

**Meeting of the GLAM Committee
12.00 on Monday 10 September 2007 at the British Library**

Minutes

Present: Chris Sheppard (CS, Chair), Jamie Andrews (JA), Fran Baker (FB), Fiona Courage (FC), Chris Fletcher (CF), Jessica Gardner (JG), Stella Halkyard (SH), David Sutton (DS), James Travers (JT), John Wells (JW).

Agenda items:

1. GLAM Survey

68 survey returns have been received, and a few more may be forthcoming. The problem of local authority under-representation was raised; the listserv posting encouraging local authority participation elicited some enquiries but no returns. One problem appears to be confusion over defining 'literary archives', with many institutions applying quite narrow definitions and therefore overlooking relevant material.

DS reported that in 2003, the Location Register undertook a survey of local authority institutions collecting literary papers. The results revealed that while a significant number of these institutions hold literary manuscripts, very few regard themselves as collectors.

JT reported that NRA statistics suggest that 20% of acquisitions activity in the field of literary archives is carried out by local authorities and 80% by HE and national libraries. JT suggested making contact with, and possibly disseminating GLAM survey recommendations to, the Association of Chief Archivists in Local Government in order to reach the local authority sector.

It was agreed that the survey analysis should inform a set of proposals/recommendations, which could then be endorsed by the membership of GLAM; other bodies should also be invited to endorse these, e.g. the UKLH Group, SCONUL, AMARC.

Committee members agreed with CS's suggestion that the survey recommendations should fall into six general areas:

Policies:

Recommendations on what should be covered in a collecting policy for literary archives/MSS, and provision of models for institutions which do not currently have well-developed policies. SH suggested that these recommendations should take into account TNA's document, *Archive Collection Policy Statements: Checklist of Suggested Contents* (http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/archive_collection_policy.pdf)

Monitoring recent acquisitions:

The importance of continuing to gather information on literary acquisitions (and checking these against stated collecting policies) was stressed, and members agreed to JG's proposal that the recommendations should focus on:

- Encouraging GLAM member institutions to report recent acquisitions to the NRA for inclusion in their literary digest.
- Supporting the work of the Location Register, and any bids for renewed funding for the Register. DS suggested that in order to drill down to the next level (i.e. providing information about the content of the material listed) would require a full-time researcher for 2-3 years along with a supervisor and a structure (i.e. a six-figure sum).
- Asking member institutions to submit information (e.g. on a three/four-yearly basis) on how acquisitions were made (by purchase, gift, loan etc, and in the case of purchase on sources of funding); it was felt that the inclusion of questions on this subject distinguished the GLAM survey from existing mechanisms for monitoring acquisitions like the NRA and Location Register. JA stressed that such information would also be useful to the UKLH Group, and suggested that GLAM members could be encouraged to submit details through the GLAM website.

Targeting potential donors and depositors:

Most of the institutions which are actively engaged in collecting have an idea of current writers or movements they wish to target for future acquisitions. There was some discussion of whether this information should be shared in order to avoid conflicts in collecting and to point up gaps in current collecting activity; concerns about confidentiality were raised, although it was suggested that the information might be submitted anonymously. JG suggested that GLAM might simply provide a forum for institutions to talk to each other about particular archives they are interested in acquiring.

Valuations:

The survey results indicated that many members do not feel confident about valuing literary material. It was agreed that it would be desirable to develop some kind of self-help mechanism in this area, rather than relying solely on a small number of experts who have an overview of the market. The UKLH Group may be able to help GLAM in this; JA is currently compiling a database of prices paid for recent purchases and would be prepared to share some of this information for price-comparison purposes. JT reported that TNA have a long tradition of monitoring prices paid for manuscripts and archives of all kinds, and would also be happy to advise.

JG stressed that given the financial constraints of most UK/Irish institutions, the importance of demonstrating value through the *use* of material is important, and may be a way of persuading writers to consider home institutions for their archives rather than selling overseas.

Outreach and use:

JG suggested that the three or four-yearly submission of information on acquisitions should also include a question about the use of material, and it was agreed that this should cover both information about innovative uses (as in the survey questionnaire) and factual data about the types of research being carried out in the more conventional context of the reading room.

A day-school, workshop or conference focusing on the use of literary archives/MSS was suggested; this could perhaps be run in conjunction with the UKLH Group, and form a follow-up to Manuscripts Matter.

Another possible means of publicising the use of literary archives/MSS is an exhibition – either online (e.g. bringing together dispersed archives), a travelling exhibition, or a ‘dispersed’ exhibition in which various institutions mount small exhibitions focusing on (for example) a single literary manuscript. The issue of copyright clearance may form an obstacle to mounting an online exhibition, and funding would be needed to curate a travelling exhibition.

Digital archives:

The issue of ‘born-digital’ literary archives/MSS will also be addressed in the recommendations. CF has done some work in this area, and FB also suggested drawing on the work of the Bodleian/John Rylands Library Paradigm Project; this focused on the personal archives of politicians but much of its work is also relevant to authors’ papers; a comprehensive Workbook is due to be published, which will provide best practice guidelines for curators engaged in collecting and managing born-digital materials. JA also mentioned the Digital Lives project – a collaborative venture between the British Library and UCL which is exploring how scholars and authors manage their personal collections of digital information.

Next steps:

The three survey analysers (CS, JG and SH) will work on analysing the survey results and putting together recommendations for consideration by the committee, and endorsement by the general membership, at the next (March 2008) meeting.

2. UK Literary Heritage Group

JA briefly summarised the report he would be giving to the general meeting in the afternoon (see meeting minutes, item 4). The UKLH Group report will be a standing item on the agenda in future.

3. Publicity

In August CS gave a talk on GLAM to the Specialist Repositories Group of the Society of Archivists; this was positively received, and the SRG have repeated their offer of providing some financial support for GLAM, although it was decided that for the present GLAM should continue on an informal basis with no bank account or treasurer.

DS advised that if the group does want to change its status, a good time to do this might be just prior to carrying out a new initiative that requires funding, as grant funding bodies tend to look more favourably on new proposals. However, this would not provide ongoing funding – something which would need to be addressed if GLAM was to change its status.

4. Conference on literature, archives and literary archives being held at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, in July 2008

It was suggested that individual GLAM members should be encouraged to submit proposals for papers to the organisers of this conference, called 'Archive Fervour / Archive Further'. The possibility of a joint GLAM contribution was also discussed. DS suggested a 'state of the nation' report, which would draw on the findings of the survey. SH pointed out that the focus of the conference is primarily on cultural theory and the literary archive, so any proposed presentation should take this into account.

5. Future meeting venues and topics

Seven Stories in Newcastle have offered to host the next meeting in March 2008; FB will contact them with possible dates.