

## **London Archives Partnership (LAP) network meeting**

**18<sup>th</sup> July 2016 Hackney Archive 10am-12.30pm**

**Boroughs attending: Hackney, City of London, Southwark, Hounslow, Ealing, Bromley, GLL Libraries, Haringey, Westminster, Bexley, Lambeth, Islington, Redbridge, Triborough (Westminster, Kensington & Chelsea, Hammersmith & Fulham) [plus CEO & Keeper Jeff James TNA and Head of Archive Sector Development Isobel Hunter TNA]**

**Apologies: Kingston, Brent**

This meeting was designed partly to feed into The National Archive's current work to scope a New Vision for Archives nationally, following on from the previous policy 'Archives for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century'. More on this can be found here: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/archives-sector/whats-happening-now/developing-a-future-vision-for-archives/>

The meeting focused on a discussion of the future of archives, particularly in London. One of the main messages that came across from the representatives of the London boroughs was that London is different, somewhat unique in the challenges that it faces.

In his opening speech Jeff James highlighted the transformation in the way archives are working with the public and with each other. Transformation is necessary in order to embrace the future and new demands on services. Several examples of successful collaboration include Archives Plus in Manchester, The Keep in Sussex, Hull History Centre and The Hive in Worcester. These are also notable for working with universities. There is potential in London to do much more. Jeff expressed the hope that LAP can work towards encouraging partnerships to promote innovation so that London could be held up as an example of collaborative and innovative working.

### **Questions/Discussion:**

Comment: There is doubt that what worked in the regions could work in London. The examples of successful collaboration Jeff gave in his introduction had support from people in authority, unlikely to be easily obtained in London. The climate in London is very different.

- No-one is trying to create a uniform approach; it is up to London to create its own way of working. All the examples previously cited work differently.
- While stakeholder engagement is vital, a significant proportion of collaboration has been/can be facilitated by the middle ground. TNA can also help with this by suggesting useful connections, pulling senior people into the room, working with the boroughs to open doors. However, TNA's role is one of enabler rather than deliverer; any partnership projects need to be sustainable.
- Not all boroughs need to take the same direction or do the same thing. But groups could work together to achieve common aims. Each needs to find its own route; the important thing is to keep moving forward.

Comment: London has the difficulty of London universities – as global players – not being interested in engaging with small local organisations. Also, the University of London colleges are almost as disparate as the boroughs. But perhaps other partnerships – such as commercial organisations – could be considered.

- Collaboration takes much work and planning, and will not occur overnight. Universities in general are looking for more impact and interested in moving in to a cultural space as it were. Partnership with archives can provide this.

- Also London University colleges do operate as a body, for example, in Senate House, so the possibility is there and possibly worth exploring more fully.

Comment: While getting local authorities to work together is challenging, the current situation could be viewed as an opportunity. Austerity has caused councils to see things in a different way, and be open to options they may not have previously considered. Initiatives need to come from organisations like LAP and push upwards.

Comment: Regarding collaborative projects such as in Manchester, what savings were made with respect to physical storage, and what was the impact on staff?

- At Manchester, the aim was not to make savings but to provide a better service, such as a uniform web service.
- In Manchester each borough retained its own staff but they work in partnership across the boroughs to complete e.g. cataloguing projects.
- We need to consider the role of the archivist of the future as more services are delivered online. What will onsite services look like? It will be important to think about the potential needs of future users. The sector will need to try new set-ups and be prepared for big changes.

Comment: Agree that the client base has changed. Family historians have moved primarily online, and those in the reading rooms gravitate to multimedia, interactive or digital resources. In light of this, how can LMA develop a more active leadership role to provide alternate models of working, and how can this feed into TNAs strategy?

- It can't be the role of LMA or TNA to tell the boroughs what to do, but we need to look to the future and create more structured, and perhaps more formal, partnership links. There needs to be further conversation about this.
- We need to consider how we respond to a changing audience and their different needs and ways of working. For example, most people bring their own devices so there is less of a need to provide PCs. We need to look at who is using archival services now and whether they will continue to do so. If people are using archives in a different context, we need to take this into account in what we do next.

### **Workshops:**

There was general agreement that the following were the right themes needing discussion, with digital perhaps being the most pressing.

#### **Leadership and Partnership:**

- Very little collaboration exists, even in boroughs under the same overall management (such as Ealing and Hounslow). There is a concern that footfall might decrease if services are moved.
- A more centralised approach to storage would provide a solution to the issues of space and resources (film is stored centrally).
  - Is there a risk of 'out of borough out of mind'?
  - Centralised storage would require boroughs to have catalogued their holdings or access would become difficult. Would it be possible to create a federated catalogue?
  - There could be joint publicity of London holdings and a joint web-portal.
  - Charging depositors or renting out storage space (perhaps to small private archives) could bring in revenue.
- Boroughs should start coming together to discuss what they are doing. LMA is happy to broaden the conversation – perhaps in the form of seminars – if boroughs wish to discuss further.
- There is a feeling that there is a lack of buy-in from chiefs/directors.

- There is low level of understanding from newly elected councillors. Inductions for councillors would therefore be helpful.
- Support from TNA could include:
  - Small grants to aid archive accreditation.
  - Professional advice regarding conservation and digital.
  - More cross sector work in e.g. museum development programme.
  - TNA could get involved in helping HLF understand the need for all the housekeeping to support engagement in the London boroughs.

#### Digital Transformation:

- An online catalogue, although time consuming to create, can be of great benefit in attracting new – and far flung – audiences and in saving time answering enquiries.
  - Digital can mean an international presence and the potential to attract a global audience.
  - However, there are difficulties in meeting costs of maintaining an online catalogue and in dealing with corporate IT, which tends not to be willing to be experimental.
  - Ideal would be a service where content is described online – perhaps using open-source software, externally hosted – and it is possible to search across borough holdings.
- Users also often want the content, or to see the document online, rather than just a catalogue description. It may be possible to institute pay-per-view systems, but it's uncertain how this would work.
- The majority of people using or accessing material is doing so online, but there is a tendency to prioritise those in the reading rooms. LMA is trying to give online users a similar kind of service that those in the reading rooms get, but the equivalent of a digital archivist sitting by the computer would be required.
- Born digital material is an issue. Very reactive at the moment, more of a salvage operation, with lack of server space and budget constraints also posing a challenge.
  - LMA is looking at creating a digital repository, could this be done London-wide?
- Partnerships regarding digital could also be found further afield as digital material need not be geographically constrained.

#### People and Education:

- Education projects go down well with elected members, but there are no formal or sustainable links.
- Garnering interest from schools and teachers is a constant challenge.
  - Literacy projects might provide more of an opportunity than history.
- Growth areas include:
  - Year 12 work placements in e.g. intergenerational oral history or technical/digital projects.
  - Taking up the slack regarding FE/Adult Education as other providers fall away.
  - A London Archives education programme – shared resources and funding bids, and in partnership with e.g. City Lit, WEA, Bishopsgate etc.
- Diverse collections and programmes allow for better connections with local communities.
  - Can have a positive impact, e.g. 're-building' of communities after riots.
- Volunteers are very important, and in some cases vital, for the continuation of services.
  - Need multi-skilled, multi-tasking people.
  - There is a great pool of volunteers in London already working in archives, could a central resource be designed to find and share the right skills?
  - The way in which volunteering opportunities are presented is also important. It might be possible to target marketing, IT or finance professionals from the corporate sector.

- However, the problem with volunteers is lack of consistency.
- Less and less professional staff is being employed, which can feel isolating, so groups like LAP are very important.
- There should be better promotion of LGA master classes.

#### Financial Resilience:

- London has a global pull commercially and, collectively, the archives represent London, but councillors still focus on local needs and tax-payers.
- Could a stronger connection with the mayor, with TNAs help, be established?
- Boroughs could consider sponsorship and establishing links with progressive businesses.
- Uniform charges across the London boroughs, e.g. for reproduction, would be useful.

#### **Feedback/Next Steps**

Re: leadership – a request that TNA has a look at the way the Museum of London provides support for its sector.

Educating/guiding the people that hold the purse string might help the London boroughs.

TNA is actively looking at ways to be of aid/intervene in the sector. Accreditation can also help in this, not only driving up standards but also providing visibility and potentially commercial opportunities to organisations.

TNA might support the boroughs by commissioning a piece of work to see if the London boroughs really are a special case or if it is actually more equivalent to Manchester. Are there other places/examples that could be used as a model? This would be useful information with which archivists could approach senior managers. A starting point for this could be the case studies done with LGA.

All London boroughs are encouraged to participate in the national survey of visitors to archives in September.

There was a plea to schedule another Roundtable event at Kew. This would depend on there being sufficient interest.