

London Archives Partnership

Practitioners Meeting

Monday November 30th 2015

London Metropolitan Archives

10:00am – 12:30pm

NOTES AND ACTIONS

Attendees: TNA, Legal Records at Risk Project, City of London, Hackney , Hillingdon, Waltham Forest, , Bromley, Bexley, Westminster, Croydon, Lewisham, Southwark, Harrow, Newham, Brent, Haringey, Kensington & Chelsea, Sutton, Lambeth, Enfield, Wandsworth, Tower Hamlets, Barking & Dagenham

Apologies: Kingston, Ealing, Hammersmith & Fulham

1. Welcome and Project updates

Geoff Pick

Geoff Pick has volunteered to be the new Chair of LAP as Sue McKenzie steps down. Geoff thanked Sue for all her work getting the group off the ground and moving forward. Sue will continue to be on the steering group.

Photo Portal

Simon McKeon

Boroughs including Bexley, Bromley, Greenwich, Barnet , Wandsworth, Greenwich, Lewisham, Barking & Dagenham and Hackney have photographs up (or will have shortly) on the Borough Photos website(s). Sales have been generated locally through articles in local free magazines with Wandsworth having particular success. The group will work with Max Communications on some further publicity ideas.

London Screen Archives

Simon McKeon

Rebecca Polding has now been replaced. London: the Bigger Picture project is ongoing with various events planned in the participating boroughs.

Procurement

Simon McKeon

At present this has proved to be too difficult to implement due to differing governance models and so on. Please let us know if you have ideas on taking this forward.

50th Anniversary of the London Boroughs

Tina Morton on behalf of Souraya Ali

50th anniversary activities went very well. The resources generated are still available on London Councils website including the film, almanac, photo gallery and histories. <http://boroughs50.londoncouncils.gov.uk/>

We would like to work with London Councils on further collaborative projects – let Tina know if you have any ideas: tina.morton@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk keeping London Councils wider agenda in mind.

Ideas generated at the meeting include:

- Next year's anniversary of the Fire of London and the aftermath – rebuilding the city/resilient cities. Scope for events across London, and tie into rebuilding after WW2. Possible themes: 50 years after the fire, How quickly did London recover? Anniversary is 1st-4th September.
- Shakespeare anniversary
- FWW anniversaries: Somme/Jutland/Easter Rising. Some of FWW Partnership activity already planned in Lewisham, Waltham Forest and Croydon.

Aim25/LAP Catalogue project

Geoff Pick

Initial conversations held with HLF. Links to work in Croydon in presentation below. Meeting to push the project forward scheduled for December. Links to work being carried out by East London Family History Society.

Benchmarking

Tahlia Coombes

Reminder to send in your CIPFA return if you haven't already. Some haven't been received though have been sent, so worth checking. There will be a CIPFA working party group soon to discuss improvements.

Discussion on usefulness of comparing the stats across London at a future meeting but feeling was that you can only really usefully compare opening hours and staffing as you are not comparing like for like. Comment that PSQG can be more useful as lets you know what users think.

PSQG – next visitor survey will be next autumn. Working group also looking at evaluating groups of users rather than individuals.

2. Croydon Cataloguing Project

Lindsay Ould

See presentation below

Croydon have worked with software developer Imagiz to develop the open source software AToM (developed by International Council of Archives) into a working archive catalogue (for front and backend application). They are initially working with the archive collections but are expanding to local studies and museum collections. Archive collections now up on line: <http://museumofcroydoncollections.com/catalogues/index.php/museum-of-croydon> initial work took 6 months.

For more information contact: Lindsay.Ould@croydon.gov.uk

3. Fundraising for Archives

Tola Dabiri (TNA)

See presentation below

TNA programme to provide training in cohorts to enhance fundraising skills with some open call training as well. Possible LAP meeting in the future on bid writing?

4. Legal Records at Risk

Clare Cowling

See presentation and workshop brief below.

Clare kindly wrote up the workshop :

• **Legal Records at Risk workshops**

- Workshop 1: What do we mean by “legal records at risk”? Are legal records more at risk now than in the past? Are some more at risk than others? If so, what are the contributory factors?
- Workshop 2: what legal records held in your archives are used by researchers and for what purpose? Where do you see the existing gaps, if any, in the provision of legal records for research?
- Workshop 3: given the current economic climate, how can the collection and management of legal records by archives be facilitated?

LAP members spilt into 3 groups to discuss: findings and background notes for facilitators follow.

Workshop outcomes:

Workshop 1: What do we mean by “legal records at risk”? Are legal records more at risk now than in the past? Are some more at risk than others? If so, what are the contributory factors?

- Records in general are more at risk now than in the past due to decreased resources for archives, including resources to collect and manage born digital records.
- Legal records include private sector records of businesses, pressure groups, member organisations and learned societies; if they are pertinent to the physical location of the borough archives they are eligible for collection. There are, however, special issues around legal records in the private sector i.e. they are particularly at risk due to:
- Poor records management by information owners (especially solicitors’ firms). Firms tend to just throw boxes of papers at archives, meaning that it is excessively costly to store, sort, appraise, conserve and list them. Archives are increasingly unwilling/unable to go along with this.
- Cataloguing backlogs are an issue but don’t necessarily stop archives collecting records, though if the records were properly listed in the first place by the information owners this would reduce the backlog considerably.
- Closure periods. Archives can no longer afford to house records with lengthy confidentiality restrictions. Some now refuse to accept any private records closed for longer than 20 years, and even then won’t take them in until the 20 years is almost up.
- Volume – some records of private bodies are just too voluminous, especially as usually entire offices are just cleared out and offered to archives with no attempt to sort the valuable from the rubbish. Westminster Archives has had to stop collecting citizens’ advice bureau records for this reason – it simply does not have room.
- The user community (especially the academic community) doesn’t communicate its research needs around legal records to archives. The primary use of legal records in archives is genealogical.
- Issues around defining borough boundaries ie who should collect what, especially where organisations are based in the borough but may have national or international interests.
- Lack of a co-ordinated archives strategy for the collection of private records, including business/legal records. Such a strategy would save everyone time and ensure a more consistent collection approach among the boroughs.

Workshop 2: what legal records held in your archives are used by researchers and for what purpose? Where do you see the existing gaps, if any, in the provision of legal records for research?

- Records most used by researchers in archives are deeds and the primary use is genealogical, though they are also consulted by planners/developers or for research into prominent families. The main gap here in provision is the cataloguing backlog for deeds.
- Most archives hold some solicitors' business papers and correspondence, but these are rarely used.
- Contracts, conveyancing files, deeds, legal opinions and town clerks' records are consulted for legal disputes, usually around property.
- Most other enquiries for specifically legal purposes, particularly around individual/citizens' rights, are not into "legal" records as such but borough records such as school records, housing records, records documenting immigrant groups, ethnicity etc.
- Gaps – everyone felt that more records of citizens' advice bureaux and local law centres should be more actively collected, as these would help protect the rights of borough residents and show changes to trends in the legal needs of individuals over time. The reason they are not more pro-actively collected is one of resources, both in time to negotiate with such groups, sort, list etc and to house the records.
- I mentioned arbitration and conciliation records – no-one was aware of any user demand for them, though they do exist, and are kept, in local government records.

Workshop 3: given the current economic climate, how can the collection and management of legal records by archives be facilitated?

- Most legal records come from either the BRA (deeds) or the Charity Commission.
- It would be good if the BRA widened its scope from deeds, as separating these categories of records from the business records of law firms destroys the context and reduces their value. More variety in legal records available for collection is also desirable.
- Engagement with the Law Society and the SRA is needed to encourage legal entities to manage their records better and deposit them with archives.
- The idea of consultant archivists to undertake preliminary appraisal, sorting and listing of records before transfer (NOT cataloguing- every archives has its own methodology) was welcomed as a potential model.
- Charging organisations for storing their records/requesting donations was also seen as a good way to facilitate collection. The feeling was that most legal entities could afford this.
- Engagement with local businesses was seen as important but given that borough archivists are so strapped for resources it was felt that this would be better on a national/enterprise scale. TNA?
- Borough archives could engage more pro-actively with legal departments within their own authorities, as many legal depts are archivally unaware

5. Actions and Next steps (including ideas for future meetings)

Ideas for future meetings:

Volunteer digitisation projects

London CIPFA results

Reuse of Public Sector Information

Goddard enquiry: transparency of government

Any additional ideas please send through to Tina Morton tina.morton@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk

Appendices



Croydon
CataloguingLAP Presc



Fundraising for
Archives presentator



2015-11-30 LRAR
LAP presentation.ppt



LLAR LAP workshop
brief.docx