

# International News Notes

Edited by Evelyn Wareham

## **Principles and Functional Requirements for Records in Electronic Office Environments: Report on ICA/ADRI Project Meeting in Edinburgh, September 2006**

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Australia is currently coordinating a project that aims to produce globally harmonised principles and functional requirements for software used to create and manage digital records in office environments. There currently exist a number of jurisdiction-specific sets of functional requirements and software specifications, so the goal is to synthesise this existing work into requirements and guidelines that meet the needs of the international archival community and that will enable that community to speak with one voice to the global software industry.

This project is being sponsored by the International Council on Archives (ICA) as a lead activity in its Electronic Records Priority Area, one of four priority areas currently being pursued by the ICA Program Commission. George Mackenzie, Director of the National Archives of Scotland, hosted the first meeting of the Project Team in Edinburgh on 25-28 September in his capacity as member of the ICA Program Commission with responsibility for the Electronic Records Priority Area. Adrian Cunningham (National Archives of Australia) acts as Project Coordinator. Archives New Zealand (Stephen Clarke/Evelyn Wareham) is acting as the Secretariat for the project. Other countries present at the meeting were South Africa (Louisa Venter), England/The National Archives (Richard Blake), Scotland (Rob Mildren and Steve Bordwell), the USA/National Archives and Records Administration (Mark Giguere) and Sweden (Göran Kristiansson). Malaysia (Mahfuzah Yusuf), Netherlands (Hans Hofman), Germany (Andrea Hänger and Frank

Bischoff) and the Cayman Islands (Sonya Sherman) are also participating in the project, but were unable to attend the meeting. Australia and New Zealand will also coordinate input into the project by the Australasian Digital Recordkeeping Initiative (ADRI), <<http://www.adri.gov.au>>.

The Edinburgh meeting agreed on the scope, modules, work plan and timelines for the project between now and the International Congress on Archives, which will be held in July 2008 in Kuala Lumpur. The agreed modules with timelines and lead jurisdictions are:

1. Develop overview document with principles, concepts, etc (10-12 page draft due in January 2007; USA National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) to lead).
2. Work with the European Union MoReq2 Project to develop detailed core and optional functional requirements for eDRMS software, with supporting rationales and test scripts (ICA project group to seek to be an expert reference group for the MoReq2 revision process, which is due to run from November 2006 to September 2007, with the aim of ensuring that MoReq2 meets the requirements of ICA members; The National Archives of the UK (TNA) to lead).
3. Develop global high-level statement of core and optional requirements, including application guidelines and compliance checklist (draft due September 2007; New Zealand to lead).
4. Identify reference recordkeeping metadata element sets based on ISO 23081 Part 2 (Metadata for Records: Implementation Issues) and mappings of other recordkeeping metadata element sets (Draft by January 2007; TNA to lead).
5. Develop guidelines and generic core and optional functional requirements for records in business information systems (Draft by September 2007; Australia to lead).
6. Explore options for an international software testing regime based on a model of reciprocal recognitions.

The Project Team identified two additional modules that could possibly be pursued after the 2008 Congress:

7. Develop UML and/or IDEF modelling diagrams in support of the functional requirements (dedicated funding would be needed for this work); and
8. Develop implementation guidance for the functional requirements, perhaps in cooperation with the International Records Management Trust (IRMT).

The next meeting of the project team will take place in Australia in September 2007, at which time the various drafts will be discussed and revised and discussions will be held with members of the Australasian Digital Recordkeeping Initiative. The aim is to issue exposure drafts on the ICA website <<http://www.ica.org>> for comment during October or November 2007, with the comment period extending to the end of March 2008. In addition to ICA branches and sections, the consultations will target the ISO Records Management Committee (ISO/TC46/SC11), the DLM Forum in Europe (regarding MoReq2), the IRMT, ARMA, the Association of Commonwealth Archivists and Records Managers, the Workflow Management Coalition, the Object Management Group and other relevant industry and professional organisations. Professional peer review will also be sought from selected international experts. The project team will need to meet again in March or April 2008 to consider the comments received during the consultation phase and finalise the various products for release in time for the July 2008 International Congress on Archives in Kuala Lumpur.

### **'Minding the Gap': An Aussie Archivist in the United Kingdom**

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Nearly four years ago I boldly left the sunny shores of my homeland bound for not so sunny 'Londinium'. I read an article in 2003 about a perceived shortage of archivists in the UK and saw this as my opportunity to live out my hopes and dreams of working overseas. Despite not having any British ancestry (and exceeding the age limit for working holiday

visas), I investigated options for sponsorship under a UK work permit, that is, where a bona fide shortage could be proven in the field.

After much perseverance, I finally struck it lucky with two offers at once inviting me to help fill a gap in the UK job market. One offer came from a small archive at a seaside town in Yorkshire. As beautiful as that might have been, the appeal of becoming a tragic Bronte heroine on the windy moors was outweighed by my greater desire to work on a fascinating collection in London. This second offer also had the added appeal of drawing upon all of my previous work experiences.



I therefore took up a position as a Project Archivist with the Bernie Grant Trust, a registered charity established to continue Grant's work for racial justice <<http://www.bgtrust.com/>>. I discovered the Trust had been facing their own battle of perseverance, trying to secure funding to preserve their own archives, and then, amidst a national shortage, locating an archivist to do the work.

The late Bernie Grant MP led a remarkable life and it was such a privilege to work on his collection, most certainly a career highlight. Over thirty-five years, Bernie Grant was at the forefront of a furious dialogue about race in British society as a trades unionist and civil rights activist, as the first ever black leader of a local authority in Europe, as an outspoken black Member of Parliament, and as an international campaigner who gained respect and support from prominent world leaders and personalities such as Nelson Mandela and the Reverend Jesse Jackson. Generally considered to be Britain's foremost black spokesman and one of the most charismatic black political leaders of modern times, his funeral was probably the largest black funeral that Britain has ever seen. Five thousand people attended.

The Bernie Grant Archive <<http://www.berniegrantarchive.org.uk>> provides an intimate portrait of the man himself as well as the voices and struggles of an entire generation of black and minority ethnic citizens who arrived in Britain in the post war period, providing a significant insight to understanding a key period in the making of the multi-racial Britain.

In partnership with the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and Middlesex University, I was appointed by the Bernie Grant Trust to preserve, catalogue and make accessible a permanent collection to be held at Middlesex University. Promoting the collection was an especially exciting challenge and involved the creation of a website dedicated to the archive, delivery of local talks, and development of a published guide to the collection, as well as a public exhibition. It was quite a busy year as a lot had to be achieved in light of the time-specific and limited funding available under HLF.

To take the project from an idea to a reality was not without difficulty - and the process says much about the real challenges still associated with preserving the heritage of excluded groups in society. While there is a considerable way to go to addressing the under-representation of archive professionals who are of black or minority ethnic descent, efforts are gradually being made to address this imbalance by offering a number of more flexible routes into the field, such as distance learning modules and positive action traineeships.

The UK's Heritage Lottery Fund has a long-standing track record in supporting community participation in archival activity led by organisations which are typically under-represented in formal heritage collections. With an influx of funding grants in 2003, a shortage of archivists to take up these short-term project appointments had become widely apparent.

Anecdotal evidence would also tend to suggest that archivist shortages in the UK revolve around the areas of greatest technological challenge and growth as the scope of archives and the profession has expanded (and where certain skill sets are yet to be incorporated within the postgraduate archive courses). Consequently, there seem to be an increasing number of opportunities in records management (in view of new Freedom of Information legislation), as part of strategies to increase

community participation in archival activity (social inclusion and regeneration) and within digital archiving.

One study in the United States has recently investigated the skill gaps and lifelong learning requirements for digital librarians in academic libraries.<sup>1</sup> This particular survey identifies key areas where professionals have not felt suitably equipped to handle their responsibilities as part of the digital age. Notably, the survey identifies inadequate postgraduate training in: understanding the complex interplay of software; vocabulary to communicate to technical staff; web design; digital imaging and technology; programming and scripting languages; XML standards and technologies; basic systems administration; as well as project management, digitisation, and management skills. These skill gaps and issues resonate with my own personal experiences as well as those of colleagues within the new and emerging roles of 'Digital Archivist' and 'Meta Archivist'.

Shortly after my contract with the Bernie Grant Trust had expired, it was in the field of digital archiving that another bona fide shortage in the market unsurprisingly arose. I was fortunate to be sponsored again, this time by the University of London. Due to the difficulties of recruiting Archivists in this role, the vacancy was advertised on both the UK National Register of Archives (NRA) Listserv as well as openly inviting Australian archivists to apply via the Aus-archivists Listserv so I applied and therein entered the brave new world of digital archives.

I currently work as a Digital Archivist at the University of London Computer Centre (ULCC) <<http://www.ulcc.ac.uk>>. There are over ninety professionals at ULCC, including archivists, designers, e-learning advisers, programmers, network engineers and customer support specialists. Our current major projects include many of the leading UK digital preservation initiatives: the National Digital Archive of Datasets NDAD, <<http://www.ndad.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>>, a specialist digital preservation training programme, the selection and archiving of websites for the UK Web Archiving Consortium (UKWAC), development of an e-repository for University clients, and the development of a tool for assessing the preservation needs of digital assets.

While I've been involved to varying degrees in some of the projects just mentioned, I have largely been involved with work as part of the NDAD

Service. NDAD essentially preserves and provides online access to archived digital datasets and documents from UK central government departments. Originally known as the Computer Readable Data Archive (CRDA), it was part of a pioneering program developed by The National Archives of the UK (TNA) <<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>> in the mid 1990s. TNA selected ULCC to develop and operate the NDAD Service, providing a cost-effective solution built on strong specialist skills. TNA recognised at an early stage that the preservation of government databases as public records was of urgent concern, especially in view of the number of legacy systems in government departments dating back to the early 1960s. NDAD now offers a diverse collection of statistical and technological information covering more than forty years.

Under contract to TNA, the service at ULCC started in 1998 as a unique cross-collaborative effort between archivists, data specialists, archive assistants, developers and systems staff. Data specialists and developers happily attend basic archival skills training courses, while archivists simultaneously visit workshops on topics like XML and Unix. Although quietly reassured that I don't need to know all of the 'technical stuff' with IT staff in easy reaching distance, having a good working relationship and open exchange with IT staff has given me added confidence to effectively communicate the potential and capability of technological developments within our field - especially in championing interoperability.

While ISAD(G) largely serves our needs in describing datasets, we've also had to tinker around the edges and generate new fields unique to datasets such as 'constraints on the reliability of the data', 'digital processing and conversion', and 'logical structure and schema'. Archivists and data specialists work in tandem to provide the descriptive and technical metadata for the online dataset catalogues. This convergence of skills was a strong foundation for NDAD's success and continues to demonstrate the importance of collaboration and cross domain exchange in order to tackle the increasing tide of challenges presented by digital archiving, especially digital preservation.

Use of databases as a way of storing and retrieving data is widespread in many departments in UK central government, and statistical data has been proven to possess a very high re-use value. By interrogating NDAD's datasets online, it is possible to analyse and research information gathered from a wide variety of departments and subjects (from ancient

woodlands to accidents in the home, bats to beer, and crime to coastal defences). NDAD therefore provides an important service to researchers across many fields and disciplines, and has for a long time been unique in the UK in offering this online querying facility for archived datasets, as well as catalogues and related documents, seamlessly integrated with the datasets to provide a fully digitised service.

At ULCC, we work closely with the Records Management Department and the Digital Preservation Department at The National Archives, and with departmental records officers in central government departments and other public bodies to select and transfer records to NDAD. The data remains in the legal custody of The National Archives, but its accessioning and preservation is managed by ULCC.

Within the NDAD Service, we adopt migration rather than emulation as our digital preservation strategy. We don't aim to preserve the look and feel of a system, but rather preserve its functionality; we extract data from the original system so that it can be stored permanently in a non-proprietary format along with associated metadata and supporting documentation. This approach therefore enables the data to remain free from the vagaries of software dependency.

Some of NDAD's current efforts are directed at improving and promoting the re-use value of the data. Often our data has already proven useful for purposes unrelated to the reason for which it was originally collected. Besides being important evidence of the decision-making processes of UK government, datasets often represent a slice of technological history and can offer insight into the relative success and failures of IT projects commissioned by Government departments.

At ULCC, we're continually confronted with the challenges associated with the preservation of born-digital material like the ever-increasing diversity of complex electronic formats. Many of these formats come within our regular 'technology watch' (preservation planning) surveys in order to ensure that the data is preserved and continues to be usable over time; for example, GIS data and objects or documents embedded as part of databases, such as audio and video files. Challenges also extend to issues such as capturing the varied and dynamic content of websites, and developing an understanding of preservation metadata.

As an archivist, I have found myself expanding archival definitions and even challenging hallowed practices and standards; for example,



questioning what originality means in the digital context, where we're largely concerned with preserving copies - or how the idea of original order can apply to an Excel spreadsheet. I'm continually realising that we all need to broaden our notion of archives (seeing databases, websites or blogs as records) and improve upon our archival skills in contextual analysis (eg managing multiple manifestations of the same object appearing in different contexts at the same time).

Government databases are also growing in size and complexity as part of new e-government and 'joined-up' measures where databases are increasingly being integrated as part of much larger systems, making appraisal all the more challenging. As if it wasn't challenging enough!

After hearing a talk by Dr Andrew Flinn entitled 'Documenting the Margins' at the UK Society of Archivists Conference in 2006, I was personally struck by the alarming rate at which our digital heritage is disappearing. Take for example the transient history of the increasing number of minority/dissenting voices, whose heritage is only documented via websites, blogs, wikis and social software (with many seeking to collaborate and communicate using these new tools). I support the view that it falls under our professional ambit to preserve this heritage and to determine which of these new technologies pose new challenges for the Digital Archiving community.

All in all, both work experiences in the UK have served to strengthen my belief that as archivists, we must be more proactive, collaborative and holistic in preserving our heritage if we're to responsibly leave behind a more truthful picture of the past for future generations - all voices and all formats. I remain inspired by activists such as the late Bernie Grant, who was intensely aware of those whose experiences are too often 'written-out' of history and was adamant that the present couldn't be understood without honesty about the past. Wherever my professional career takes me, especially in the face of rapid technological change and obsolescence, I'm keen to join others in striving to ensure essential evidence and memories aren't lost from the historical record forever.

... Oh, by the way, I still call Australia 'home'!

*The opinions contained in this article are my own and not those of the University of London Computer Centre, The National Archives of the United Kingdom or the Bernie Grant Trust.*

## **Endnote**

<sup>1</sup> Youngok and Rasmussen, 'What is Needed to Educate Future Digital Librarians: A Study of Current practice and Staffing patters in Academic and research Libraries', *D-Lib Magazine*, vol. 12, no. 9, September 2006, pp. 1-8, at <<http://dlib.org/dlib/september06/choi/09choi.html>>.