



the national archives

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The National Archives, bringing together
the Public Record Office and the
Historical Manuscripts Commission

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30 March 2009

Dear David,

I am writing following the inspection carried out by my colleague Catherine Guggiari on 9 October 2008. I would like to thank you for the time spent by you and your staff on the inspection process, and enclose the agreed report of that inspection for your information.

The inspection was undertaken as part of The National Archives statutory duty to inspect and appoint places of deposit for public records. In addition, the inspection gave us the opportunity to assess whether the archive service meets all the requirements of The National Archives *Standard for Record Repositories*.

The report notes some significant improvements since the last inspection including the acquisition of extra strong room space, the securing of an archives assistant post and a learning and outreach post, improvements to the conservation workshop and the recent purchase of CALM software. You and your staff are to be congratulated on these improvements, but there remain a number of significant challenges which will need to be addressed in the next few years if place of deposit status is to be maintained in the longer term.

Most importantly, we believe that the time is now right to consider the future of Teesside Archives in its present premises. It is our view that the present building falls significantly short of the standard of accommodation which is realistically required for the permanent preservation of archival collections, and that it would not be possible to upgrade it to meet such standards at reasonable cost. I would encourage the archive service partners to consider options for relocating the service, either to purpose-built accommodation or to premises which can be more economically converted to meet the desired standards. My staff would be happy to provide further strategic advice to assist with this process.



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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

The challenges posed by the accommodation are outlined more fully in the report, but I would draw attention in particular to the limited fire resistance offered by the building, where the existing strongroom doors fall far short of the four-hour resistance recommended in the *Standard for Record Repositories*, and the wooden flooring and bare wooden beams in the fourth-floor strongroom represent a significant hazard. With such an important collection housed in this room extra vigilance should be taken until the records can be moved to better accommodation.

Our second main issue with the accommodation is the effective control of temperature and humidity. Although readings show fairly stable conditions throughout most of the strong rooms, high temperatures and humidity levels were noted in the large, fourth floor repository during summer months, and high humidity levels in the basement strong rooms, where there is a persistent problem with stormwater flooding. Whilst no outbreaks of mould have been reported, we would recommend constant vigilance, especially in areas where stagnant air may occur.

In addition to these accommodation issues, there are a number of other developmental matters which need to be addressed in the short to medium term.

Online catalogue

It is encouraging to learn that, through the British Steel Archives project, CALM software has been acquired to allow this collection to eventually be searched online. Whilst Teesside has catalogues on the A2A database, many local record offices now have their own online catalogues, enabling more accurate and up-to-date information to be available online. We hope that Teesside Archives will soon align itself with other record offices in providing good online access for researchers.

Staffing

A staffing level of two professional archivists is notably low for an archive of this nature and size. Staffing levels should be reconsidered in light of any changes resulting from the review of the archive service.

Collecting Development Policy

Whilst an Acquisition and Disposition Policy is available, we would recommend a more active Collecting Development Policy whereby Teesside Archives seeks to acquire records, set within a given timescale, reflecting the full range of activity in the area you serve, whereby areas which are under-represented within your collections are identified (this may include certain geographical areas; sectors such as religious or business archives; themes such as Black and Minority Ethnic groups; and formats such as digital records). With new accommodation Teesside Archives would be better placed to think strategically about collecting and to develop a Collecting Development Policy.

We recognise that you have made some progress towards achieving national standards for the preservation of archival material. However the

service falls significantly short of the provision recommended in our *Standard for Record Repositories*, and I therefore cannot award the service "TNA Approved" status. We are, however, happy to recommend that you retain Place of Deposit status for a further five years subject to the following conditions being met:

- **Formal subscription is made to *The National Archives Standard for Record Repositories*.** Subscription is required of all Places of Deposit and, in addition, can aid applications to a number of grant-awarding bodies. By subscribing to the *Standard*, authorities enter into a commitment to make progress towards meeting the *Standard* in all essential respects
- **The installation of flood alarms in the basement strong rooms with, preferably, 24x7 external monitoring.** Whilst we understand that public records are not stored in basement strong rooms, flooding can have a knock on effect to humidity levels within the building and poses a risk of structural damage

I hope that you have found the inspection helpful and congratulate you on the work achieved to date. In light of the recent proposals to review the service we will, of course, be happy to offer advice on the future plans or to discuss the content of this report if this would prove helpful.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nicholas Kingsley', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Nicholas Kingsley MA Hon. DLitt FSA RMSA
Head of National Advisory Services