

**West Midlands Regional Archives Forum  
Meeting  
2.00pm Friday 13 November 2009**

**MLA  
Grosvenor House  
14 Bennett's Hill  
Birmingham B2 5RS**

**Present:** David Bishop, Mary McKenzie, James Patterson, Nat Alcock, Sian Everitt, Ruth Vyse, Nick Coney, David Owen, Michael Cooke, Liz Doull, Sylvia Watts, Andrew George, Maria Howes, Beverley Nielsen

**1. Apologies**

Mairi MacDonald, Elaine Cooper, Sarah Chubb, Elizabeth Semper O'Keefe, Caroline Sampson, Richard Ratcliff, Gillian Roberts, Thea Randall

**2. Minutes of Forum meeting, 22 July**

Agreed. No further updates regarding Archives in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century consultation. Strategy would be presented in the House before Xmas, although timescales still TBC

**3. Minutes of Executive Committee meeting, 11 September**

Agreed.

The Yahoo group had now been set-up for the Committee, so invites to Forum members would be going out in due course. Copies of past minutes, as well as other related documents, would be posted here.

There was no further progress re: a presence on the MLA website, although Michael felt this was achievable, and would continue to follow-up.

Responses to the information templates were still minimal, and it had been agreed that these should be filled in by offices who were not able to attend, as part of their giving apologies. David would encourage offices to do this in advance of the meeting in March.

#### **4. MLA update**

Michael Cooke gave an update. Sarah Holmes had been appointed as Area Engagement Advisor for the West region, as maternity leave cover for 1 year. Marie Fowler is the other Engagement Advisor. A Regional Manager for the South West, Trevor Gough, had been appointed.

A paper on accreditation, and whether this might be extended to include archives, would be going to the Executive Board shortly. An announcement regarding Designation was due imminently. Michael asked offices to send him ideas for projects around existing designated collections, ideally something pan-regional. Improvement Network Conference, taking place Fri 20 Nov. Report would be circulated to Forum members.

MLA aware of problems presented by cuts to services. Michael asked if services could make him aware if any significant cuts were in the pipeline, so MLA could formulate a response.

Work with cultural observatory, was also being circulated.

A light touch peer review of Sandwell Museums Service was being carried out, the first in the region. An improvement plan would follow, and would be circulated if appropriate.

MLA working with partners to develop fund-raising strategy around Staffordshire Hoard. This should be in place by Xmas.

Michael also apologised for the issues surrounding the 'Digital Treasures' event, and the limited involvement of the archive sector for the region. Michael asked for candidates from the Forum, who could be available to join the panels on the day.

#### **5. Regional Cultural Offer – Maria Howes**

Maria spoke about the 'Find You Talent' initiative, which was being piloted in Telford and Wrekin. If successful, it would develop in 2011 into a comprehensive offer, available across the country. Maria and MLA were keen to ensure that the region was ready to provide such an offer, and to ensure that it was not seen as just an 'arts' offer. There were various themes that the archives sector could support – e.g. basic skills, local identity.

Maria was keen to document existing good practice, and the projects currently being offered by archives. Maria would also be looking at the sort of structures needed in order to support such an offer.

Maria agreed to send further details through to David after the meeting, which could then be circulated, and information gathered on existing outreach projects.

## **6. West Midlands Digital Archive & Product Design Hub – Beverley Nielsen**

Beverley handed out material relating to this project, which aimed to draw on local archive collections, and provide a resource for designers. No funding was available to support it, but local universities were keen to develop it further. The idea was to make something which could be self-sustaining, and possibly link existing businesses to record offices.

Beverley agreed to send on the presentations, which David would circulate to the wider Forum.

## **7. Regional strategy/action plan**

The action plan was agreed, with some minor changes. The column headed 'Responsible' would be changed to 'Executive Committee Lead'. Ruth wanted to ensure that Jenny Child's efforts in organising the digital records session was acknowledged.

A meeting regarding benchmarking would take place by March 2010, based in part on some of the work previously done by Thea. David would liaise with Thea, and send a invite round.

Nat circulated an update on the wills project, which was continuing to progress.

The preservation of digital records needed a regional approach, with assistance from MLA. Michael suggested contacting the Collections Trust, who were doing some work in this area, and also had some other contacts. David agreed to email Michael to move this forward.

## **8. Open meeting, Spring 2010**

The event planned for September was cancelled, due to poor ticket sales. Another event was being developed for 2010, possibly around the theme of Friends groups and volunteers. This was felt to be a good idea by the wider Forum.

Michael suggested a joint meeting with the Museums Forum, in May. Mary agreed to follow this up to see if archives could be involved, or to have museums input to another event.

## **9. Updates from services**

Shropshire – looking at combined storage area, for record office, records management and museum. Large number of accessions coming in. Also currently have a Learning Links placement with a local college; and manorial records project with TNA

MACE – currently working to release funds for a storage facility/’Future Memories Store’. Bid to HLF, will be assessed at December meeting. Additional member of staff, HLF-funded, has started. Also now have presence on Twitter, Facebook, as well as a blog. Ongoing development of website – now 35,000 catalogue entries online, as well as 1200 film clips

Staffordshire – From 1 October, we are part of the Communities and Chief Executive’s department, moving from Children and Lifelong Learning. We face budget reductions next year. Cara Lister (ex Derbyshire RO) started work this autumn as assistant conservator. A one-day special exhibition was put on in Stafford to mark the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the outbreak of WW2, on the Home Front. A display of original documents was also held to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Lichfield RO. Study days, papermaking events and other exhibitions have also been mounted during the autumn. A major 6-week exhibition has just ended in Leek “Discovering the Past: celebrating Leek and its people”, well-received, attendance figures awaited from Staffordshire Moorlands DC. Quarter Sessions cataloguing funded project half-way through and on schedule. Bid to HLF is in for a “Children on the Move” project linked to evacuees

Walsall – spending freeze currently in place, but have found funding to replace air conditioning units. Next regional SoA meeting, will take place in Feb 2010 at Boots, Nottingham (joint meeting with East Mids), and will include training on FOI/DP

TNA – Monday closures likely from early in 2010. Continuing issues over car parking

Coventry – have been open in the Herbert for a year; still a process of integrating service, re-modelling public areas. Future cuts likely – may have an impact on opening hours

BCU – new campus plans still ongoing, but space for the archives is limited, and issues over environmental conditions. Knowledge Transfer project starting with Ikon Gallery, with others in the pipeline. Also planning for 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of building in Summer 2010.

Birmingham Archives & Heritage – plans for new library progressing well, interviews taking place with removals

companies, shelving contractors &c. Work due to start onsite Jan 2010.

**10. AOB**

Future agenda items were suggested: digital preservation; Coroner's records (David to send possible questions to Nick Coney, in advance of next meeting); merger of SoA, ACALG and NCA – David to ask SoA rep to attend next meeting.

**11. Date(s) of next meeting(s)**

2pm, Thurs 11 March 2010 – MLA-WM