

Welcome to the summer edition of the Research newsletter. The last few months have seen us take on some significant and innovative projects. It's also seen some internal reorganisation, and as a result, the Research team is working to revise and adapt the National Archives' academic engagement and research strategies. These provide guidance for the research we undertake and inform collaborative work with the academic community. Knowing what the academic community needs from The National Archives is vital, so we would welcome your feedback.

The National Archives and the University of Glasgow will be collaborating on a much needed piece of work to investigate digital sensitivity review technology. We are extremely pleased to be working with experts in the field and you can read more about it on [page 2](#).

In May, the Technology Strategy Board awarded The National Archives our first Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP). The programme provides funding for a partnership between a company and an academic institution or research organisation. The KTP programme is designed to inject new thinking and expertise into business. This is very different to anything we have done before, and we look forward to the challenge.

New projects are also under way in our Archives Sector Development team, as The National Archives has received development funding through the Skills for the Future and the Catalyst umbrella programmes. Both of these schemes will allow us to focus on the needs of the sector, skills and fundraising. See [page 9](#) for more details.

In the midst of these new projects, we have been working hard to address the gaps that often exist between academic and archival partnerships. Bridging that gap was the topic of the recent Archives for Learning and Education Section conference, on [page 12](#). Considering the needs of early career researchers in archives has guided a lot of our recent work. Advice on visiting Kew and using our records can be found on [page 11](#) and there will be more information about our Collaborative Skills training programme for researchers in the next issue.

Other features include a spotlight on our work with Records of Local Interest, information about the new history of government blog, a look at the recent history of cartography event and an article about the work being done by our Collection Care team.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to this edition.



Victoria Lain

Editor and Research and Academic Liaison  
The Research Team  
**The National Archives**

## [In this issue](#)

[Academic engagement and research strategies](#)

[Digital Records Sensitivity Review](#)

[Records of Local Interest](#)

[History of government blog](#)

[Milestones for Collection Care](#)

# Digital Records Sensitivity Review

The National Archives and the University of Glasgow have recently been successful in applying for funding from the University of Glasgow's Knowledge Exchange Fund. The project will see collaboration between the Humanities Advanced Technology and Information Institute (HATII), Glasgow's School of Physics and Astronomy, the School of Computing Science and The National Archives to address the issue of sensitivity review for digital records.

Government departments are obliged by the Public Records & Freedom of Information Acts to select, review for sensitivity, and transfer public records to The National Archives. The selection and review is conducted by the government department concerned based on advice and guidance published by The National Archives; the outcome is that about five per cent of records are selected for permanent preservation and released to the public. In the present paper format these are largely the familiar files held together with Treasury tags.

There are clearly defined exemptions to this release where the information to be preserved has continuing sensitivities (ranging from personal data to material related to national security), and must be legitimately withheld from public view for an extended period of time. While the review of paper records for sensitivities is a long established and well understood practice, the move to digital records transforms the landscape from one in which well structured paper files are replaced by documents held as single instantiations in electronic systems which may or may not be aggregated into something approaching a file in the paper world.

The result is that digital records are much more granular than paper ones. This will inevitably render established procedures for sensitivity review both

redundant and so expensive that departments may find it increasingly difficult to comply with their statutory obligations. Digital records are arriving in large volumes from bodies such as the 2012 London Olympic Games (London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games and Olympic Delivery Authority). The first born-digital records from departments will be made available by The National Archives within the next ten years following the implementation of the 20 year rule.

Recent work at The National Archives on the subject of 'Parsimonious Preservation' (and more here) has confirmed that the much-discussed 'black hole' in our history, wrought by obsolete digital formats, is largely fictitious. Far more will survive than anyone predicted. This however presents a significant emerging risk, which this research addresses directly.

The risk is that the increased cost and complexity of the traditional review process will lead to unacceptable delays in the transfer of the digital record or precautionary exemptions being applied to large swaths of records damaging public accountability and transparency and making it difficult for contemporary history to be written. Further research is therefore urgently needed to determine the most effective and efficient methods for the sensitivity review of digital records before transmission. This is a problem for the whole archival sector.

Glasgow is a world-leader in information retrieval and has developed the Terrier Platform for this purpose. Building on their work, this project will develop a prototype decision-support system to implement and develop new review methods.



▲ A server room at The National Archives

Continued overleaf ►

## Records of local interest

The system will be evaluated on real records with real sensitivities, which will inform, support and improve the ability of government departments, and in fact any organisation which wishes to make contemporary records publicly available, to review digital records.

Tim Gollins, Head of Digital Preservation at The National Archives, will be seconded to the University of Glasgow to provide one of the primary research resources to the project. Interviews will be held with the relevant teams at The National Archives such as Freedom of Information and Knowledge Information Management, and with teams at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence faced with the practical problems 'at the coal face' to provide sources of expertise and experience in sensitivity review and possible approaches and methods. Although from one perspective this is a technical problem, from another it is a juridical issue that lies at the heart of The National Archives' mission.

This research is central to one of The National Archives' **strategic research priorities** around developing advanced tools for selection and sensitivity review. We are thrilled to be a partner in this project as it addresses a pressing need, sees the transfer of research into practical solutions and fits well within our research goals.

The ten-year transition to the new 20-year rule for records of national interest began on 1 January 2013. We have now begun a programme of work in preparation for a second ten-year transition for records of local interest. This transition is likely to begin in 2015.

We are currently assessing the potential impact on the more than 2,000 creating bodies and 116 places of deposit in England and Wales. We have already surveyed the places of deposit. We received a good response and our analysis of the returned data is now almost complete.

The key creating bodies we will target as part of this assessment have been identified, as follows:

- Department of Health (NHS bodies – England and Wales)
- Ministry of Justice (Court records)
- Defra
- Environment Agencies
- Natural England
- Forestry Commission
- Department of Communities and Local Government
- Homes and Communities Agencies

A survey will be sent to these creating bodies, who are responsible for a number of categories of records, including:

- Prison records
- Records of a coroner's court
- Records of the Environment Agency
- Records of a Family Practitioner Committee for localities in Wales
- Records of the Forestry Commission
- Records of a health service hospital (England)
- Records of a health service hospital (Wales)
- Records of the Homes and Communities Agency
- Records of a magistrates' court
- Records of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency
- Records of a National Health Authority in Wales
- Records of Natural England
- Records of any Rent Tribunal or Local Valuation Court

We will be working with the above departments and agencies over the coming months to support the implementation of this important government policy. We will share with creating bodies and places of deposit what we have learned through our experience in managing the transfer of records to The National Archives.

The preparation and descriptive standards have been simplified, re-work minimised and training has been improved which has enhanced the effective management of information risk.

There will be regular communications with places of deposit and creating bodies throughout the analysis period and we have established a stakeholder working group to support this.

# Academic engagement and research strategies

As part of a recent internal reorganisation, the research department has joined the Technology directorate, reporting to Dr David Thomas, expert in both history and technology. This is an exciting new change for the department, and in light of this move, Valerie Johnson and Victoria Lain are currently working to revise and adapt the National Archives' academic engagement and research strategies. These provide guidance for the research we undertake and inform collaborative work with the academic community.

The National Archives' research strategy focuses around strategic research priorities which are currently focused around the following questions:

- What is the nature of the digital archival record?
- Has digital changed the needs, expectations and nature of research and user behaviour?
- How can we develop and exploit digital information extraction tools to help support digital selection and digital sensitivity review?
- Can we develop Open Data models to provide better-quality, authentic and trusted data for use and re-use?

We have a number of current and potential projects that focus on addressing these questions,

so following the move, we will be consulting as to whether we need to update the priorities to reflect newly emerging challenges facing The National Archives.

Underlying the strategic research priorities, The National Archives also has two other strands of priorities, which reflect the broad range of work we do. The **organisational research priorities** encapsulate the key priorities for each department across The National Archives. The **historical research priorities** were produced by the records specialists in the Advice and Records Knowledge department to guide our involvement in collaborative projects and studentships.

We are also looking to refresh our academic engagement strategy. In particular, we would welcome wider input to help us focus on areas of importance to academics and researchers. Specifically, we would like to find out more about:

- What the academic community needs from The National Archives
- What the academic community needs from academic liaison
- What services researchers would like to see offered by The National Archives.

Please let us know what you would like to see in an academic strategy from The National Archives by contacting us at [research@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:research@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk). We will keep you updated with how these are developing and they will be available on the [research page](#) of our website soon.



# Milestones for The National Archives' Science and Heritage Research Programme

The last few months have been a very busy time for the Collection Care's Research and Development Team, as several of our flagship projects came to an end and others were successfully launched. Nancy Bell, Head of Collection Care, tells us more.

## Collections Demography

Collections Demography: On the Dynamic Evolution of Collections, supported by the AHRC/ EPSRC Science and Heritage Programme, hosted its final dissemination event at the end of May. This project developed three-interlinked areas of enquiry that looked at collections as dynamic populations which come into being, grow and age and human populations do. Moving beyond theoretical research, this project supported the development of a model that addresses three main areas: material ageing, environmental change and use-related damage, thus addressing a long-standing need for a collection management tool to inform collection management policy and the decisions affecting collections. It is anticipated that that further refinement of the model will continue and the tool with a customer focused interface will be developed.

## Digital Transformations & Design Registers

Through funding from the AHRC Digital Transformation scheme, The National Archives has been able to make available online the Design Registers (BT44), which contain detailed information on designs between 1842 and 1884. This series is particularly important, as it shows the influence of the many regional, national and international trade exhibitions, including the Great Exhibition held in Crystal Palace in 1851. The registers were transcribed and additional metadata has been added to Discovery. It is an innovative piece of work which uses new technologies such as polynomial texture maps (PTMs) and haptic consols, allowing us to share experiences of digital technology.

▶ BT 43/68/248309: design for a ceramic tile registered in 1870



## The National Heritage Science Forum

The National Heritage Science Forum has been launched and is made up of major UK institutions, including The National Archives, which make a significant contribution to the heritage science community. The roots of the Forum are in the recommendations of a House of Lords Select Committee report on Science and Heritage (2006), the National Heritage Science Strategy published in 2010 and the AHRC/EPSC Science and Heritage Programme (2007-12). The Forum includes major national museums, universities, conservation and heritage bodies, humanities and science researchers, policymakers and practitioners.

Over the next three years the Trustees will work to deliver an active programme that will:

- Demonstrate the public benefit of heritage science and increase public engagement and support for it
- Increase collaboration within the sector and beyond, to make better use of research, knowledge and innovation and to enhance resources, funding and skills.

This is a significant achievement as it will bring together a diverse interdisciplinary community to work together to share innovation and resources, as well as to act as a voice for the heritage science sector to Government and other strategic bodies. Further details about the Forum, its background and members can be found on the [Forum website](#).

# The history of government blog

The National Archives is currently working with the Government Digital Service, the communications team at Number 10 and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to develop a blog that focuses on the history of government. The National Archives will serve as curator of the blog, and it is hoped that it will open up government by making material available and more accessible online.

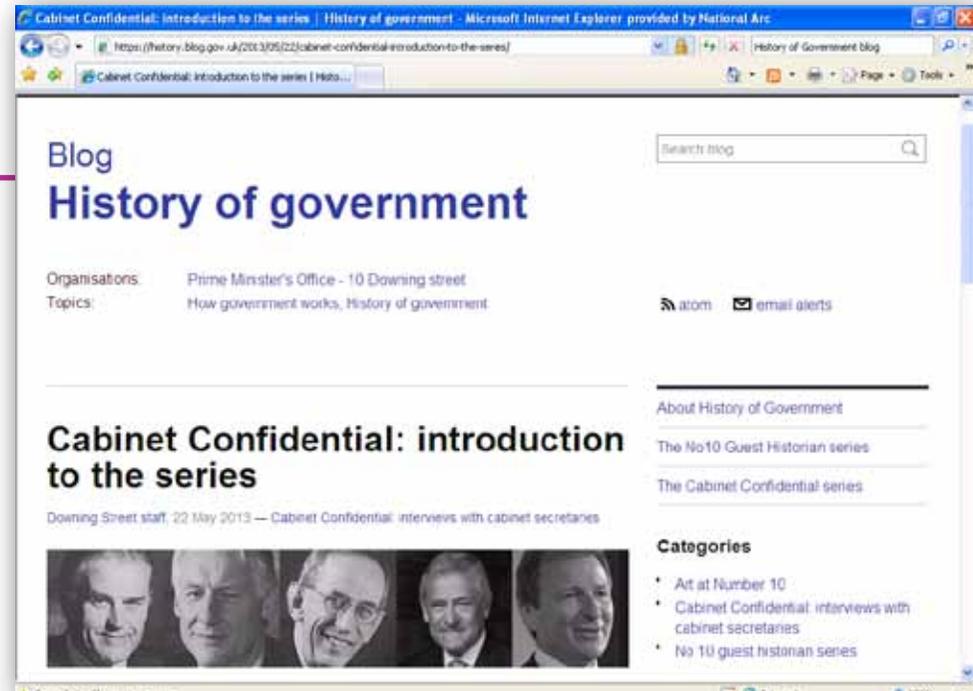
The history of government blog was created as part of the move of the Number 10 website to GOV.UK and it is the new home for the regular series of articles by guest historians which were previously available from the Number 10 website.

Over time, the blog will evolve to include posts from civil servants and external experts on the broader history of government. It will provide a historical record which will include first hand accounts, videos and photographs to create a resource for a wide audience, including historians and researchers.

The blog will be a dynamic space, and members of the public are encouraged to engage with the content, post comments, learn about government and its work by interacting with its history. The Cabinet Confidential Series features a series of interviews with cabinet secretaries offering valuable insights and unlocking fascinating stories from the past and present.

Visit the **[blog](#)** to find out more.

If you have any suggestions for future blog posts, do email us at:  
**[historygov@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:historygov@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk)**



▲ The blog homepage

## Live Chat service

The National Archives has developed a new Live Chat service. Users can 'talk' to contact centre staff and records specialists and get instant feedback. The service can direct researchers to records, and suggest other sources of information such as other local or national archives around the country. It allows for instant online interaction with experts at The National Archives and bridges the support via phone and email that is already available. The service has also been used by people with hearing difficulties for whom phoning might be difficult. Most of the questions relate to how to access particular records, but the team also answers operational enquiries about copying records or obtaining a reader's ticket.

The service has been successful so far, and truly global in its reach. A teacher from Mississippi used the instant feedback and links provided through her chat with staff to direct her class in real time!

The feedback has been very positive with users commenting that the "support was very fast, efficient and friendly" and that this is an "excellent way to ask for advice and information. I'd recommend this to any other user".

The service can be accessed via our website [nationalarchives.gov.uk/contact](http://nationalarchives.gov.uk/contact) from 11:00-15:00 Tuesday to Friday.

# Enhancing impact, inspiring excellence: collaborative approaches between archives and universities

**Wednesday, 4 September 2013**

**Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham**

This conference will bring together archivists, academics, and students to discuss the ways in which archives and universities can work together, strengthen existing partnerships, and identify collaborations for the future. Formatted as a series of practice-led case studies, the sessions will highlight the important role that archives can play in supporting universities, the means of developing joint initiatives, and areas for future collaboration.

Archives have had a long history of working collaboratively to share expertise and have provided valuable learning experiences to undergraduates and postgraduates. University archives, local authority archives and private institutions frequently contribute to the REF process. The work of academics has helped to cement the historical importance of collections, placed collections within a wider historical landscape and has introduced new audiences to the possibilities of archival research.

Yet the opportunities for establishing collaborative working and partnerships between archives, universities, and individual academics are frequently unclear. They often depend on geographical proximity or preexisting relationships. This conference will showcase some of the varied work completed by the academic community in collaboration with archives. It will also highlight how these can contribute to wider research agendas and archivists will discover the ways in which working with universities can further collection development.

You can view the programme and register via [our website](#).

If you have any questions, please contact [Matt Greenhall](#).

# History of cartography workshop



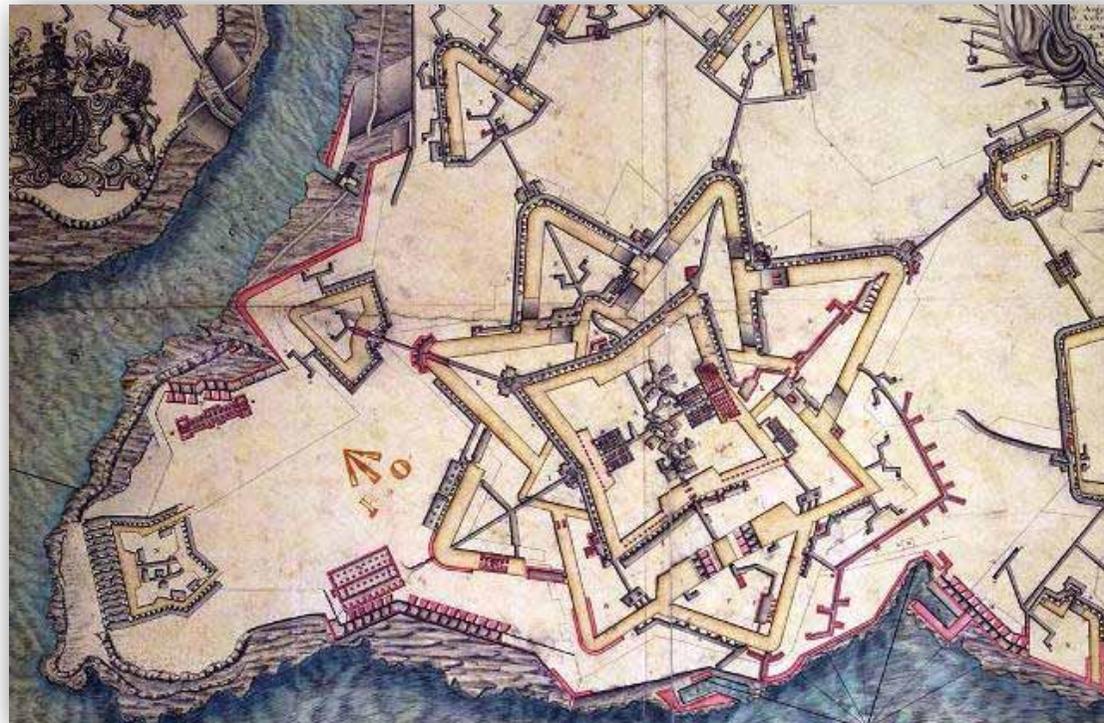
▲ Rose Mitchell discussing a map with course participants

Historical maps are important tools across many academic disciplines and timeframes, and also the focus of study in their own right.

The National Archives hosted a workshop in June 2013 as part of the summer school of the London Rare Books School, School of Advanced Study, University of London. It was part of the module 'Mapping Land and Sea before 1900', in which participants learned about the main genres of European mapping, their production and use within their social and cultural context. The course aimed to provoke reflection on ideas about the development and use of maps, not simply in terms of their scientific development over time, but as important social and cultural documents. Participants were drawn from America, Australia and Switzerland as well as England.

The first workshop session was led by renowned geographer Roger Kain (formerly Montefiore Professor of Geography at Exeter University, now Dean of the School of Advanced Study). He considered the history of property mapping in England from the 15th to the mid 19th century with emphasis on estate, enclosure and tithe maps, showing how maps reflected a change from feudalism to capitalism, and became increasingly sophisticated tools for land management.

Rose Mitchell, a map archivist at The National Archives, then discussed how this English cartographic tradition was exported overseas, influencing the development of military and colonial mapping, which also gave rise to specific genres of maps such as those for exploration and reconnaissance, boundary definition and colonial administration. Students viewed examples of maps illustrating these themes, drawn from the vast and important collection at The National Archives.



▲ WO 78/1017/4/34: part of a map showing St Phillip's Castle, Minorca, 1754, which was at that time a British colony.

# Heritage Lottery Fund development grants



The National Archives has recently received initial support for two different funding bids from The Heritage Lottery Fund which will allow for the development of full applications in the coming months.

## Skills for the Future

The National Archives received an £18,000 development funding bid under HLF's *Skills for the Future* programme which gives people the skills they need for future careers in heritage and opens up heritage to wider audiences. The support will enable The National Archives to plan a successor to the present three-year scheme under the programme, offering a further three annual cohorts of trainees the opportunity to develop practical archiving skills between 2014 and 2017.

The project will be delivered in partnership with the Archives and Records Association and a network of partners across England who will host work placements at archive and heritage services, providing an alternative route of entry into archives work for people with non-traditional backgrounds.

To enhance their training experience, the trainees will share an online learning space, regular joint training days and a training week at The National Archives. Trainees will also have the opportunity to undertake training focused on an area of heritage, and take advantage of one-to-one support and mentoring to help personal development.

## Catalyst

The second development funding bid to gain support was our collaboration with the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, CyMAL: Museums Archives and Libraries Wales, Scottish Council on Archives, the Archives and Records Association and the Institute of Fundraising, under HLF's Catalyst umbrella programme. This is a strategic HLF programme for umbrella bodies to build fundraising capacity in heritage organisations.

The National Archives and partners are now undertaking a second stage bid under this programme to run a project between 2014 and 2017. This will support archives to increase the funding they receive from private sources, such as

individual and corporate donations and trusts and foundations. To embed fundraising as a core activity within the archives sector requires a cultural shift and access to resources and training. The project will use training and a series of pilot projects to help archives to build a strategic approach to fundraising, and raise awareness and understanding of the funding sources available to them. It will help to create the skills needed within the archives workforce to employ a range of techniques to improve fundraising and income generation.

We are extremely grateful to the HLF for their support in helping us develop this important investment in the future of individuals who want to pursue careers in the heritage sector, and in supporting the development of fundraising capacity.

For further information on either of these funding development bids, please contact the Archive Sector Development team: [asd@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:asd@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk). To find out more about the great work being done through our current *Skills for the Future* grant, please see the **autumn 2012** edition of the newsletter.

# Transparent papers matter

## A valuable resource

Maps and technical drawings of railway lines and embankments that are still in situ today, tracings of copyrighted designs that are inspiring contemporary designers, and map overlays detailing Second World War bomb sites across Britain that are valuable in the assessment of risk for developers; these are just some of the diverse ways in which transparent papers at The National Archives have mattered and still matter to society today. Dr Helen Wilson, a Conservation Research Fellow in Collection Care tells us more.

## A material of their time

Transparent papers such as tracing paper and vegetable parchment were once ubiquitous and ephemeral. Their commercial production via a variety of methods started from the mid-19th century following developments from the Industrial Revolution. They revolutionised office work, being favoured by architects, engineers, and designers, for the ease with which multiple, cheap copies of maps, plans, and designs, could be made in large sizes. The advent of modern transparent materials and computers has precipitated a decline in transparent paper usage but the century or so of popularity has left large quantities of these papers in heritage collections such as The National Archives worldwide.

## The challenge

Transparent papers are often brittle and discoloured due to the manufacturing method. Their frequent use as working documents with a short expected lifetime led to damage due to the circumstances of their use and storage. Handling of these fragile records can cause further damage, yet maintaining their accessibility to users at The National Archives is essential. The preservation of transparent papers is an enormous challenge. Our current research project aims to:

- Gather and present evidence of the quantity, location, and condition of transparent papers through the use of surveys and databases
- Evaluate current preservation practices and identify knowledge gaps through staff discussions and literature review
- Develop a framework and relevant tools to guide conservators through the complex considerations in deciding on appropriate treatment for transparent paper
- Investigate whether there is a strong correlation between the colour of a transparent paper, its age, and its method of manufacture through analysis using non-destructive techniques. This is important to find because the method of manufacture can affect the suitability of conservation treatments, particularly if oils/resins/waxes are present.

The project is progressing well, with the literature review complete, current preservation practice evaluated and surveys such as the [Transparent Paper Survey](#) completed or in place.

## The wider picture

This is just one in a series of projects that are or will be providing the vital evidence needed to support every day conservation work within The National Archives and wider heritage sector.

More information can be found about [transparent papers](#) and [conservation research and development](#).



▲ Dr Helen Wilson examining a transparent paper

# Students and early career researchers at The National Archives

In addition to free wifi, a great bookshop and coffee shop, there are lots of resources available for new academic researchers at The National Archives.

Visitors can access expertise through the enquiry desks, staffed by specialists from Archives and Records Knowledge. The Library at The National Archives has a collection of books, periodicals and directories (including local, family and military history), law, biography, genealogy, as well as a wide range of reference material. Many publications relate to the documents held within The National Archives. A number of electronic reference sources such as The Times Online and JSTOR are also available and you can find out more via the [library catalogue](#).

Our range of [online tutorials](#) on Latin and palaeography will help you to read documents from the medieval period and beyond, through practical activities and useful examples. There is also a currency converter so you can compare old money with new.

The academic inductions series is currently being redeveloped to allow for new online and on site services for students and postgraduate researchers, focusing on methods and sources.



There are regular talks and events which may connect to your area of interest. You can check the full schedule of upcoming talks on our [website](#). As a result of AHRC funding, The National Archives is currently running Archival Skills workshops, for students at the beginning of their research. Sessions focused on medieval, early modern and modern records, and were delivered by records specialists. The final workshop will take place over the summer and will be recorded. The resulting videocasts will be hosted on our website and there will be a full write up about these popular courses in the next issue of the Research newsletter.

◀ Students at the workshops examine a document

# Bridging the Gap conference

Dr Matt Greenhall, an Engagement Manager with Archives Sector Development and Dr Jessica Nelson, a records specialist in the medieval team in Advice and Records Knowledge recently attended the annual conference of the Archives for Learning and Education Section (ALES) of the Archives and Records Association.

The conference, hosted by the Public Record of Northern Ireland (PRONI), was entitled *Bridging the Gap: Archives for HE/FE Students* and focused on the steps that archives are taking to attract students into the archives and to train and equip them with the necessary skills to approach archival research confidently. Speakers were drawn from the across the archive, museum and university sectors.

Matt and Jess presented a joint paper. Matt focused on The National Archives' role as the archive sector lead, discussing the current research landscape and how we can bridge the gap between policy and practice. Jess then spoke about the practical experience of running workshops in archival skills for students. These workshops are funded by a grant from the AHRC, and run in collaboration with the Institute of Historical Research (IHR), East Sussex Record Office and Berwick Record Office.

The day gave Matt and Jess a great opportunity to share knowledge, ideas and experiences with colleagues in the sector, and also included an interesting tour of PRONI.



## Files on film

The National Archives is inviting aspiring filmmakers to put our '[Files on film](#)' by entering our short film competition.

The competition, supported by the Friends of The National Archives, is aiming to encourage filmmakers to use our diverse collection of documents and pictures as the inspiration for an original feature.

Ten documents from the archives, ranging from the floor plan of a 19th century lunatic asylum to a West Indian view of life in post-war Britain, have been put online and entrants will need to use one or more of them as the starting point for a three-minute short film. It could be a character, a line, or the whole document - it is up to you to decide.

For full details of how to enter, terms and conditions and to view the documents, take a look at the [competition page](#).

Entries close on 24 September, 2013 and the winner will be chosen by a panel of judges including Oliver Morley, Chief Executive and Keeper, The National Archives and BAFTA award-winning filmmaker David Katznelson.

The winning entry will be shown on The National Archives' website and will receive a cash prize of £450. One runner-up will receive £200. For further inspiration, read our [blog](#) and watch the [video](#).

If you would like to get in touch with us, or if you have ideas for inclusion in future issues of this newsletter, email us at [\*\*research@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk\*\*](mailto:research@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk). Please note that we reserve the right to edit articles.

© Crown copyright 2013

You may re-use this document/publication (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, [\*\*visit The National Archives\*\*](#); or write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, Richmond, Surrey, TW9 4DU; or email: [\*\*psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk\*\*](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk).

This document/publication is also available on our website at [\*\*nationalarchives.gov.uk/about/research/news.htm\*\*](http://nationalarchives.gov.uk/about/research/news.htm).

Any enquiries regarding this document/publication should be sent to us at [\*\*research@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk\*\*](mailto:research@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk).