

HubbuB: News from the Archives Hub, October 2021

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Reimagining Art, Nation and Heritage



1 - Claudette Johnson, *Figure in Blue*, 2018. Arts Council Collection, South Bank Centre, London (© the artist)

The Archives Hub is a partner on one of the newly funded Towards a National Collection¹ projects.

'Transforming Collections: Reimagining Art, Nation and Heritage' is one of the five Discovery Projects² that have received AHRC³ funding. Driven by the need to address structural inequalities in the arts, engage in debates around contested heritage, and reveal contentious histories, this project aims to enable cross-search of collections, surface patterns of bias, uncover hidden connections, and open up new interpretative frames for art and heritage.

¹<https://www.nationalcollection.org.uk/>

²https://www.nationalcollection.org.uk/Discovery_Projects

³<https://ahrc.ukri.org/>

One of the project aims is to create adaptable and transferable machine learning software, with interactive machine learning methods. The aim is to enable audiences to cross-search collections and diverse datasets; uncover unexpected connections; surface hidden works and histories; and empower diverse users to control the process of determining significance.

The Archives Hub will look at whether we can integrate the machine learning processing developed by this project into our data processing workflows. We are also undertaking our own explorations of machine learning, so it will be really interesting to see what we achieve and whether we find that machine learning really does effectively enhance catalogues, address bias and boost discoverability.

We will also provide input and expertise around sustainability and the challenges of working with archival metadata. Research projects often fail to plan for the longer term, to enable tools to scale and to be broadly applicable. The Hub provides a tried and tested infrastructure and data ingest process that is scalable and sustainable. If we can implement new ways of interrogating and enhancing data, then we can make this available to all of our contributors.

Online Survey for Researchers

We usually have an annual online survey, and we have just launched the survey for this year. We are aware that people can get survey fatigue, but it is vital for us to make sure that the service develops in line with end user requirements. A survey is one way of confirming this.

The survey is shorter than previous years, so really does only take a few minutes - though there are text boxes to provide more information, which is always gratefully received.

We have two surveys this year, because we wanted to ask specific questions of researchers.

Survey for work/study research users: <https://jisc.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/ahw21>

Survey for personal research users: <https://jisc.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/ahp21>

We also have a small pop up link to the survey on our homepage, about page and main search page. The link doesn't interfere with the main interface, so users can either choose to fill it in or continue with their research work.

We would be enormously grateful if you could point researchers to the survey. The more responses we get the better, and the more it supports our standing as a core service funded by Jisc.

Google Analytics Reports for Contributors

Many of you have been frustrated by receiving empty reports from us....as have we! We set up Google Analytics reports for all contributors some time back, and whilst GA definitely has its flaws, it does at least enable us to provide a report for each contributor giving page views for the top 100 descriptions.

The empty reports are due to a bug, entirely down to Google. There is nothing we can do to rectify the situation with these PDF reports. However, we have now investigated providing CSV reports instead, and we are pleased to say that these have data in! It appears that the bug must be related to rendering

a PDF. A report in CSV also has the advantage of providing you with something that is easier to work with and feed into any other impact stats that you may have.

We will be moving over to using CSV reports, but please bear with us. They have to be done individually - all 350 of them.

If you aren't aware of these reports, but would like to receive them, please email us on contributors.hub@jisc.ac.uk⁴. We do send them to all contributors, but sometimes the email addresses are out of date.

When is an organisation a corporate body?

We posed the question of terminology to our contributors' list - should we use the ISAD(G) and NCA Rules terminology of 'Corporate Body' for organisations when they are added as creators or as index terms, or should we use 'Organisations'? This question came up whilst we were creating our spreadsheet template. We felt that people filling in a spreadsheet might be volunteers or archives assistants, and not so familiar with official terms. A corporate body could, for example, be The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, the Society of Authors, the Congress of Vienna or HMS Invincible. It could be a hospital, a priory, a rock group, an exhibition, an abbey, etc.

NCA Rules describes a corporate body as an organisation or group of persons that is identified by a particular name and that acts, or may act, as an entity. It goes on to say that it will normally have 'clearly defined powers and mandate, have a clearly identified level of responsibility and sufficient functional autonomy to allow it decision-making power for the business falling within its competence'. But this does seem to emphasise the notion of a business.

Overall the responses that we got supported the idea that it is more useful to use the label of 'organisation'. We may, therefore, re-label our EAD Editor (cataloguing tool) to use 'Organisation'. We do get quite a few organisations as index terms that aren't put into the 'Corporate Body' section, and re-labelling it as 'Organisation' might help for those cases that just don't seem like corporate bodies.

Thoughts on 'genre/form'

You may be interested in recent latest blog post on 'genre/form'⁵. We get into very long discussions about many of the fields in an archival description.... reference, title, creator, language, dates, admin/biog history, index terms....these have all taken up many many hours of our time. You would be amazed (or maybe you wouldn't) at how much there is to talk about and decide upon. The main questions are around what makes a useful, meaningful description, what will allow us to treat all descriptions in the same way, what sort of searching and filtering should we provide, and can we do anything more imaginative around search? Often our thoughts are about the potential of the data, which is very hard to quantify, but with new tools and interrogative methods being introduced all the

⁴<mailto:contributors.hub@jisc.ac.uk>

⁵<https://blog.archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/2021/09/27/genre-and-form-within-archival-descriptions/>

time, we can potentially work with data in new ways in the future, and provide new opportunities for researchers.