



the national archives

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Access to Archives - A2A: A strand of the UK archives network

Experiences of a pioneer

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Archives UK

Introduction

Access to Archives or A2A (<http://www.a2a.org.uk/>):

- started in 2000, now 4th and last phase, *Archives 4 All*, to end March 2008
- is a great success achieving professional objectives and popular with users online

Introduction

This paper will look at:

- Why did it come about and what were its goals?
- How were the goals achieved?
- Where next for A2A?

Background

There are many strands to the national archives network:

- A2A: mainly English local archive repositories
- Catalogues of national repositories (e.g. TNA, British Library, National Archives of Scotland, National Library of Wales, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland)
- Catalogues from other regional programmes and in other sectors (e.g. Scottish Archives Network (SCAN), Archives Network Wales (ANW), Archives Hub for UK Higher Education)

Background

A2A established as part of policy agenda in late 1990's:

- Developments in information and communications technology (ICT), especially the Internet
- Professional desire to provide online access to information about and representations of archives – a national archives network
- Government demands use of ICT to further policies relating to quality public services, education, social inclusion and democratic accountability

Background

A professional priority is to use the Internet to widen access to archives:

- Long term goal is digital representations of popular archives
- First step comprehensive online access to finding aids
- Encourage greater use of archives in education
- Reach out to new audiences to better reflect UK's social diversity

Background

Priorities from government then focussed on services to users but achievement means a number of linked activities for archive professionals:

- Funding acquisition
- Partnership working
- Digital content creation
- Standards development and application
- Professional skills development

Funding

A2A is making best use of funding opportunities:

- Dual funding model developed
- A2A central team mainly funded by UK Treasury and TNA with contributions from other partners
- A2A Projects mainly funded by UK lottery – Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) has awarded nearly £4 million so far.
- Changes in priorities of main funder reflected in the current *Archives 4 All* phase themes of community and education

Partnership

A2A is working in partnership:

- For the central programme TNA and British Library in partnership, governed by representative steering group
- A2A made up of over 120 projects which are also partnerships made up of of over 400 holders of archives, including:
 - Regional
 - Theme based
 - Community

Content creation

A key aim of A2A has been retro-conversion of legacy finding aids:

- 1 million pages of finding aids or
- 100,000 archive collections or
- 10 million catalogue entries

Single conversion contract has achieved economies of scale as actual costs are 40% lower than estimated

Content creation

- Still many collections with no finding aids, but 40 A2A projects create over 75 for important collections and many 1000's of collection level descriptions
- *Archives 4 All* projects:
 - Little retro-conversion
 - Some cataloguing, but community as well as traditional archives
 - Oral history, digitisation and websites
 - Local events and exhibitions

Standards

- Description standard – ISAD(G): A2A asks for minimum conformity for legacy finding aids and elements considered essential for data exchange for new finding aids
- Authority controlled terms for creators and access points formatted according to local rules for names and UNESCO Thesaurus for subjects, but no archival authority records as ISAAR(CPF)
- A2A data structure standard is Encoded Archival Description (EAD) used to capture and quality assure electronic finding aids, return them to contributors and as basis for A2A XML online database

Professional skills

A2A has helped give archivists the necessary skills and expertise and provides training, advice and guidance in:

- Funding application
- Practical use of description and technical standards
- Project and financial management methods and tools

Professional skills

A2A is in continuous communication with contributors:

- Advice and guidance available online
- Regular meetings with contributors held
- Regular news by e-mails and articles in professional media
- Each project has a dedicated A2A contact

A2A database -

<http://www.a2a.org.uk/>

- Finding aids mounted on simple website in searchable form -
- A prototype of the national archives network
- A single gateway giving access to distributed archive resources

Technical Architecture

- EAD finding aids in SGML converted and normalised as XML
- Loaded into XML document management system
- Structure encoded as EAD used as basis for indexing and searching functionality
- Search results presented to users in 3 views by 'on the fly' XSL conversion to HTML



A Access
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A Archives

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Search
the
Database 

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Welcome to A2A

The A2A database contains catalogues describing archives held locally in England and Wales and dating from the eighth century to the present day.

Click the Search button to [search these catalogues](#)

A2A does not yet offer a full description of *all* local archives but it is regularly updated, so **revisit often** for newly-included catalogues!

Or try a [Global Search](#) of A2A with 10 other resources based at TNA...

Usage since launch: **12.2 million** searches | **29.7 million** catalogue downloads



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right: *View along a village street [Clifton Hampden, Oxfordshire] in the spring of 1884*
English Heritage National Monuments Record: Henry W Taunt, ref. CC72/00456

What's New?

[XML](#)

The A2A database was last updated in March 2007 and now contains **10 million** records relating to **9.2 million** items held in [411 record offices](#) and other repositories.

For more details, see the list of catalogues which are [New This Month](#) or see the [latest news](#) from the Central Team.

For information on what to look out for in the future, see [A2A Projects in Progress](#).



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Search

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Standard Search

Type a word or exact phrase into the box and click Search - you can also scroll to use the other options available below, or use the links on the left hand side of the page. Use help links for more information on each option.

Keyword (or phrase)

[help](#)

Location of Archives

[help](#)

English Region or Wales

[help](#)

Dates of Archives

Find descriptions of archives dated between the years: and [help](#)


Find descriptions of archives dated for a specific year: [help](#)

Dates of Catalogues

Search only in catalogues added to A2A since:

[help](#)

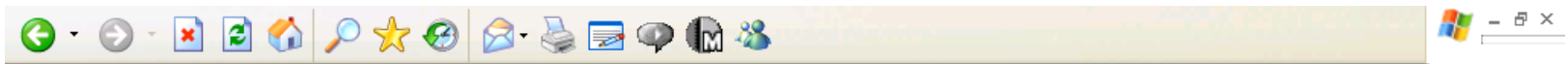


Sort your results... 

64 catalogues were found to match **Windmill**
Shown below are catalogues 1 to 25 (of 64)

next

English Heritage National Monuments Record: Gordon Barnes [MF000291 - MF000533]	1940-1984	155 hit(s)
English Heritage National Monuments Record: Hallam Ashley [HXA01/01/02: MF98/00556 - MF98/01119]	1931-1983	147 hit(s)
English Heritage National Monuments Record: Hallam Ashley [HXA01/01/02: MF98/01120 - MF98/01644]	1931-1983	120 hit(s)
English Heritage National Monuments Record: Hallam Ashley [HXA01/01/02: BB98/30082 - MF98/00555]	1931-1984	111 hit(s)
English Heritage National Monuments Record: Hallam Ashley [HXA01/01/02: AA98/12214 - AA98/13403]	1931-1983	110 hit(s)
English Heritage National Monuments Record: Hallam Ashley [HXA01/01/02: AA98/15868 - AA98/17185]	1931-1983	82 hit(s)
English Heritage National Monuments Record: Hallam Ashley [HXA01/01/02: AA98/09787 - AA98/11426]	1931-1983	59 hit(s)
English Heritage National Monuments Record: Hallam Ashley [HXA01/01/02: AA98/07736 - AA98/09786]	1931-1983	57 hit(s)
English Heritage National Monuments Record: Hallam Ashley [HXA01/01/02: AA98/06681 - AA98/07735]	1931-1983	54 hit(s)
English Heritage National Monuments Record: Hallam Ashley [HXA01/01/02: AA98/15091 - AA98/15867]	1931-1983	52 hit(s)
English Heritage National Monuments Record: Hallam Ashley [HXA01/01/02: MF98/01645 - OP00387]	1930-1983	51 hit(s)
English Heritage National Monuments Record: Estate Sales Particulars [SC000470 - SC000928]	1877-1971	45 hit(s)



English Heritage National Monuments Record: Eric de Mare [AA98/04782 - AA98/05488]

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To find out more about the archives described below, contact [English Heritage National Monuments Record](#)

Eric De Mare

Catalogue Ref.

[Access Conditions]

Public

FILE - GENERAL VIEW (General view) - ref. **AA98/05261** - date: 1945 - 1980

[Access Conditions] Public

[from Scope and Content] Chesterton **Windmill**, Chesterton, Chesterton

[from Scope and Content] Monument type: **Windmill**



[SEE THIS PHOTOGRAPH ONLINE](#)

[Chesterton Windmill, Chesterton, Chesterton and Kingston, Warwickshire]

FILE - GENERAL VIEW WITH MODERN ELECTRICITY GENERATING PLANT IN 1980

[Access Conditions] Public

[from Scope and Content] North Leverton **Windmill**, North Leverton

[from Scope and Content] Monument type: **Windmill**



[SEE THIS PHOTOGRAPH ONLINE](#)

[North Leverton Windmill, North Leverton With Hubblesthorpe, Nottinghamshire]

FILE - DETAIL VIEW SHOWING CAP AND SAILS OF UNIDENTIFIED SMOCK MILL
ALSO AA98/05262 - ref. **AA98/05263** - date: 1945 - 1980

[Access Conditions] Public

[from Scope and Content] Monument type: **Windmill**

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Repository details

National Monuments Record
Archon Code : 1585

Contact Details

Enquiry & Research Services
English Heritage
National Monuments Record Centre
Kemble Drive
Swindon
SN2 2GZ

Done Internet

English Heritage National Monuments Record: Eric de Mare [AA98/04782 - AA98/05488]

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FILE - GENERAL VIEW (General view) - ref. AA98/05261 - date: 1945 -
[Access Conditions] *Public*



- [from *Scope and Content*] Chesterton **Windmill**, Chesterton, Chesterton and Kingston, Warwickshire
- [from *Scope and Content*] Monument type: **Windmill**

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[Chesterton Windmill, Chesterton, Chesterton and Kingston, Warwickshire]

FILE - GENERAL VIEW WITH MODERN ELECTRICITY GENERATING PLANT IN 1980
[Access Conditions] *Public*

- [from *Scope and Content*] North Leverton **Windmill**, North Leverton With Hablesthorpe, North Lincolnshire
- [from *Scope and Content*] Monument type: **Windmill**

 [SEE THIS PHOTOGRAPH ONLINE](#) 


[North Leverton Windmill, North Leverton With Hablesthorpe, North Lincolnshire]

FILE - DETAIL VIEW SHOWING CAP AND SAILS OF UNIDENTIFIED SMOCK ALSO AA98/05262 - ref. AA98/05263 - date: 1945 - 1980
[Access Conditions] *Public*

- [from *Scope and Content*] Monument type: **Windmill**

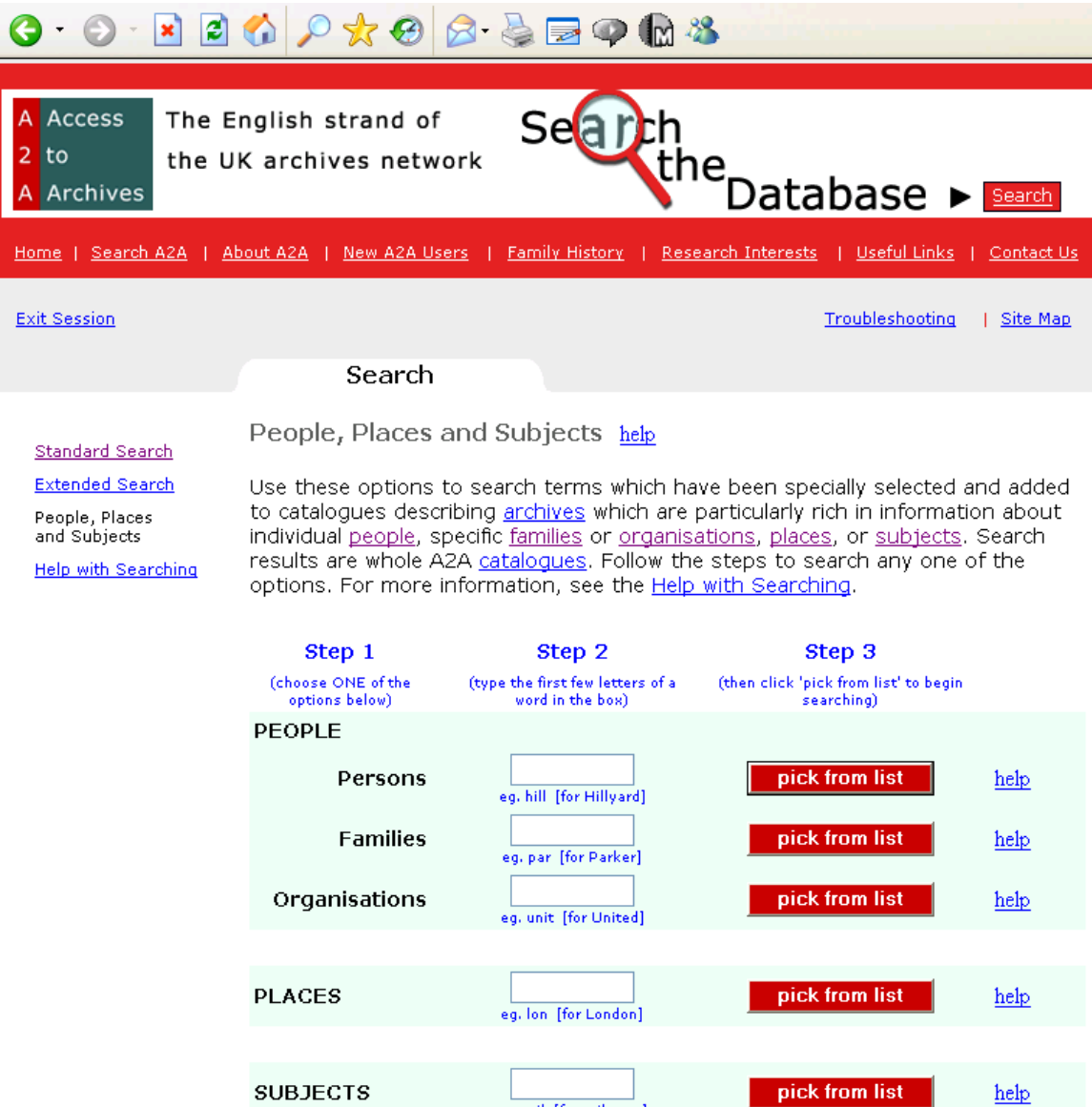
http://www.a2a.org.uk - EH NMR photo - Microsoft Internet Explorer

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People, Places and Subjects [help](#)

Use these options to search terms which have been specially selected and added to catalogues describing [archives](#) which are particularly rich in information about individual [people](#), specific [families](#) or [organisations](#), [places](#), or [subjects](#). Search results are whole A2A [catalogues](#). Follow the steps to search any one of the options. For more information, see the [Help with Searching](#).

	Step 1 (choose ONE of the options below)	Step 2 (type the first few letters of a word in the box)	Step 3 (then click 'pick from list' to begin searching)	
PEOPLE				
Persons		<input type="text"/> eg. hill [for Hillyard]	<input type="button" value="pick from list"/>	help
Families		<input type="text"/> eg. par [for Parker]	<input type="button" value="pick from list"/>	help
Organisations		<input type="text"/> eg. unit [for United]	<input type="button" value="pick from list"/>	help
PLACES		<input type="text"/> eg. lon [for London]	<input type="button" value="pick from list"/>	help
SUBJECTS		<input type="text"/> eg. will [for Wills]	<input type="button" value="pick from list"/>	help

A2A and the users

A2A is very popular!

Since June 2001:

- 13 million searches
- 30 million downloads

or currently

- 250000 people a month looking at 700000 finding aids

A2A and the users

We have sought information from users:

- Questionnaire completed by over 6000 new users shows A2A reaching the traditional UK audience for archives:
 - 80% mainly interested in Family History
 - 40% are over 51
 - Less than 5% describe ethnic origin as anything other than 'white'
- So need to widen reach still, but encouraging that 50% say they are using finding aids and archives for the first time

A2A and the users

Evaluation of the site has also included a number of focused sessions with users working with the A2A site and others, resulting in over 50 changes making A2A clearer and easier to use

The future?

A2A a great success, but much has changed in 7 years:

- While much retro-conversion left to do, archive services no longer need the same level of support
- Funding situation changed
 - Lottery different priorities including 2012 London Olympics
 - TNA reviewing its spending
- So no more content generation phases, but securing A2A database for the future

Contact

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www:

www.a2a.org.uk (A2A site)

www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/archives/a2a/ (info site)



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