
January 2011

Issue 24

In this issue...

- 2 Archives, ethics,
human rights

ICHORA 2010

exciting historical research

- 3 FARMER/NAET
conference

Trusting records – or not

- 4 2011 AGM

Student news

MARM

D/CPS:RIM

A national prizewinner



Oliver Morley, TNA's Acting Chief Executive will give this year's AGM lecture on Thursday 10 February (details, p.4)

This Newsletter will arrive slightly later than usual, allowing us to wish all friends, colleagues and readers a Happy New Year rather than Happy Christmas! It contains accounts of some of the events we were involved in during the second half of 2010 along with details of student activities and other news and comment including a reflection by Michael Cook on archives, ethics and human rights in an age of wikileaks and spin.

Looking back on the past six months or so, the main event was certainly the International Conference on the History of Records and Archives, co-hosted with The National Archives and University College London. Nearer to home, the AGM lecture, held to June, was given by David Ketterer, biographer of John Wyndham, who talked about the pleasures and perils of using family and personal papers for biographical writing.

Unfortunately we had to postpone plans for one of regular 'In the Archives ...' events but another calendar fixture, the joint training session for MARM students and the North West Region of the Archives & Records Association (formerly the Society of Archivists) took place in October. This year the theme was 'Balancing Access and Security.' Lee Oliver, and Judith Barnes from TNA and the British Library respectively ran an afternoon workshop addressing the need for balance between these areas of professional concern. This was followed by an evening welcome party, hosted by the NW region of ARA for the incoming cohort of MARM students

Two successful open days for the MARM programme were held during 2010 – at the time of writing applications are being received for entry in September 2011. Several applicants have asked us whether the changes being made in undergraduate funding will affect fees for postgraduate courses from 2012, but at the moment the answer is that we just don't know. More positively, this Newsletter contains details of current and immediate past students' successes.

Margaret Procter
Co-Director, LUCAS

Contact LUCAS at

9 Abercromby Square

Liverpool L69 7WZ

e-mail: livcas@liv.ac.uk

tel: 0151 794 2411

fax: 0151 794 3153

Michael Cook reflects on

Archives, ethics, human rights

In the autumn of the season of WikiLeaks we saw a great deal of attention paid to the related issues of professional ethics and human rights. LUCAS was active in looking at these hot questions again. In October we gave a paper on them to the long-standing International Institute of Archival Studies at the regional archives of Trieste. This was an attempt to evaluate the effects of Freedom of Information (Fol) and Data Protection since 1984. Then there arrived an invitation to present a paper to an international seminar on human rights, organised by the National Archives of Brazil in Rio de Janeiro. Finally we were asked by the Irish Region of the Archives and Records Association to speak to them on the same subjects.

It has always been a major concern of ours to stimulate awareness of the importance of recordkeeping in human rights, and to develop the skills required in a regime of Freedom of Information. In the UK this regime began in 2000 and it looks as if the new coalition government is intent on extending the scope of these laws. This is especially interesting since we have learnt – with some incredulity – of Tony Blair’s repentance. He came to power in 1997 proclaiming his support for Fol; he passed the necessary law – and then started to try to undermine it. In his memoir *A Journey*, published in 2010, he declared himself “You idiot. You naive, foolish, irresponsible

nincompoop”, for having supported Fol. In Latin America, where they have suffered so much from military dictatorships, and their policy of causing awkward people to be “disappeared”, the value of Fol is much better appreciated.

WHAT WE’VE DONE

I-CHORA5 1-3 July, London



The biggest event of 2010 for LUCAS was the International Conference on the History of Archives and Records (I-CHORA5) which was held in London in July 2010, on the theme of the interdependence of archives and technology over time. Alas, that it could not have been held in Liverpool, even though LUCAS, together with University College London (UCL) and the National Archives (TNA), was a leading member of the organising team. The venue was UCL, with one main session at TNA; the LUCAS contingent was prominent, and we could call the venue ‘virtual Liverpool’.

This series of conferences has been held at intervals of about two years, since it was initiated in Toronto in 2002. Since then it has popped up again in Amsterdam, Perth (Australia), Boston, and now London; next time it will be in Austin, Texas. It seems to be going strongly, and it has certainly aroused a lot of interest in a broad range of subjects which, for a change, are not concentrated on how to solve the pressing problems

of this age of recession. This time, about 100 people came, over the three days, and they came from a wide variety of countries. Apart from the UK, 18 countries were represented. We normally expect a good representation from the main English-speaking lands – America, Canada, Australia. This time the spread of interest in Europe was visibly increasing: Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, Germany are always expected, but now we also had colleagues from Denmark, Iceland, Estonia, Romania and Sweden. Outside Europe, there were delegates from China, Korea and New Zealand. There was a good spread of representation from British institutions too.

The three keynote papers were all memorable, starting from the first day. Professor Gary Urton (below) from Harvard, opened our eyes to a strange and remarkable type of archives, the knotted strings – khipu - used in the Inka empire:



Prof Gary Urton



Using khipus

For a brief introduction to Gary's work see <http://khipukamayug.fas.harvard.edu/Researchers.html>

The second keynote was supplied by Paul Luff and Christian Heath from the Department of Management, King's College London, and examined the functionality of paper records in medical administration.



Prof Paul Luff, King College London

For a brief introduction to Paul's work see <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/schools/sspp/mgmt/people/academic/luff/research.html>

In the third, Barbara Craig and Heather MacNeill looked at recording technologies in the British civil service in the 19th century.



Prof Barbara Craig

These major papers were backed by a solid programme of shorter papers which left little time for leisure. What did the conference achieve? All the abstracts are available on the website; we now have a lot more knowledge on how recordkeeping has used technologies, and vice-versa too. But the main benefit may have been to spread the idea that we do not always have to worry away at day-to-day problems, but may fairly spend some time

on looking at the journey that brought us to today. After a series of five of these conferences, we can now begin to see the major themes in the history of archive/record administration over time. These may be summarised as

(a) the history of particular recordkeeping systems in specific times and places; (b) the history of particular administrations; and (c) diplomatics – the technical study and interpretation of specific types of documents.

All of these themes have a pre-existing literature, but do not in general appear as a coherent group of subjects in any syllabus. The remarkable feature of I-CHORA5 was that it successfully invited input from disciplines outside archives and records management. A somewhat less successful feature was a tendency, shown by several speakers, to be uncertain about what was past, present and future – in other words, to succumb to the temptation of addressing current problems. This temptation was the stronger because a common feature in many papers was the effect of ICT on recordkeeping – an entirely legitimate subject in historical terms, but one in which it is difficult to keep to the strictly historical. A final comment: at this conference there were no papers expressing the concerns of postmodern philosophy. The absence of these was perhaps due to the conference being held in England: postmodernists have more followers in the New World, and are regarded with some suspicion by European colleagues.

The conference was by any standards a success, and we hope will lead on to a further series. It would be good if the theme could spread into new countries and new quarters of the world.

MGC

FARMER/NAET conference, Oxford

Following directly from the I-CHORA5 conference in July, the FARMER-NAET conference was held in Oxford. FARMER (UK and Ireland Forum for Archives and Records Management Education and Research) and NAET (Network of Archival Educators and Trainers for North-West Europe) are bodies that bring together everyone concerned with professional education in this subject. This time the conference was held in Wolfson College, one of the modern colleges, blest with a beautiful site next to the river Cherwell, along which, in brilliant summer sunshine some of us walked into the historic heart of the city.

Was this a much more serious occasion than I-CHORA? One might be tempted to think so, though the topic, *Questions of Trust – archives, records and identities*, might seem abstract enough.



Wolfson College, Oxford

All the papers were available in full text, gathered into a stout volume

for distribution at the start, and many of them were solid enough. There was a substantial international presence, with a particularly strong body of delegates from the USA. The conference covered two very full days, with no breaks (although there was a great evening celebration at Merton College, under the spreading chestnut tree, in the evening sun). Keynotes were all from people with great international reputations, many of them our old friends: Heather MacNeil from Toronto, Anne Gilliland from UCLA, and Michael Moss from Glasgow. Although the overall attendance was about 60, there were so many papers offered that both days had parallel sessions.

Trust is a basic question in archives. How much and when can these sources be trusted, so they lead us to the truth, do they provide an essential insight into communities? How should our professional practices, in cataloguing for example, be designed to ensure that trust is not lost? How can we relate our work to governance and the rule of law? Questions like these face everyone working in original sources of whatever kind. Decisions have to be made when carrying out work on them, and these decisions depend on specific characteristics of the work in hand. The Oxford conference has certainly provided material that will help colleagues to come at their work in ways that will at least avoid the worst pitfalls. All users of archives are affected, since increasingly the input of users is needed in carrying out professional processes, and the collaboration of

users is needed in outreach and collection programmes. This was an important occasion for developing our consciousness of work that needs to be done.

MGC

LUCAS AGM 2011

The LUCAS AGM will be held at 5.30 on Thursday 10 February in University Lecture Block D (building 221 on campus map at <http://www.liv.ac.uk/maps/>). The main event will be by The National Archives Acting Chief Executive Oliver Morley followed by wine and light refreshments.

All are welcome – please R.S.V.P. to Trish Haider on P.Haider@liverpool.ac.uk or 0151 794 2698

STUDENT NEWS

Twenty-one students started the MARM programme in September. Among the cohort are students from the USA, Spain, Japan and Zimbabwe.

A majority of the twenty three UK-based students from the 2009/10 cohort are now working in records and archival posts. These include roles with a number of local authorities, the National Archives of Scotland and the Sisters of Mercy. In addition three students are working overseas – with the UN in Rome, with the EU in Thessaloniki and with the European Central Bank in Frankfurt. A fourth is due to begin an internship with the UN Special Court for Sierra Leone in The Hague.

During the summer, a team of six students worked for Alternative Futures Group in Huyton to

implement a new records management system. AFG is a large mental health support organisation whose existing system had failed to keep pace with changing organisational

The AFG Autumn newsletter reported that, 'A team of archives students have been working tirelessly to assess the material: over 1300 boxes in services and a further 740 in the offices and warehouse. .. This new system has been tested and found to be effective .. it has already saved us money.'



Former MARM students Jess and Adam hard at work in the AFG warehouse.

C/DPS: RIM student successes

Successful Records and Information Management students from the Certificate/Diploma in Professional Studies programme were presented with certificates by Acting TNA Chief Executive Oliver Morley at a ceremony at The National Archives on 27 October. A new cohort of 18 students began their studies in September/

National prize for MARM dissertation

Congratulations to Richard Hunt, MARM 2009/10 who was named joint winner of the FARMER 'best dissertation' prize with a study on the future of the national archives network. Along with a cheque he wins the opportunity to publish a version of his article in the *Journal of the Society of Archivists*.