienza University of Rome, gave a paper on an InterPARES project to create a comprehensive overview of recordkeeping functions derived from professional standards. He suggested that standards can be a basis for professional identity and therefore collating the standards that structure recordkeeping processes into a coherent framework can facilitate inter-disciplinary partnerships. As an archives student it was useful to have the discontinuities and overlaps between the various recordkeeping standards parsed out. Both these sessions highlighted how archivists, records managers and museum curators operate on a spectrum, and have made me more conscious of the way that the methodologies adopted by each profession have grown, in some part, out of the specific demands of the materials in their custody.

These presentations conveyed the need for archivists to be outward-facing and open to working constructively with colleagues from related sectors. By clearly articulating and understanding the value brought by archivists, records

Each session provided plenty of opportunity to ask questions; photography by Mills Media Creative



managers and museum curators and inherent in their respective materials, the different professions can work in concert towards preserving the past, serving current business needs and securing documentation for the future. I hope that I can go on to apply the key messages of these sessions in my studies and career. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to attend the ARA conference, an experience that has allowed me to gain insight into the possibilities for cross-sectoral collaboration.

Tania Parker

National Railway Museum

Panel sessions brought together complementary papers and encouraged debate; photography by Mills Media Creative



Archives & Records
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UK & Ireland



Trending: #ARA2017 top tweets

This year saw the annual ARA conference have a stronger social media presence than ever before. Social media is revolutionising the way groups of people engage and interact with each other and possesses the ability to instantly connect people worldwide. A virtual platform which encourages knowledge sharing, debate, networking and reflection, ARA Conference 2017 well and truly lit up the “Twittersphere” this year for both attendees and those that couldn’t make it.

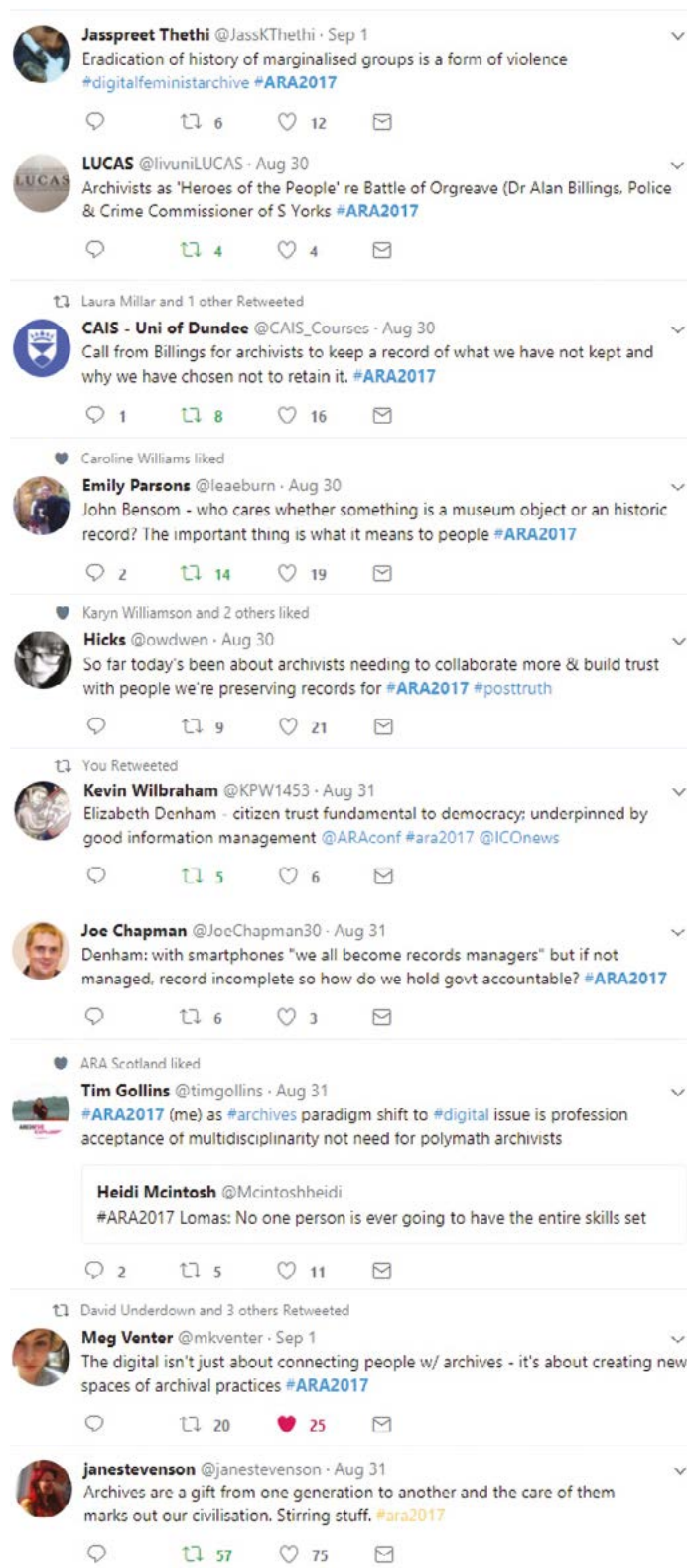
Continuous communication exchanged between the Conference Planning Committee proved there was much to shout about: a new dedicated ARA conference website, bursary-winner announcements, ARA Excellence Award nominees and, of course, publicising the exceptional array of keynote speakers.

During the 3 days we hit a huge milestone achieving over 1000 followers and, for the first time, snappy Periscope Q&A’s with keynotes Elizabeth Denham and Dr Alan Billings were streamed live on Twitter. ARA conference tweets achieved more engagement than ever before with 31,550 tweet impressions achieving nearly 800 likes, clicks and retweets. Here we showcase ten of the top tweets from the conference.

Twitter: @araconf

Zoe Fullard

ARA Conference Social Media Officer



ARC magazine New editor required

We have a vacancy on the ARC Editorial Board, if you would be interested in joining our team to help, edit, develop and commission copy for ARC then **please contact John Chambers on: john.chambers@archives.org.uk**



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