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Social inclusion at The National Archives by Rachel Hasted

Rachel Hasted ([The National Archives](#))

I am going to speak about a number of digital projects and the digital resources available at [The National Archives](#). I will be following on from [Madge Dresser's](#) comments about the need to find a reflection of our personal experiences in public history, and what happens when we do not.

I am going to start by talking briefly about social inclusion, what that might be and, conversely, what social exclusion might be. The standard definition of social exclusion provided by the Cabinet Office is: 'a shorthand term for what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime, bad health and family breakdown.' (1) You will immediately see that this definition lacks an educational dimension, beyond vocational training, and a wider sense of the cultural isolation that can be a driver in preventing people from achieving their full potential. Social exclusion has also been defined by John Vincent as 'The process of being shut out, fully or partially, from any of the political, social, cultural or economic systems which determine the social integration of a person in society'. (2) This definition also identifies social exclusion as an active process in which institutions and groups 'shut out' others from access to social, cultural and economic participation, whether wittingly or not.

I do not have time, in this short talk, to look in detail at all the aspects of social exclusion and the measures which an organisation like [The National Archives](#) can take to tackle it. So I have chosen to concentrate on ways in which access to specific historical sources from the archives may be relevant to combatting the exclusion of some groups through education. However, in light of previous discussions today, I would like to say that it is not our aim to pigeonhole people into one-dimensional identity groups and then tell them that they should be interested in the history that we have digested for them and pointed in their direction.

I am going to look specifically at areas where our archival sources can support the visibility of groups at risk of being shut out in education. In 2001 the [National Council on Archives](#) (NCA) published the report '[Taking part: an audit of social inclusion work in archives](#)', which detailed the work that archives across the country were already doing to support social inclusion. The NCA felt that the contribution that archives could most helpfully make was in the area of developing personal and community identity and empowerment. It would be counterproductive to suggest that improving access to archival sources, on its own, is likely to bring about radical social change. The effect of access to diverse sources for history would be most felt in the area of personal and social identity that is at the heart of both the teaching of history and of how we define belonging to British society.

This month [Stonewall](#) published some statistics resulting from research into the skills and careers of young gay and lesbian people. Those with six GCSE passes are more likely to leave school at 16 than their peers and many cite experiences of bullying and violence as reasons leaving. Many of you in education will know that Stonewall has launched its [Education for All](#) initiative aimed at tackling homophobic bullying in schools, and alongside this [Schools Out](#) has launched the first ever [British Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans History Month](#) this February to try and identify areas in history teaching where the presence of people of all sexual orientations could be highlighted in schools. [The National Archives](#) launched its own Research Guide to resources on gay and lesbian history last year (3) and has made key documents from the public records available to download free of charge on [DocumentsOnline](#). So if you need a copy of the Wolfenden Report, or the documents from the obscenity trial of Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*, you can find them on our website or look at the originals at Kew.

The launch event for that Research Guide was booked out one week after it was advertised. Not surprisingly, the five historians who gave presentations at that event were able to show that lesbians and gay men were not as invisible in the archives as has perhaps been assumed. A photograph showing an outfit of crepe culottes and kimono top in shocking pink was found amongst the evidence from a police raid on a London gay men's club in the 1930s. It was worn by one of the men arrested at a drag ball in Holland Park attended by a number of Metropolitan Police also in drag, and incidentally speaking very good polari. This was the largest bust of the 1930s, but the men arrested, who were later put on trial in large numbers, were not in any way shamed victims, as the trial records make clear. One told the arresting officer: 'there is nothing wrong in who we are. You may think so, but before long our cult will be allowed in this country.' This shows some very interesting evidence brought to light by research in the archives, and the material is highly accessible for use in teaching.

I want to draw your attention to another piece of research entitled '[In between two worlds: London teenagers ideas about cultural identity, belonging and Black history](#)' which was recently carried out by the [Museum of London](#). It posed questions around the effect of the present state of access to often invisible histories. I think the results of this - admittedly small - piece of research are extremely interesting. It showed that young people were much more aware of American black history and culture than of British. Participants had very hazy ideas about the history of migration to Britain and the history of British involvement in slavery. Students had low expectations of what resources were available to them in school and expected to find out more about Asian and black British history from the Internet than from schools or school libraries. Perhaps the most serious cause for concern was that participants were divided over what relevance different aspects of history had for them personally. European history and World War Two were not considered personally relevant by students from minority ethnic and mixed backgrounds. (If this is the case, we must question how these topics are being taught.) On the other hand, white students were found not to be interested in black and Asian British history.

This research is a small indication, but suggests that we do not yet have the right resources available to support schools in making British history and citizenship education relevant to students of all backgrounds by emphasising the achievements and contributions made to society as a whole by all groups. What difference can [The National Archives](#) make to that picture? Well, our underlying values speak very directly to some of these issues:

- Raising awareness and understanding of this country's past and preserving the archival record.
- Offering everyone the widest possible access to archival resources.
- Providing lifelong learning opportunities.
- Promoting democratic accountability in government and the public sector by effective record-keeping.

These values highlight the potential that the archival heritage of the country has within a democratic society. We are all involved in the discussion about national identity; with its new remit, this is a discussion in which TNA feels centrally involved. Debates about our shared past, contested and open to many interpretations are vital to evolving ways of living and thinking about ourselves in the United Kingdom of today. Opening up understanding of the complexity and richness of the past through better access to our archival sources is an important task. But we are still a long way from reaching that goal.

[The National Archives](#) calls itself 'the nation's memory', and some of our initiatives are aimed at improving the nation's recall of our diverse histories. [The Moving Here](#) project at TNA worked in collaboration with the Black Elders Group of the Haringey [University of the Third Age](#) and [Bruce Castle Museum](#) at

Haringey to produce the exhibition 'Memories of the Islands'. The exhibition was based on a collection of Ministry of Information photographs of the Caribbean in the 1950s and 1960s which, as you can imagine, come with their own particular slant, from TNA collections. The group created the interpretation for the exhibition using their own memories of life in the islands at that time, and the exhibition was opened at TNA by David Lammy MP in 2002 and has since toured, not only in this country but in the Caribbean as well. Like many archives, The National Archives collection contains rich sources for black and Asian heritage, and we are working to make these more accessible.

One thing we have discovered is that partnerships can speed up the process of learning to work in new directions. I am going to talk about three partnership projects with which [The National Archives](#) has been involved. This has been extremely beneficial, as we have been able to add to our understanding, and involve others in the generation of the interpretation. Working with collections apart from our own has allowed partner organisations to contribute resources to illuminate the history.

The first project I would like to mention is the CASBAH (Caribbean Studies and Black and Asian History) database, which you can find at <http://www.casbah.ac.uk/>. This project was set up as a consortium led by the [Institute of Commonwealth Studies](#) at the [University of London](#) and with funding from the [Research Support Libraries Programme](#) in 2000. The Public Record Office (as it The National Archives was called), was a partner and it looked at both library and archive collections with an aim to draw out and define some of the problems associated with hidden histories, and to develop useful research methodologies and data collection tools. The long-term aim was to raise the profile of these areas of study and encourage future research to combat legacies of exclusion, neglect and ignorance of the long history of black and Asian people in the UK. CASBAH project staff, notably Dr Roayah Saltus-Blackwood and Carol Dixon undertook sampling surveys in selected archives across the country. Through this work, and the creation of a pilot database of four hundred resulting records, they were able to deliver reports on indexing collection descriptions. Those indexing terms have now been put forward to the UCAT Thesaurus to be used in other archives. They also serve as an archival survey methodology tool which shows archivists how to look at their existing collections without having any specialist knowledge of black and Asian history and identify possible resources of interest to future researchers so that they can be catalogued accessibly. Through its national advisory service, The National Archives is now looking at ways of promoting this methodology to archives across the country and to other partners in the heritage sector.

The second partnership project, with which [Marika Sherwood](#) was particularly involved through the [Black and Asian Studies Association](#), produced the [Black Presence](#) online exhibition. The website was launched in 2003, and funded by the [New Opportunities Fund](#). It is one in a series of online exhibitions produced by our [Pathways to the Past](#) web resource for adult learners, intended to provide an historical context for lifelong learners using the archives in their own research. It includes digitised records, artworks and other resources from TNA's collections and elsewhere.

Finally I want to talk about [Moving Here](#), which is a consortium project, led by [The National Archives](#) with over 30 [partner organisations](#) across the library, museum and archive domain. All have contributed to create an online resource of over 200,000 digitised images, documents, sound clips and videos covering the migration histories of four groups. These are Jewish people from Eastern Europe, people from Ireland, people from the Caribbean and people from South Asia who have all come to England over the last 200 years. The history is presented in four parts, from life in the country of origin, through journeys, to settling in England and to reconnecting with family roots. The project has been able to achieve great impact through bringing together such a rich diversity of material online. Moving Here offers not only access to digitised and sometimes searchable documents but also a range of historical context material and guides to research and family history.

I can show you a few documents and images from the extraordinary range that [The National Archives](#) have online. This picture shows a Birmingham meeting of the Anti-Slavery Society in 1836. This is a portrait of Walter Tull, who played for Spurs 1909-12 and went on to be the first black British officer in the British army serving in the First World War, in which he was killed. This is an unknown Edwardian black family group photo from the collection of the Black Cultural Archives in Brixton, and this is a Passover Seder in London in about 1900 from the Jewish Museum collection. This is the last entry in the personal journal of Gina Bauer, an Austrian-Jewish refugee in London. Her family had sent her to England. She was university student working as a hairdresser's assistant in London to keep herself, and waiting for her parents to join her. Three days before their journey, war broke out and Gina knew that they would not be able to come and she would never see them again. This is an anti-Irish cartoon from the 1853-4 Preston strike and lockout when mill owners brought over Irish labour to break the strike. Unsurprisingly, the Lancashire striker who drew this cartoon has caricatured his class enemies, the Irish workers, as ignorant and lazy workers. But by the time the First World War arrived, we see, here, the Newcastle Chronicle explaining that all the Major-Generals are Irish and that the Irish are the greatest fighting men in the British army. This record from the London Borough of Wandsworth commemorates the election campaign of Shapurji Saklatvala in 1922. This from the Bradford Heritage Recording Unit showing a Sikh family in the 1960s in Bradford.

Lastly and most importantly, I want to point out that the [Moving Here](#) site is interactive. Anybody with a history of migration can submit their own text to the Stories section of the site. They can write it as text and we can arrange to have it in dual language. Personal photographs can be scanned in or photographs and images can be selected from the existing database on the site. We believe that it is vital that this kind of history is an interactive and collaborative enterprise between institutions such as ourselves and the communities which are represented. There are at the moment 450 stories on the site, many of those completely unsolicited.

It is clear that where bodies such as [The National Archives](#) produce resources on minority history there is an issue about "who speaks?" Community involvement and ownership of heritage is an issue which needs more discussion. We believe that there are opportunities through digital resources for the representation of many view points. I am delighted to say that the [Heritage Lottery Fund](#) has just awarded £750,000 to Moving Here to work with a wide range of communities in five regions of England. This will increase the representation of different migration experiences on the site, and, working in partnership with regional museums and archives, will ensure that the material collected remains in permanent collections as well as being represented by a national web publisher in Moving Here.

The same grant allows us to create a set of online support materials for teachers to use [Moving Here](#) in relevant areas of the history, geography and citizenship curriculum. It was a high priority for those people from minority ethnic backgrounds consulted by the project that this history should be documented and transmitted to the next generation through schools. Being visible in the national story was identified as important for community confidence and for children's self-esteem. I believe that [The National Archives](#), 'the nation's memory', has a role to play alongside other cultural organisations in ensuring the transmission of records like this to future generations.

Notes

1. 'Preventing Social Exclusion' report, March 2001, Chapter 1, (1.2) The Social Exclusion Unit, <http://www.socialexclusionunit.gov.uk/downloaddoc.asp?id=232> [accessed 26 Sept. 2005]. [Back to \(1\)](#).
2. 'Libraries and Community Cohesion' report by John Vincent, SEMLAC 2005, <http://www.semlac.org.uk/communitycohesion.html> [accessed 26 Sept. 2005]. [Back to \(2\)](#).
3. 'Gay and Lesbian History at The National Archives: An Introduction' by Dr Matt Houlbrook, <http://www.catalogue.nationalarchives.gov.uk/RdLeaflet.asp?sLeafletID=357> [accessed 26 Sept. 2005]. [Back to \(3\)](#).

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