

Group for Literary Archives & Manuscripts (GLAM)
Interim Committee meeting
Leeds University Library, 22 September 2005

The discussions of the Interim Committee - Fran Baker (Secretary, JRULM), Mike Bott (Reading UL), Jessica Gardner (Exeter UL), Stella Halkyard (Under-Secretary, JRULM) and Chris Sheppard (Chair, Leeds UL) - concentrated on three main issues:

1. The rationale for establishing a literary archives and manuscripts group
2. An initial programme for GLAM
3. GLAM's constitution and related practical matters

1. The rationale for establishing a literary archives and manuscripts group

While there is currently no literary special interest group within the field of archives and manuscripts custodianship, AMARC already provides a context for discussion of the more generic issues relating to archives and manuscripts. As stated on its website, it 'promotes the accessibility, preservation and study of manuscripts and archives in libraries and other research collections in Great Britain and Ireland. It brings together curators, researchers and all who share a scholarly interest in this field.' Among its aims it includes: providing a forum for discussion or exchange of knowledge and experience; representing the views of its members to policy makers; participating in international scholarly and professional activities; and encouraging 'co-operation and best practice in the acquisition, conservation, cataloguing, management and study of manuscript collections and archives'.

In this context, can we justify establishing a group focusing solely on literary papers? Are there elements of these core professional activities which are sufficiently distinct in the case of literary papers to justify establishing a separate group to address them? What kind of activities might GLAM usefully undertake in some of these key areas?

The majority of university special collections departments and many other repositories hold literary archives and manuscripts of some kind. This ubiquity of holdings relating to literature is probably unmatched in any other 'subject' and represents a common feature unifying repositories, which are otherwise extremely various, in a unique way.

The standing of literature as an artistic and cultural phenomenon gives it an appeal and interest far beyond an academic constituency. Manuscript resources for most other subjects do not have this kind of audience. As a result, the promotional and esteem-enhancing value of literary archive and manuscript collections, besides their value to research and teaching, has encouraged their widespread acquisition by libraries. As with other archives and manuscripts, there is often an emphasis in libraries on the 'local', but literary material transcends the local through its appeal to broader national and international audiences; archives and manuscripts relating to many other kinds of local activity have less power to do this.

Archives and manuscripts have a high level of significance for literature, perhaps higher than those for other arts with comparably broad appeal, where the written word isn't the ultimate product. Arguably the UK has achieved a greater excellence in literature (with drama) than in

any other artistic pursuit, giving its unique physical expression in archives and manuscripts centrality in our national heritage. Institutional collecting recognises this.

The desirability of literary archives and manuscripts has also long been reflected in the dominant interests of private collectors. This has led, particularly in the USA, to benefactions conspicuously of literary archives and manuscripts to academic libraries, creating legacy collections in the higher education institutions, institutions which themselves have rapidly expanded in number and in aspiration over the period. These collections have called out for development. Wealthy, academically-outstanding US institutions (as well as private collectors) have a long-established hunger for archives and manuscripts of literatures other than their own, above all in English. This has given a sense of urgency to institutional UK collecting, while driving up the cost of competing: UK institutions seek - somehow - to show that they are serious players and that they take the national literary heritage seriously. It's important to have collective affirmation that this is so.

The market in literary archives and manuscripts has served and fostered demand. Other archives and manuscripts markets may also thrive, but that in literature is exceptional. The comparatively high commodity value of individual literary letters and fragments has promoted the scattering of collections with important implications for libraries and their users. The tendency for literary archives and manuscripts to be dispersed is also strong for other reasons - writers for whom the word has such significance are often voluminous correspondents, their letters inevitably scattering, and patterns of literary publication transfer related manuscripts to numerous different locations.

Awareness of the actual or supposed financial value of their archives and manuscripts has affected the practices of literary authors, and continues to do so, more thoroughly and consistently than with most practitioners in most other fields: they consciously preserve their papers for financial reasons. These writers are also unusually inclined to preserve their archives and manuscripts comprehensively for personal reasons. Thus ever-renewing supply creates and caters for demand.

Taken together, these features of literary archives and manuscripts support the view that they are 'different' and justify the creation of a dedicated GLAM.

Furthermore, while AMARC organizes useful conferences and sponsors important projects, it does not generally initiate 'hands-on' activities like training sessions or establishing working parties to address specific aspects of professional practice. Its focus also frequently tends towards the medieval period.

There is currently no other special interest group which takes the lead in addressing the management of personal papers. GLAM could usefully lead the field in this area - enabling custodians working in other areas to generalise from our experience.

2. An initial programme for GLAM

Collections and Acquisition

- Mapping of existing literary archive and manuscript collections in the UK

While there are many sources of information on LAM and their locations, a clear and comprehensive digest of the principal components of national coverage would be valuable to GLAM and potentially to others.

- Gathering details of collecting policies from different institutions
The aim would be to assemble background information on declared intentions and possible conflicts of interest so as to investigate the feasibility of evolving a national collecting strategy.
- Identifying significant gaps in our collections and collecting policies:
Again to inform a potential national strategy.
- Undertaking a survey of literary material that acquired by institutions during the last 3-5 years,
To establish how active institutions have been in acquiring such material; the relative importance of gifts, deposits and purchases to the development of collections; to point up where problems have occurred in attempting to acquire, successfully or unsuccessfully. We recognise that financial matters are likely to be sensitive, but it is important for GLAM to gather as much information as possible on the capacity of institutions to purchase, both recurrently and in one-off transactions.
- Collecting policies relating to the receipt of deposits and gifts
To gather information on current policies with a view to evolving model forms of agreement

It is proposed that these exercises should be undertaken by questionnaire, so far as possible, in order to ensure consistency of data. Institutions which are not yet participating in GLAM should be encouraged to respond.

The information collected in these exercises could be made available in different ways to different audiences. It is expected to be of particular value to the UK Literary Heritage group.

Conservation

- Surveying current and recent conservation activity and practice for literary material
Evidence may be found that the limited funding for conservation, both within institutions and from external sources, is characteristically directed to relatively early material.
- Electronic literary archives and manuscripts
We propose the setting-up of a GLAM working party to investigate relevant issues. The generic problem of preserving (and providing access to) 'born-digital' records is particularly pressing in relation to literary papers because of the importance of preserving literary drafts – which provide vital evidence of the composition and revision process lying behind published literary texts – and the high potential significance of emails. GLAM could usefully lead the way in addressing the management of e-records in the context of literary papers [NB the PARADIGM project (collaborative project between JRUL and Bodleian) is currently looking at the management of e-records in relation to the personal papers of politicians. We might be able to learn from those working on this initiative].

Cataloguing

- Production of guidelines for cataloguing literary papers

It would be possible for GLAM – as specialists in cataloguing literary material – to produce guidelines for cataloguing literary papers. Often the level of detail required for describing them is greater than for other, more standardised or generic, material. It is also less easy to construct standard ‘templates’ or other schemas for literary archives (which reflect the individuality of each writer and their unique methods of composition). Guidelines for non-specialists who are given responsibility for literary collections would be valuable, while promoting consistent, best practice by all concerned.

Related activities like appraisal are also different in relation to literary archives: the normal rules of appraisal simply cannot be applied to literary papers. Even ‘business archives’ like those of literary journals and small publishing houses cannot be subject to the standard approach; they have often grown up in informal or idiosyncratic ways.

Access

- Data Protection Act

There is a lack of recognition – even within the archive profession – of the kind, and extent, of personal data found in literary archives. There isn’t the same kind of clear distinction between public and private that occurs in other papers: not only do literary archives often contain highly personal and sensitive material which should be subject to embargo, but writers often choose to make their private lives public (through fiction/poetry); this means that in some cases papers which might ordinarily be closed can remain open. Blanket closures are also not an option, as this would defeat the object of collecting modern literary papers (and fly in the face of FOI). The standard guidelines which are available are very hard to apply to this kind of material; consequently there is little uniformity between institutions in the way that the DPA is implemented. In addition, literary researchers are often those who are most intent on uncovering the most personal aspects of a writers’ life; this does not apply just to literary biographers; in literary research, all written documents potentially contain information relating to the evolution of the finished literary texts.

- Copyright

While this applies to all archives (particularly but not exclusively modern ones), it may have greater implications for literary papers – particularly those which contain previously unpublished material. In the context of successive drafts of a work with subtle differences underlying a published version, it is difficult to establish when a manuscript should or should not be regarded as unpublished. Literary copyrights may have, or be thought to have, unusually high value. Raising awareness of copyright issues is important, as is support for the WATCH initiative.

- Security

The high market value of individual items within literary manuscript collections necessitates particular care when making them available for use. Information on how this is addressed in practice could usefully be shared. Approaches to the insurance of such collections could also be compared.

Promotion and inter-institutional collaboration

Not only do literary archives have high publicity value, but the very fragmentation and scattering which characterise them provide the opportunity to work together to 'join up' our collections across institutional boundaries. Activities in this area might include:

- Creating collaborative on-line exhibitions.
- Mounting collaborative travelling exhibitions, with associated events.
- Investigating the potential for creating cross-institutional digital collections
- Working with partners internationally

Collaboration would also enable

- Working to build up group relationships with funding bodies.
- Engaging as a group with writers and their estates.
- Participating in and promoting conferences on a group basis
- Sharing information on access initiatives undertaken within individual institutions

Website

- Establishment of a GLAM website is fundamental. Possible components include:
 - Providing a starting point for locating papers/linking to archive catalogues for writers. Link to Location Register.
 - Copyright advice and link to WATCH.
 - Advice to writers – on keeping their records; issues like electronic records; information about donating/depositing to libraries.
 - Information on collecting policies – and other information gained as a result of the activities listed under 'acquisition' above.
 - Guidelines for professionals, e.g. DPA guidelines, cataloguing info, glossaries, useful links.
 - Guidance for researchers at all levels, to include: locating material of author/publisher/magazine; copyright info (how to go about publishing or reproducing MS material); primary vs secondary sources; good practice in using archives in repositories. Case studies of instances where research based on archive material has had major impact?
 - FAQs for different categories of user.
 - Research guides.
 - Online exhibitions.
 - Links to other useful resources.
 - Ensuring that we have a presence on other relevant sites (which need to be identified).

3. GLAM's constitution and related practical matters

Proposed Goals

1. To promote awareness and raise the profile of literary manuscripts and archives within the archive and library professions.
2. To provide a support network for those who specialise in the field of literary manuscripts and archives, sharing information and giving advice.
3. To create a framework for building formal partnerships to undertake inter-institutional projects relating to literary manuscripts and archives.
4. To encourage a collective approach to particular aspects of literary manuscript and archive stewardship.
5. To establish a literary manuscripts and archives network for the purposes of communicating with the wider literary community.
6. To develop ways of encouraging and enabling research and learning by developing partnerships with a wide range of audiences in the literary community.
7. To encourage cross domain working with rare book librarians, museum curators and others working with collections connected to those in the literary community.
8. To engage in dialogue, both nationally and internationally with major institutions, agencies, and organisations with regard to the stewardship of literary archives and manuscripts.

Proposed Parameters of GLAM:

- "Literary"
The term "Literary" relates to [creative] writing in all literary genres, including: poetry; the novel; other forms of fiction (short stories and novellas) prose (letters and essays); writing for drama (in the theatre, and for radio, television and film); Life Writing (autobiography, biography and self-representation); and the writing of criticism (theoretical and practical) relating to [creative] writing including, editing, reviewing and the histories of literature. It further extends to the process of publishing or otherwise supporting the production and dissemination of literature.
- Language
Literature has no boundaries of language, geography or ethnicity. However, for practical purposes GLAM is likely to focus its interest on Literatures in English (or indeed Englishes) as well as the other languages which are indigenous to, or have taken root within, the archipelago of the British Isles (including England, Wales, Scotland, and the whole of Ireland). It also takes account of literatures in other languages which have been translated into English.
- Chronology
The chronological remit of GLAM spans from the end of the Middle Ages to the Present. However, it is recognized that the work of the Group is likely to focus on the Modern era, particularly the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries, in which collecting is most active.

GLAM's Constitution

1. Committee Structure. Elections of officers to be held on a regular basis, the frequency to be determined by the membership as a whole. Nomination and voting to be via email around the time of an AGM. Committee to have authority to co-opt members and to set up small working groups to focus on a particular matter of concern or specific project. Chair/committee to have the power to make decisions relating to the day to day business but questions fundamental to GLAM's identity and functions will be made by the whole membership.
2. Committee meets in person twice a year. GLAM's general meetings also to be twice a year.
3. Committee posts required: Chair and Secretary (Membership and Minutes?) in the first instance. The other post which is deemed to be important immediately is that of Web Officer. This will require someone with the appropriate technical skills and a particular individual will probably need to be approached directly.
4. Committee size: membership of 5-10 to be considered. The presence of a variety of experience and expertise is desirable – should this be made formal by defining particular interest groups that should be represented?
5. Financial matters: GLAM's proposed initial programme, chiefly involving information gathering and sharing experience, doesn't appear to require independent Group funding to sustain the activities. The main cash expenses are likely to be those of hosting GLAM meetings; at this stage, Manchester and Leeds are willing to host meetings without charge (and other members may be willing to do the same). In the longer term, GLAM is likely to need funds, probably raised by subscription. However, the administrative burden associated with this is best avoided until inescapable.
N.B. The possibility of an event to 'launch' GLAM may be considered and it would probably have one-off financial implications.
6. Status of GLAM: Independent from any other body, such as the Society of Archivists, Sconul, CURL or indeed AMARC - to allow GLAM to set its own agenda and to lobby without restriction of its freedom to speak.
7. Locations for general meetings: repositories most accessible for a widely distributed membership and able to host large meetings. London, Manchester and Leeds are potential venues.
8. Membership: Membership should be broad and open to all interested parties. While GLAM is establishing itself and concentrating on practical issues, its business is most likely to be relevant to the concerns of practitioners (archivists, librarians) in UK HE libraries, national libraries/archives, and notable independent libraries/archives (e.g. Centre for British Romanticism, Brontë Museum).