

**Meeting of the Group for Literary Archives and Manuscripts  
Friday 1 September 2006 at the Bodleian Library, Oxford  
Minutes**

**Present:** Chris Sheppard (chair), Fran Baker, Elisabeth Bennett, Fiona Courage, Nia Daniel, Chris Fletcher, Jessica Gardner, Hannah Green, Stella Halkyard, Judith Priestman, David Smith, Robin Smith, Simon Smith, David Sutton, Susan Thomas, James Travers, Lara Webb, John Wells, Liz Williams.

**1. Apologies for absence:** Jamie Andrews; Charlotte Berry; Larysa Bolton; Sally Brown; Judy Burg; Andrew Carlin; Alex Cave; Alison Cullingford; Jo Elsworth; Philip Endean; Helen Ford; Elizabeth Gow; John Gray; Sally Harrower; Jacky Hodgson; John Hodgson; Katy Hooper; Dorothy Johnston; Peter Keelan; Hannah Lowery; Patricia McGuire; Bernard Meehan; Ed Potten; Nicholas Robinson; Daniel Scott-Davis; Dorothy Sheridan; Grace Timmins; Maureen Watry; Deirdre Wildy; Melanie Wood; Anne Young.

**2. Minutes of the meeting held on 10 March 2006 at Leeds University Library:** approved.

**3. Membership**

FB reported that membership now stands at 85 people. Of these 52 are from an HE context, but there are also members from national libraries and archives, literary houses and museums, single-author centres, a literary society and one local authority; there are also a number of independent members. Local authority archivists and librarians are under-represented at present, but this may change as a result of the survey.

**4. Postponement of AGM**

C. Sheppard outlined the committee's decision to postpone the AGM, because:

- a) a change of personnel at this time would be difficult due to the practicalities of administering the survey, which is ongoing;
- b) the constitution had not yet been formally adopted.

Members concurred with this decision. The March 2007 meeting will now include the AGM.

**5. GLAM constitution**

The constitution was formally adopted.

**6. Invitation from the Specialist Repositories Group (Society of Archivists)**

F. Baker reported that the Specialist Repositories Group (SRG) had recently contacted GLAM and invited the group to affiliate to the SRG. The SRG is one of seven special interest groups of the Society of Archivists (SoA); it receives funding from the SoA and reports back on issues specific to non-governmental repositories. The SRG has a number of affiliated groups, which retain their independence and are open to non-archivists; one representative of each affiliated group (who must be a qualified archivist and SoA member) sits on the SRG committee. Benefits of affiliation include: keeping in

contact with the archive profession and having a voice in the SoA; support and practical advice; a presence on the SoA website; and this year for the first time the SRG has been able to offer funds (£200) to its affiliate groups. The SRG have also offered GLAM £200, whether or not the group chooses to affiliate, as a token of support for a newly-established group with similar aims to their own.

After some discussion, it was decided that GLAM would need to be established on a more formal footing before it could take up this offer; at the minimum a Treasurer (and bank account!) would be required. It was agreed that GLAM should retain its current informal structure at present, although this does not preclude the possibility of developing a more formal organisation in future. F. Baker will respond to the SRG accordingly.

## **7. GLAM publicity**

F. Baker reported that a press release was drafted and sent out to all GLAM members in May. It was also posted to four different library and archive listservs, appeared in the July issue of *ARC* and the June issue of the *Historic Libraries Forum Bulletin*. An article about GLAM appeared in the summer issue of TNA's *RecordKeeping* magazine.

C. Sheppard is scheduled to give a talk about the group to the LitHouses Conference at Newstead Abbey in November, and GLAM has also been publicised at a South-West Region SoA meeting.

MLA were approached but are unable to publicise independent groups; and the AMARC newsletter has also been contacted; current work commitments of committee members mean that an article which doesn't retread the same ground as earlier pieces is unlikely to be produced by the newsletter's deadline of 25 September; a future issue may be more appropriate, by which time the survey will have made further progress.

Some publicity avenues identified at the March meeting have not yet been explored, namely: LUCAS and other postgraduate archive courses; the *Museums Journal*; CILIP; and the Society of Authors.

The committee are keen to recruit additional members, and publicity work is one area which a new member could very usefully take on. F. Baker is now spending half of each week working on an externally-funded project which means she has less time to spend on GLAM secretarial work. The committee are therefore also keen for one or more volunteers to assist with some of the survey administration (which might involve identifying institutions to target; sending out surveys and reminders; answering queries about the survey etc). Any willing volunteers were invited to contact F. Baker.

*Post-meeting note: three volunteers have now come forward.*

## **8. Survey of collecting policy and practice**

The survey is under way; so far 72 surveys have been sent out and 40 returns received. Committee members have undertaken some initial analysis based on the first 31 surveys returned; these are predominantly from higher education institutions, but also include national repositories, author houses and museums, themed repositories, and one business archive. Some of the preliminary observations are as follows:

### ***Collecting policies*** (S. Halkyard/F. Baker)

21 of the 31 institutions supplied copies of their collecting policies. Some policies give detailed and precise accounts of their institutions' aspirations for collecting literary archives and MSS, while others contain little information. Policies produced by author houses/museums and national repositories tend to contain more detailed information about the literary elements of their collecting than HEIs.

Overall, the policies themselves provide less useful information than the structured questions posed in Section 2 of the GLAM survey on collecting policies.

*Some of the issues arising from the questions posed in section 2 of the survey:*

The only institutions to emphasize a single named author in their policy are established, well-known centres associated with their specified author, but where a small number of named writers are cited, there is some potential for overlap or conflict; in two cases, more than one institution named the same writer.

Almost half of the institutions focus on a particular geographical area, leading to: overlap in geographical areas prioritised by HEIs; overlap between national repositories/HEIs; and potential conflict between HE/local authority archives – who have not yet been surveyed.

Collecting policies overwhelmingly focus on the modern period (20<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> centuries), justifying GLAM's decision to focus on issues affecting recent/contemporary material.

Few institutions identify particular literary movements or circles as collecting priorities (and one movement is named by more than one institution). This perhaps reflects a lack of analysis when compiling broader overarching policies; it may also reflect the dispersal typical of literary archives.

Most repositories are happy to accept material in special formats like photographs and audio-visual material. Perhaps surprisingly over half of those surveyed also consider themselves able to deal with digital literary material.

When queried about the terms on which they accept material, almost half the institutions no longer accept material on indefinite loan; some have changed to fixed term loans in accordance with MLA guidelines; others accept no kind of loans. Many issues were raised in this section relating to terms of acquisition.

If GLAM is to work towards promoting a national collecting strategy, some of the areas which might be addressed in this section include:

- Providing guidance to institutions drawing up or revising their collecting policies, which might entail: advice on analysis of existing collections based on the criteria covered in section 2 of the survey; advising where specific literary movements/circles are well-represented; pointing up areas of potential conflict and facilitating co-operative and ethical collecting.
- Promoting particular institutions as centres of excellence in their established areas of collecting.

- Establishing best practice guidelines for loans/deposits, and exploring models which might overcome the problems raised by indefinite and fixed term loans (eg deposit for lifetime of individual with provisions in their will for future of collection).
- Some research into, and recommendations on, the collecting of digital literary archives; institutions accepting these should ideally have robust digital preservation policies in place based on recognized international standards like the OAIS Model.

### ***Acquisition practice*** (C. Sheppard)

Section 3 of the survey focused on acquisitions of literary archives/MSS made during the last five years.

When asked to list five (or fewer) of their most significant acquisitions during this period, 16 institutions were able to list five, and 103 acquisitions were listed in total.

There was a strong emphasis among these acquisitions on literature in English by writers from the British Isles. In terms of chronology, there was an overwhelming emphasis on 20<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> century material, with only one collection dating from the 18<sup>th</sup> century and a small number from the 19<sup>th</sup>. The pre-20<sup>th</sup>-century collecting reveals a broadly regional approach, with writers of international importance being collected in places with which they are closely associated. This collecting builds on interests originally established as a result of gifts made locally.

The largest groups of acquisitions were for 20<sup>th</sup>-century novelists and poets: large new collections were established for 18 novelists and 9 poets; and significant additions were made to established collections of 9 novelists and 7 poets. Fewer (though individually substantial) acquisitions related to dramatists, publishers and literary magazines, literary critics and children's writers.

Almost all of these acquisitions had strong local associations for the institutions making them, although it is recognized that local associations may not be entirely straightforward, and it might be useful for GLAM to discuss the reasons behind this pattern in collecting. Instances of acquisitions without such local connections are far fewer, although in a number of cases institutions added to established thematic collections.

Among HEIs, 48 acquisitions during this period were by gift or bequest, 8 were received on loan, and 30 were purchased. Expenditure by each of the three national libraries was predictably much higher than by any other institution, with 9 of the 12 acquisitions made during this period costing over £10k each.

The question about annual expenditure on literary archives/MSS in 2005 provides a recent snapshot of spending (although no year is typical). The total expenditure by HEIs was £224,000, which was spent by just 7 institutions (and of these 3 made up 87% of the total). This suggests that a small number of HEIs may be able to purchase on a different scale from the rest, although this varies greatly from year to year. It seems that HEIs will generally make substantial purchases on a case-by-case basis as good opportunities arise, although they may be unable to purchase frequently or consistently.

Apart from the national libraries, only 6 institutions have an annual acquisitions funding allocation; a further five reported that case-by-case funding from their institutions was available; and 8 indicated having received acquisition grants from MLA/V&A and Friends of the National Libraries. Only 2 institutions reported failing in applications for grants from the FNL, and while grants may have been smaller than successful applicants might have hoped, it would seem that applications have been appropriate and cases made well.

Only one HEI and one independent repository reported success with an HLF application, although two national libraries reported significant success with funding grants from the same source, so a GLAM seminar on HLF application with some input from the national libraries might be welcome.

8 HEIs, 2 national libraries and 1 independent institution reported failed acquisitions, due to being outbid at auction, and difficulties in putting together funding packages quickly enough to secure acquisitions.

Comments on taxation issues included: the unbound/bound VAT anomaly; the ability to reclaim VAT by three institutions; lack of any tax incentive for sellers or donors of MSS to public institutions.

In terms of valuation issues, there was general uncertainty among respondents about assessing the financial value of unique material; many also mentioned the high cost of professional valuations.

Only the national libraries considered their knowledge good or adequate in all the issues raised in question 4.2 – relating to material available for acquisition, collecting activity elsewhere, the workings of commercial market and sources of funding.

### ***Innovative uses of literary archives and manuscripts*** (J. Gardner)

The survey sought information from institutions on innovative ways in which their literary collections had been used. The results will be important in demonstrating the purpose of collecting such material and its value to a wide range of audiences, and to justify the funding needed to build collections. The results fell into five main categories of activity:

**Research:** respondents from the HE community tended to look beyond research when responding to this question because research is assumed as a core use. There were some striking examples, however, including a major AHRC-funded project which is using literary archives and manuscripts to challenge received opinions of literary history in a way that seeks to participate in the process of developing regional identity.

**Teaching & Learning:** 11 respondents supplied examples, reflecting the increasingly proactive roles taken by librarians/curators/archivists in recent years in the teaching and learning missions of their organizations. Examples include: outreach activities like workshops for the public and schools activities; generic courses using literary diaries to help demonstrate the value of archives to students; tailor-made collection-based learning sessions for students - offered as part of research training modules and more focused topic-based courses.

**Creative Writing:** DCMS are particularly interested in the use of literary archives/MSS for teaching creative writing, because they perceive it as tending towards the vocational rather than the academic. One example was the use of archives to inspire poetry by a creative writing PhD student; another example related to creative writing by year nine schoolchildren. J. Gardner will follow this up and seek further examples to gauge the extent to which literary papers are being used for teaching and inspiring creative writing.

**Exhibition & Performance:** 19 respondents provided examples of collections being used for exhibition; some of these were web-based, and some tied into teaching/learning activities. Examples which came from the museum sector were very proactive, suggesting that this is an area where archives and libraries have much to learn. There were examples from the HE sector of collections being used to inspire performances by drama students.

**Media:** there were several good examples of literary archives/MSS being used for publicity access initiatives through local and national media, including: the discovery of a 'lost' MS which prompted a series of linked events and publicity; and a daily 'archives' slot on a local BBC radio programme with TV news tie-in during the week leading up to a public open day.

*Comments:*

J. Gardner queried whether writers from ethnic minorities are mentioned in the policies of any respondents; F. Baker reported that only one institution mentioned ethnicity in its collecting policy, pointing up a potential gap in collecting.

In response to a query from C. Fletcher, C. Sheppard confirmed that the main emphasis in collecting activity appears to be equally split between acquiring material which builds on existing strengths, and a geographical emphasis. Institutions on the whole are not becoming involved with new, young writers at an early point in their careers.

S. Halkyard stressed that the geographical emphasis identified is not necessarily tied to physical geography/locality, but that many HEIs interpret geographical coverage as a notion which is localized to the HEI itself and the research, learning or academic interest of its constituents – i.e. an 'imagined community'.

D. Sutton stressed that this should be celebrated, and emphasized that GLAM can play an important role in developing a national collecting strategy; the group should be able to speak with authority and advocate particular localities and institutions as the most appropriate homes for literary collections.

*Post-meeting comments were received from J. Travers, who underlined the possible overlap in collecting between HEIs and local authorities, and directed the committee to the literary history digest of TNA's Accessions to Repositories, which is a good source of information on local authorities collecting in this field, at:*

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/accessions/default.htm>.

## **9. 'Manuscripts Matter' conference**

C. Fletcher reported on this UK Literary Heritage Group Conference, which is taking place on 19-20 October [see GLAM minutes of 31 October 2005 for Clive Field's summary of this group's work].

The conference will provide an opportunity to discuss issues that have emerged from the work of the UKLH Group. It is being hosted by the British Library, organised by the Institute of English Studies (University of London) and the British Library, and additionally sponsored by Bernard Quaritch Ltd, the Ransom Center (University of Texas at Austin), the Robert W. Woodruff Library (Emory University, Atlanta) and the Friends of the National Libraries. The conference is also being supported by GLAM.

The first day will, broadly, confront the tax difficulties faced by writers and estates; the second will address the issues from the perspective of collecting institutions in the UK and America, and the users of collections. It will include sessions on: historical perspectives; trade perspectives; collecting born-digital literary archives; American perspectives; nations and regions (at which GLAM will be represented); the virtual reunification of scattered archives; an authors' panel; and a scholars' panel.

GLAM members will be sent details of the conference once the final programme is in place.

#### **10. Policy on GLAM support for funding bids**

C. Sheppard reported that GLAM had recently received two requests for endorsements for funding – one for a major acquisition and one for a digitization project – both involving literary papers. Both were endorsed.

There was some consideration of how future requests like these should be dealt with, including the following points: the (unlikely) event of competing bids which might be sensitive; the possibility of promoting GLAM as a potential supporter of such bids (which might fall within the remit of a new committee member with responsibility for publicity); the problem of subjectivity; and the difficulty of how to 'approve' institutions

Conclusions:

- Members generally concurred with D. Sutton's opinion that GLAM should welcome such approaches for support, and that in the absence of a national collecting policy for literary archives and manuscripts, GLAM has an important role to play in endorsing funding bids and advocating appropriate institutions as homes for specific collections.
- A similar view was put forward by D. Wildy, who was unable to attend the meeting, but stated that 'GLAM could/should have a powerful/respected lobbying voice for this kind of thing – given the spread of membership which represents the interests of many institutions in Britain and Ireland...it should be recognised as speaking with some authority (experience) on matters relating to literary archives'.
- It was agreed that for practical purposes the committee should make decisions in these cases on behalf of the membership, following J. Wells's suggestion that

requests should be assessed against the objects of GLAM as set out in item 3 of the Constitution.

- Even if competing bids were involved, as long as it could be demonstrated that both institutions were suitable homes for a particular collection, GLAM could provide support for both.

## **11. Possibilities for future GLAM meetings**

It was suggested that future meetings might feature speakers, panels or workshops, and the committee would welcome suggestions from all members for topics they would like to see covered. Some initial thoughts include:

- DPA and confidentiality in relation to literary papers.
- Copyright in relation to literary papers.
- A speaker from the book trade on valuations, the market for MSS etc.
- The process of submitting funding bids for literary acquisitions to bodies like the HLF.

One of the priority areas identified by members at the October 2005 meeting was the issue of managing born-digital literary archives and it was suggested that literary archivists and curators could learn from the experience of the Paradigm Project, which is focusing on the digital papers of politicians.

The Project Manager, Susan Thomas, has agreed to speak about the project at the next GLAM meeting in March 2007. She was present at the current meeting and gave a brief outline of the project, which is addressing issues relating to the selection, acquisition, long-term preservation and future accessibility of digital and hybrid personal archives. Digital material is increasingly forming part of writers' archives, and many of the issues explored by Paradigm will be relevant to literary papers.

## **12. GLAM listserv**

F. Baker asked whether members would be interested in a GLAM listserv, which would enable them to post messages/information or initiate discussion directly. People were generally agreeable to this, and on the advice of S. Smith and S. Thomas, F. Baker will look into setting up a private listserv using jiscmail.

## **13. A.O.B.**

D. Wildy (who was unable to attend the meeting) had suggested that GLAM might contact bodies with similar interests in the USA or internationally. S. Halkyard pointed out that the archivists at the JRUL had been able to find little evidence of special interest groups for literary archives/MSS elsewhere when doing their initial research for GLAM. S. Smith commented that overseas (especially American) interest may grow out of the listserv. C. Fletcher noted that the Manuscripts Matter conference may provide a forum for discussion with American colleagues. S. Thomas also suggested Australia as having a strong interest in literary archives.

## **14. Date and location of next meeting.**

J. Wells offered Cambridge University Library as the location for the next meeting. This will take place on a Friday in March 2007 (precise date to be confirmed).