

**Meeting to discuss the establishment of a Literary Manuscripts and Archives
Group**

Thursday 30th June 2005

The John Rylands University Library, Manchester

Minutes

Present: Bill Simpson (BS) (Chair), Jamie Andrews (JA), Fran Baker (FB), Charlotte Berry (CB), Michael Bott (MB), Judy Burg (JB), Stella Butler (SB), Jeff Cowton (JC), Nia Daniel (ND), Elizabeth Gow (EG), Stella Halkyard (SH), Duncan Heyes (DH), Katy Hooper (KH), Chris Sheppard (CS), Robin Smith (RS), John Wells (JW), Anne Young (AY).

Apologies: Iain G. Brown, Sally Brown, Dorothy Johnston, Philip Endean, Chris Fletcher, Jessica Gardner, Victor Gray, John Hodgson, Patricia McGuire, David McKitterick, Bernard Meehan, Stella Panayotova, Judith Priestman, Marie Reddan, Dorothy Sheridan, David Sutton, James Travers, Maureen Watry.

Introductions

BS thanked everyone for responding so positively to the proposal for establishing a literary manuscripts and archives group, and welcomed everyone to the JRUL. He reported on the recent establishment of the Working Group on UK Literary Heritage – a British Library initiative which is chaired by the Rt Hon Chris Smith, and includes Clive Field of the BL, David Sutton, Michael Holroyd and Andrew Motion among its members. The activities of this group will include advocacy to Government to secure funds and bring about changes in legislation to protect the literary heritage of the UK. It is hoped that the group we plan to establish will complement and work effectively alongside this high-level group. John Hodgson (Keeper of MSS & Archives at JRUL) was attending a meeting of the UK Literary Heritage group on 30th June; BS will be attending future meetings.

SB briefly outlined the history of the Special Collections Division of the JRUL and its holdings. The historic building on Deansgate which forms the home of Special Collections is currently closed while undergoing a major redevelopment project. Once re-opened the Deansgate building will include a new reading room and extra gallery space.

Agenda items

1. Establishing the need for a Literary MSS and Archives Group

SH referred people to her 'Modest Proposal' document, and FB outlined work undertaken to identify existing special interest groups in the archive and library fields.

Two main issues were discussed in response to the proposals:

a) Chronology

CS suggested that it may be useful for the group to focus exclusively on the modern period, because there are very specific issues related to the custodianship of modern papers, including

acquisition (and funding for acquisitions), quantity, dispersal, copyright, DPA, and relationships with living writers. In response it was pointed out that writers work within a long tradition, and that ultimately any cut-off date would be arbitrary.

It was therefore agreed that the chronological remit of the group should be broad (i.e. post-medieval) but that priorities in the first few years might have a bias towards issues relating to modern papers; ultimately special interest groups might be set up within the larger group to focus on specific chronological periods.

b) Language

JW queried whether the group intended to limit its remit to literatures in English. SKH stressed the importance of the other languages indigenous to the British Isles. It was pointed out that many literary archivists/curators have foreign-language material, or material relating to translations, in their collections. It was generally agreed that literature has no boundaries (of language, geography or ethnicity) and that the group should spread the net as widely as possible.

2. Defining the purpose of the group

2a) Goals: the small working party set up to consider the group's constitution should formulate some goals for consideration and discussion by the wider group.

2b) Activities the group might engage in. The following suggestions were made:

- Protecting and extending the work of the Location Registers: the value of these resources in mapping collections was noted, especially given that there is such fragmentation between location guides and finding aids. RS suggested that the group might consider establishing a resource like the online *Guide to Australian Literary Manuscripts* which provides the starting point for locating papers and linking to archive catalogues for Australian authors.
- Working on a national strategy for collecting: it was pointed out that most of the institutions represented in the group do not restrict their collecting to a geographical area (as with CROs) and are often unaware of the collecting policies of other institutions. The importance of working together to ensure that collections are kept in the UK and housed in the most appropriate institution was stressed.
- Sharing information and news about current projects and activities being undertaken in member institutions – e.g. reporting on recent acquisitions, and (in conjunction with mapping collecting policies) mapping other activities like electronic cataloguing. Also sharing experience in relation to copyright, DPA and FOI.
- Holding conferences. SB offered the newly restored Deansgate building as a possible venue for a conference in late 2006/2007. JA reported that a conference on modern literary archives is being planned for March 2006 in relation to the UK Literary Heritage Working Party, and that the group might like to have a presence at this event.
- Working together on issues of interpretation, and exhibitions.
- Training sessions: e.g. on cataloguing; printing processes; exhibitions.

- Establishing a listserve/discussion group where specialist queries could be posted.
- One further suggestion made by a number of people who were unable to attend the meeting is the establishment of a website as a resource for fellow information professionals, researchers and writers, to include: links to resource discovery tools; copyright advice and links to WATCH database; advice to writers; and facility for publishing papers and guidelines.

2c) The group's membership

It was generally agreed that membership should be inclusive, and extend beyond archivists and manuscript curators. In particular, the value of including users of literary papers was recognized. MB suggested various writers (each part of a wide literary network) who might be approached, including biographers Jeremy Lewis and Jeremy Treglown, art historian and biographer Frances Spalding, and Mark Le Fanu, General Secretary of the Society of Authors.

2d) The group's constitution

It was agreed that a committee should be established to run the group. BS suggested that in the first instance, a small interim committee/working group should be established to consider the group's constitution and goals, and called for nominations/volunteers. The following people came forward:

- Chris Sheppard (as interim Chair)
- Fran Baker (as interim Secretary)
- Stella Halkyard (interim 'Under'-Secretary)
- Mike Bott
- Jessica Gardner (nominated by Charlotte Berry)

The working group will meet in advance of the next meeting of the larger membership and circulate papers for discussion.

2e) Whether the group should be national or international

JA pointed out that the group's plans to address issues like co-ordinating collecting policies would naturally point to a national membership, but it was also suggested that the group should not exclude anyone based overseas who wished to join. The issue will be discussed by the smaller working group.

2f) Affiliation and links with other groups

It was agreed that this should be discussed more fully when the group is better established and the proper mechanisms in place. It could be addressed at the next meeting of the larger group. However, it was stressed that the group should work closely with the UK Literary Heritage Group. Other suggested organizations the group might seek links with include ARLIS, STR, SOA, AMARC and SHARP. It was pointed out that the group's international dimension might come from affiliation to relevant international organizations.

2g) Frequency of meetings

It was suggested that the group as a whole should meet two or three times a year, with the committee meeting more often. JB suggested that each meeting should be hosted by a different repository, and EG suggested having guest speakers at each meeting. JA offered the British Library as the venue for the next larger meeting.

[JC left the meeting at this point]

2h) The group's name: EG's suggestion of GLAM (Group for Literary Archives and MSS) was adopted as a working title.

2i) Other literary archivists/MSS curators not represented who might be interested in the group

Chris Fletcher (who was not present at the meeting) had suggested Dick Sargent of the NRA.

There was further discussion about membership, including the possibility of approaching: custodians of children's literature collections; custodians of drama-related collections (with the emphasis on the writing of drama rather than performance); those working in historic/authors' houses; county record offices (which often hold literary papers); and taking active steps to get non-custodians involved. It was suggested that members could look at specific geographical areas and compile information on collections/institutions which might be interested in joining. It was also suggested that membership could be 'self-declared', i.e. the group could be advertised in appropriate ways and be open to anyone who believes they would benefit from becoming a member.

3. AOB: None.

4. Date and venue of next meeting

[JA left the meeting at this point]

The next meeting will be on Monday 31 October at the British Library (time to be confirmed).