The All Party Parliamentary Group on Archives and History


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This Report has been compiled by the Archives and Records Association (UK & Ireland), which administers the work of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Archives and History.
The All Party Parliamentary Group on Archives and History

The All Party Group is committed to supporting the work of the Archives sector and to encouraging the study of History. Specifically, the Group:

• Takes evidence of best practice and innovation in the archives sector and in the study of history

• Celebrates milestones and professionalism in the archives sector

• Encourages the study of history

• Visits archives

• Speaks out for archives and ensures that any proposed legislation takes account of the need for transparency and availability in the UK’s archives.
Officers of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Archives and History

February 2015

Co-Chairs:
Dr Hywel Francis MP and Lord Clark of Windermere

Secretary:
Lord Bew

Vice Chairs:
Tristram Hunt MP, Paul Murphy MP, Chris Skidmore MP, Lord Boswell of Aynho

Treasurer:
Lord Aberdare

Administration of the Group is provided by the Head of Public Affairs of the Archives and Records Association (UK & Ireland).

Archivist and Historians honoured by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Archives and History for their lifetime achievements:

Lord Briggs (Asa Briggs)
Professor José Harris
Professor Eric Hobsbawm
George Mackenzie
Lord Morgan (Kenneth Morgan)
Dr Gerry Slater
Lord Thomas of Swynnerton (Hugh Thomas)
Sarah Tyacke

Annual Lectures of the All Party Group on Archives and History

2011: Lord Hennessy
Government Records

2012: Professor Michael Slater
Charles Dickens and Parliament

2013: Professor Malcolm Chase
The People’s Charter of 1838: The Chartist Legacy to Parliamentary Democracy

2014: Professor Sir Richard Evans
Politics and the Great War: A European and Global Perspective
Background

The All Party Parliamentary Group on Archives was formed in April 2008. Work to bring together MPs and Lords interested in the archives sector was undertaken by the National Council on Archives to help ensure that the voice of archives was heard across a range of policy areas. The first Chair was Tim Boswell, then MP for Daventry, now Lord Boswell of Aynho. The Vice-Chairs were Dr Hywel Francis MP and Lord Howarth of Newport; the Secretary was Lord Bew.

The National Council on Archives provided administrative support to the new Group. One of the first events the new Group hosted was a panel discussion in the summer of 2008 looking at the issue of digital archives, chaired by Professor Lisa Jardine. The Chief Executive of The National Archives, Natalie Ceeney and Richard Ovenden, Keeper of Special Archives at the Bodleian Library debated how born digital and digitised records should be collected, preserved and accessed.

The following summer, in 2009, to celebrate the launch of The National Archive publication ‘Corporate Memory’, a high profile reception took place at the Houses of Parliament. The publication followed work by the Business Archives Council and promoted the vital role that the archives and records of businesses can play in core business functions, including recruitment, internal communications, CSR activities and marketing. Speakers at the Reception included: Professor Mervyn King (later Lord King of Lothbury), then Governor of the Bank of England; Sir Stuart Rose, then Chairman and CEO of Marks & Spencer plc; and Dame Stella Rimington, the former Director General of MI5 and one time archivist at Worcestershire County Record Office.

A new Parliament and the Formation of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Archives and History

Following the general election of 2010, on the suggestion of the new Chair of the All Party Group on Archives, Dr Hywel Francis MP, the All Party Parliamentary Group on Archives merged with the All Party Group on History to form the All Party Parliamentary Group on Archives and History.

The formation of the new All Party Group coincided with the formation of a single body, the Archives and Records Association, UK and Ireland (ARA), to represent the majority of those who work in, donate to and care about the archives of the UK and Ireland. The new Association, which was created on 1 June 2010 merged the Society of Archivists, the National Council on Archives and The Association of Chief Archivists in Local Government. Its Patron is Professor Lisa Jardine.
The administration of the All Party Group was undertaken from this point by the Head of Public Affairs of the ARA. From this point as well, the President of the Royal Historical Society was invited to all meetings.

The All Party Group held the first event of the new Parliament - a Summer Reception - on 14 July 2010. Guest speakers included the new Minister for Culture Ed Vaizey MP, ARA Patron Professor Lisa Jardine CBE, Oliver Morley, Chief Executive of The National Archives and Roy Clare CBE, Chief Executive of Museums, Libraries and Archives Council. The Reception was held in the Cholmondeley Room and River Terrace of the House of Lords and was hosted by Professor the Lord Bew, Secretary to the All Party Group. The event was held in partnership with UNESCO UK National Commission and the theme was ‘archives in civil society’. The reception also marked the first National Archive Volunteering Project of the Year Award; the Minister announced the winner as Suffolk Record Office.

The newly-appointed Minister for Culture, Ed Vaizey MP, said that that archives and records mattered: to people, to the country and to the economy.

The new Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Archives and History, Dr Hywel Francis MP, was welcomed to his position by Mr Vaizey, who noted Dr Francis’ own reputation as a historian and user of archives and congratulated him on the publication of his well-received book on the 1984 Miners’ Strike.

On 21 July 2010, the All Party Group met with Susan Robeson during her UK tour to promote the archive of her late grandfather, Paul Robeson. The event was hosted by Dr Hywel Francis MP. Attendees included the former Cabinet Minister Peter Hain MP, the former Welsh Office Minister Huw Irranca-Davies MP and Professor the Baroness Young of Hornsey.

First ‘lifetime achievement’ award and annual lecture

The Group’s AGM of June 2011 elected the Officers of the Group as: Chair Dr Hywel Francis MP, Secretary Lord Bew, Vice-Chairs: Tristram Hunt MP, Chris Skidmore MP and Paul Murphy MP.

On the same day The All Party Group honoured, for the first time, the lifetime achievement of two historians. From 2012, the Group would adapt this honour to recognise, each year, one historian and one archivist. The historians honoured at a lunch on 15 June 2011 were Professor Eric Hobsbawm and Lord Thomas of Swynnerton (Hugh Thomas). At the time of the lunch, Eric Hobsbawm was 94 and Lord Thomas was nearing his 90th birthday.
The leader of the Labour Party Ed Miliband MP, a family friend of the Hobsbawms, dropped in on the lunch to join fellow MPs and Lords in paying tribute to the two men.

Both historians spoke of the debt they owed to archives and those who work in them. Professor Hobsbawm made the memorable statement: ‘Historians come and go: archives go on forever’.

In November 2011 the All Party Group visited The National Archives at Kew on the invitation of the Chief Executive and Keeper Oliver Morley. They were shown round the building at Kew which houses 1000 years of government records and examined specific items of interest from the collection.

The Group is committed to learning about the archives sector and ‘taking evidence’ about its work and challenges. On 5 December 2011 those with responsibility for the UK’s national archives met with the Group (and an invited audience) to talk about the challenges and opportunities of the sector. George MacKenzie, Keeper of Records at the National Records of Scotland, Oliver Morley, Chief Executive and Keeper of The National Archives at Kew and Aileen McClintock, Director and Deputy Keeper of the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, confirmed that the archive sector worked in a collegiate way across all national and many international boundaries, sharing many challenges in a difficult financial environment and an ever-developing digital present and future. While the clear brief of each national repository was the safety, preservation and access to government records, significant work was also undertaken to advise the profession and the public about all aspects of archive work – specifically the ‘right home for the right archive’, be it religious, scientific, business or private.

The second All Party lunch to recognise outstanding lifetime achievement took place on 23 February 2012, when Lord (Asa) Briggs and Sarah Tyacke were honoured. Lord Briggs was introduced by Lord (Kenneth) Morgan as ‘a total historian’ and an ‘incomparable social historian’ whose honesty and humanity shone from his work. While others had described the events, the landscape, the buildings of history, Lord Briggs had described the people, including the all-important ‘humdrum’ details of existence.
The work of Sarah Tyacke, who led The National Archives from 1992 to 2005, was introduced by historian and Vice-Chair of the All Party Group Tristram Hunt. He emphasised Sarah’s significant achievements as a scholar, leader and archivist. It had fallen to her, and others, to find a way through the early challenges of a new age of information freedom. Her contribution to the growth and reach of The National Archives had been profound.

Dickens in Parliament

The 2012 Annual General Meeting of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Archives and History was held on 4 July 2012, when the Group had 76 members. Lord Clark of Windermere joined the Officers as Vice-Chair.

The Group’s 2012 Annual Lecture took place on 20 June in the Grand Committee Room at the Houses of Parliament. The lecture ‘Charles Dickens and Parliament’ was given by Professor Michael Slater, Emeritus Professor of Victorian Literature at Birkbeck and renowned Dickens scholar. Around 60 people attended, including five members of the All Party Group. Professor Slater quoted widely from Dickens’ letters and novels. The past and the present chimed wonderfully for his audience as he read Dickens describing the ringing of the ‘Division bell’; at the same moment the screens in the Grand Committee Room announced a vote in the House of Commons. Chair of the All Party Group Hywel Francis and Vice-Chair Tristram Hunt made their apologies for a few minutes.

An ‘evidence’ session with the leaders of national libraries took place on 30 October 2012. This was a sister event to a session held in 2011 with the leaders of national archives. Leaders of the national libraries of the UK, Wales and Scotland (Roly Keating of the British Library, Andrew Green of the National Library of Wales and Martyn Wade of the National Library of Scotland) spoke to members of the Group and an invited audience about their successes and challenges.

‘It’s all about connectivity’ was a key message. All the national libraries were determined to reach out – locally, nationally and internationally. And technical infrastructure improvements promised ‘a full system of connectivity’. Exciting futures may rest on ‘a good bit of software’. But if future generations visit a national library out of ‘choice not need’, what will bring them? Martyn Wade reminded the audience of the power of the original: thousands of visitors queuing to see the handwriting of Mary Queen of Scots, though the digital image was widely available.
**Historians come and go – archives go on forever.**

*Professor Eric Hobsbawm, All Party Group annual lunch, June 2011*

Given that future archives rested on ‘born digital’ material, had we lost forever the exploration of a creative person’s thinking process? Annotations, re-drafting on paper or within a printed book had given much to researchers. Martyn Wade counselled against nostalgia: ‘print and paper weren’t perfect’ and those charged with keeping material for the future must do their best whatever is produced, whatever is kept.

**History for All?**

Chris Skidmore, Vice Chair of the Group, led a piece of work to take evidence about and make recommendations on the teaching of History in England. Evidence was taken in summer 2012 and the report *History for All?* published in January 2013. The Group invited The Citizenship Foundation to a subsequent meeting of Officers and agreed to work together to encourage the study of Citizenship.

The Group’s annual lunch to celebrate the lifetime achievement of one archivist and one historian was held in May 2013 and honoured Professor José Harris and Dr Gerry Slater. The lunch was attended by 6 of the 7 Officers of the Group; there were 19 guests in all. Professor José Harris is Emeritus Professor of Modern History at the University of Oxford and a fellow of St Catherine’s College. Her main interests are in intellectual history, political thought, and the history of social and economic policy. She wrote *William Beveridge: A Biography*, which was published in 1978 (and a ‘much more frank’ second edition in 1997).

Dr Gerry Slater worked in the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) from 1974 to 2008; he led the institution as Chief Executive and Deputy Keeper from 1999. He is currently policy adviser to the Scottish Council on Archives.

Chris Skidmore, Vice Chair of the Group, gave a lecture on 10 June 2013 about his new book, *Bosworth: The Birth of the Tudors*. Chris talked about the archaeological and archival sources for his book to an audience of MPs, Lords, archivists and historians.
2013: Year of the Chartists

In what would be its busiest year to date, the Group decided that its 2013 activities would centre on the 175th anniversary of the People’s Charter.

The Chartist movement called for six changes to Parliament: a vote for every man over the age of 21; a secret ballot; no property qualification for members of Parliament; payment for MPs (so poor men could serve); constituencies of equal size; and annual elections for Parliament. Five of the Charter’s six points became law by 1918. Annual parliaments were never seriously considered.

Dr Francis put down an Early Day Motion about the Chartist movement: ‘That this House celebrates the 175th anniversary of the launch of the People’s Charter on 8 May 1838 which was a blueprint for our Parliamentary democracy; salutes the men and women of the Chartist Movement across the UK who sacrificed so much to achieve universal adult suffrage; acknowledges the Black Chartist leader William Cuffay and others who were transported to Australia for striving for political justice; recognises that it was left to the Suffragist and Suffragette movements to win universal female suffrage; notes the subsequent roles of political parties in legislating for many of the Chartist demands including the secret ballot; and welcomes the work of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Archives and History to commemorate in appropriate ways the debt that all parliaments owe to the selfless campaigning of the Chartists in achieving democracies in many countries’. There were 77 signatories.

A temporary display of Chartist material was staged in the No Division Lobby from July to October 2013. The display was formally opened in July by the Speaker of the House, The Rt Hon John Bercow MP. The small display included the only known photograph of John Frost, prominent Welsh leader of the Chartists and a volume of Byron’s collected poetry, which was given by the London Chartists to John Cuffay, the black London trade unionist who was transported to Australia because of his activities. The book is inscribed: ‘as a token of their sincere regard and affection for his genuine patriotism and moral worth’. The Poetical Works of Lord Byron was with William Cuffay at his death, aged 82, in a Tasmanian workshop hospital in 1870.

On 22 October, the annual lecture was given by Professor Malcolm Chase in the Speaker’s Rooms, by kind permission of the Speaker. This setting for the annual lecture was highly prestigious and allowed a larger audience. Professor Malcolm Chase is Professor of Social History at the University of Leeds. He has degrees from York and Sussex and is a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society. His main research interest is the Labour movement and radical politics generally in eighteenth and nineteenth century Britain, with a particular interest in the formative years of trade unionism, and the Chartist movement. His lecture title was: The People’s Charter of 1838: The Chartist Legacy to Parliamentary Democracy.
To coincide with the lecture a permanent display on Chartist material was placed on the Upper Committee Corridor, following agreement from the Speaker’s Advisory Committee on Works of Art. Curatorial work was undertaken by Melanie Unwin.

On the same day as the lecture, a seminar took place in the Houses of Parliament on Chartist archives. Chartist Archives: an overview, past and present, was led by Professor Owen Ashton, Emeritus Professor in Modern British History at Staffordshire University. There were about 20 attendees, from a number of organisations including Gwent Archives, The National Archives, The Library of Birmingham, The Working Class Movement Library and Bishopsgate Institute. Professor Ashton was introduced by Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Archives and History Dr Hywel Francis MP.

On 15 October, a small number of the Group attended the launch of the Campaign for Voluntary Sector Archives, held at the House of Lords. Vice-Chair of the Group Tristram Hunt was one of the speakers.

The 2013 Annual General Meeting of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Archives and History was held on 26 June 2013 at Portcullis House. There were at that point 76 members. There was no change in Officers.

Launching a national campaign for public awareness of Archives

The All Party Group kindly sponsored an event in Parliament to launch the Explore Your Archive Campaign in November 2013. Explore Your Archive is the sector’s new public awareness campaign led by The National Archives and the Archives and Records Association (UK & Ireland). Both Dr Francis and Tristram Hunt were interviewed about archives for the campaign website. On the day, speakers included: Dr Hywel Francis MP, Professor Lisa Jardine, Professor Joanna Bourke, Dr Gus Casely-Hayford and Gary Brannan, Archivist at West Yorkshire Archive Service. Speaking as an archivist, Gary said: ‘I am proud. Proud to keep the records of the forgotten, so they can be rediscovered. Proud to keep the memories of great deeds alive, and proud to keep the memory of our less-great days alive too, so that in the future we can learn and not make the same mistakes again. Proud to let communities connect with a past that binds them, and proud to know that when I’m gone, the work I have done will benefit someone’.
The Group visited the Trades Union Congress Library at London Metropolitan University on 28 January 2014. Six All Party Group members – Chair Hywel Francis, Vice Chairs Lord Clark and Paul Murphy and members Baroness Taylor, Lord Monks, Lord Haworth and Helen Goodman – were welcomed to London Metropolitan University by Vice-Chancellor Professor Malcolm Gillies, by TUC Librarian Chris Coates and her colleagues from the University’s Library Services.

The Group visited Swansea University on 9 May to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the South Wales Miners’ Library and to visit the University’s Richard Burton Archives, before hearing Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield – Peter Hennessy - deliver a public lecture entitled: Secrecy, Openness and Writing the History of One’s Own Times.

The South Wales Miners’ Library was established by the University College of Swansea in 1973, to house material collected by the South Wales Coalfield History Project, including photos, posters, banners, oral history tapes and many books rescued from miners’ institute libraries. Dr Hywel Francis, Chair of the All Party Group, founded the Library. As a young journalist, Lord Hennessy wrote an article for the Times Higher Education Supplement about the major research project which established the Library in 1973.

At the AGM in June 2014 Lord Clark of Windermere was elected as Co-Chair of the Group. Dr Hywel Francis would be stepping down from Parliament in 2015; he would continue as Co-Chair until then.
Fourth Lifetime Achievement Award

The Group honoured the work of historian Lord Morgan and archivist George MacKenzie at their annual lunch to celebrate outstanding achievement in 2014. The archivist and historian, with their wives, joined guests at the lunch on 18 June 2014 at the House of Commons.

Lord Morgan – Kenneth Owen Morgan – is a historian of modern British history and politics and a Fellow of the British Academy. He was Vice Chancellor at Aberystwyth and Senior Vice Chancellor at the University of Wales. He became a life peer in 2000 as Baron Morgan of Aberdyfi.

George MacKenzie retired in 2012 from the National Records of Scotland, where he held the titles Registrar General, Keeper of Records and Keeper of the Register of Tartans. He had worked with Scotland’s records for nearly 40 years. He oversaw the formation of the National Records of Scotland in 2011, which made Scotland the first country in the world to combine archives with statistics about population, registration and the census.

Dr Hywel Francis attended the 70th anniversary of the D Day Landings in June 2014 and laid a wreath on behalf of the All Party Parliamentary Group on History and Archives and the Port Talbot branch of the Royal British Legion.

Accreditation: a sector milestone

The All Party Group sponsored a celebration centred on Accreditation – the archive’s new standard comparable to museum designation - at the Houses of Parliament on 15 October 2014. Lord Clark of Windermere, Co-Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Archives and History, led the congratulations. Representatives from the first 14 archive services which had gained Accreditation were praised by Lord Clark for their hard work and their willingness to be pioneers for the wider sector.

The first 14 archive services to be accredited include business archives, local authority archives, film, university and religious archives as well as the sector’s largest archive, The National Archives.
Professor Sir Richard Evans delivered the 2014 All Party Group on Archives and History annual lecture on 25 November in the Houses of Parliament. Professor Evans, a historian of modern European History spoke on Politics and the Great War: A European and Global Perspective to an audience of MPs, Lords, historians and archivists in the Grand Committee Room.

Professor Evans spoke of the first global war as the ‘Pandora’s Box of the 20th century – letting loose chaos’. He touched on the military, diplomatic and social aspects of the war, making the point that no single country involved in the conflict had an aim or vision ‘when they started’. He dispelled some common misunderstandings: that England was democratic and that Germany was not; that Japan was an enemy of England in WWI.

In early 2015, the Group was asked to be a critical friend of the plans for the future of the Parliamentary archives.

Officers and members of the All Party Group have been active within Parliament to support the work of UK archives and to advocate for the study of history. They have raised questions, written letters on key issues, taken evidence and supported the archives sector and all who care about History whenever possible.

Throughout the Parliament, The British Library kindly invited members of the All Party Group to private views of its new exhibitions.

Archival blood proves itself time and time again to be thicker than any ‘national water’.

George MacKenzie 5 December 2011