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From transaction to collaboration: redefining the academic-archivist relationship in business collections

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ABSTRACT

Collaboration has risen up the agenda for archives and universities in recent years, yet there is unrealized potential for co-productive modes of research between archivists and academics, with business collections facing particular obstacles. This article, co-written by an archivist and a historian, presents the findings of a project that aims to support business archivists to develop co-designed research projects that mobilize business collections in rigorous ways to meet present-day business priorities (and so demonstrate to parent organizations the value of their archives and expert archivists). The project involved a collaborative process of workshops, interviews and a survey, which has allowed the project network to develop guidance materials. The authors discuss three key themes that emerged from the process, reflecting the distinctive concerns of archivists working in organizational repositories and the factors that influence their pursuit of academic collaborations. There then follows an analysis of 'mind-set' barriers to collaboration: questions of professional culture and practice or intellectual stance that can influence attitudes to and pursuit of collaborative projects between historians and archivists. The authors argue for an open and dialogic approach to designing collaborative research, acknowledging the constraints and imperatives for archivists and academics and recognizing the complementarity of their expertise.

Introduction

The potential for genuine collaboration between historians and archivists, and particularly business archivists, remains underexplored, despite the complementarity of their respective forms of expertise. This article articulates an argument for such collaborations. We propose that collaborative projects between historians and archivists can enrich research and professional development for both parties and also, importantly, act as vehicles for bringing archival documents and historical interpretation more effectively into the strategic and operational conduct of today's businesses. The latter goal may be a less familiar — and perhaps a more contentious — one than the former. Yet both professions claim there is a fundamental value in the collection and use of historical records — that 'history matters' to society at a number of levels, not least as an indispensable and irreplicable resource for helping us understand and navigate the present.[1] Societal benefit

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is an important part of the narrative archivists and historians use to describe our identity and status as professionals, and to call for posts, funding and institutional support in our respective spheres. Businesses are enmeshed in and inextricable from society; if 'history matters' then we have a stake as professionals and as citizens, consumers and service users in organizations being better able to assimilate and use historical knowledge. Collaboration between archivists and historians holds, we propose, the most potential for achieving this aim — if such undertakings are co-designed and co-conducted.

In the UK, collaboration has risen up the agenda for public and private sector archivists and for academic researchers in recent years. The second edition of the UK's National Archives' (TNA) 'Guide to Collaboration for Archives and Higher Education' was published in 2018, articulating the pressures and the incentives for collaboration. For archivists, an adverse funding environment has ensured that activities such as audience development and profile-raising have acquired a new urgency; retaining staff and services and being seen to 'pay their way' have become priorities. In this context, collaboration has been identified as a potential solution, offering opportunities to harness external expertise in a variety of subject areas with the aim of attracting new audiences and accessing new funding streams.[2]

In Higher Education (HE), notions of accountability and value for public money have driven a new emphasis on the 'impact' of research, defined as an 'effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia'.[3] Impact is now assessed on a 7–8 year cycle as part of the UK-wide Research Excellence Framework (REF), which determines the 'quality-related' research funding received by HE Institutions (HEIs) via an annual block-grant. Project-based bids to the Research Councils — the second element of a 'dual-support' system for research funding — require a 'pathways to impact' statement.[4] Universities have responded to these incentives by creating institutional structures and routes for professional advancement focused on research involving collaboration and public engagement. Archives (as well as other parts of the heritage ecosystem from museums and historic sites to community history groups) have proved valuable partners, giving academic historians access to spaces and forms of impact that are meaningful to their discipline.[5] Other drivers for academics to collaborate with archivists include enhancement of the student experience and access to new collections and specialist expertise.[6]

Collaboration has also become the focus for scholarly work. Articles published in this journal explain the importance of archives forming collaborative partnerships with museums, galleries, universities and other organizations.[7] Some historians have turned to the ethical and methodological dimensions of collaboration; challenging notions of academics as authoritative producers/public audiences as passive recipients of historical knowledge, they have imagined more complex forms of co-production and co-curation.[8] The disciplinary context for much of this literature has been the emerging field of public history, a capacious umbrella term that eludes definition but broadly concerns the ways in which historical meaning is worked and reworked, presented, represented and put to use in the world. Public history has a complex intellectual root system, but the pluralization of the academic field from the late 1960s is particularly relevant here.[9] Social history, women's history and other new lenses with which to view the past emerged in a context in which the hierarchies, privileges and entitlements of academic history were being challenged and efforts made to create an 'open and democratic scholarship' (as it was crystallized in the first

issue of *History Workshop Journal* in 1976).[10] We should, therefore, recognize that there is a conceptual heritage to models of co-producing, co-creating and co-curating history, even if such work has also been instrumentalized in recent years.[11] The same intellectual currents have been felt in the world of archives, with recognition of the role of archivists as mediators of societal memory and the emergence of participatory archiving, crowdsourcing and archival activism.[12]

Despite these convergences, incentives and pressures — and, indeed, the inherent symbiosis of their relationship — archivists and historians have not tended to work in collaborative modes.[13] The opening up of a 'history-archival divide' in the late twentieth century may be part of the picture: the two professions developing different responses to postmodernist challenges and diverging understandings of fundamental terms such as authority, evidence and context.[14] We give further attention to questions of professional culture in section IV below. It is worth recognizing at this point, however, that divides or disconnects between archivists and historians are not just methodological or conceptual but also practical. Archivists most commonly encounter academics as visitors to the research room; the involvement of the archivist will vary according to researchers' confidence and independence, the subject matter and how the archive operates. But in many cases, engagement between academic and archivist is transactional: making and responding to enquiries and requests. Even where the support of the archive is being sought for a research funding application, archivists may only receive an approach late in the process. Academic conceptions of the archive as a space for top-down dissemination of research findings or as a 'tick-box' external partner are frustrating and limiting for archivists (as well as counterproductive for academics themselves).[15] Our sense is that, while academic-archivist collaboration is under-developed across the sector, business repositories face particular challenges; these types of archives are our principal concern from this point.

The project from which this article emerges — 'Academic-Archivist Collaborations in Business' — began with the problem outlined above; it is a constellation of issues specific to the UK, aspects of which will, however, resonate with archivists elsewhere. We offer in section II an outline of the project, turning in section III to the messages that emerged from a process of conversation and consultation, organized under three broad themes: time and resources; connecting archives and HE; alignment with the business. Next, in section IV, we move into the wider professional contexts of academic and archival practice, using three levels — the organization, the archive service and the individual — to explore the 'mind-set' barriers to collaboration. We conclude in section V with some suggestions as to what the key characteristics of 'good' collaboration might be.

There are three final points to be made at this stage. First: the commitment to co-design as a principle of good collaboration called for a co-writing approach to this article; it is the product of an ongoing professional exchange between an archivist and a historian. Second: we focus here on historians as partners for archival collaborations, but acknowledge that scholars from other disciplines could, equally, be involved, according to the project. Third: we use the term 'business archives' inclusively. Many organizational repositories — in universities, charities, cultural institutions and so on — will have much in common with those held by commercial companies, in terms of their operational structures and constraints and their priorities, audiences and accountabilities; indeed, the archivist co-author works for a national arts organization.[16] This article aims to outline a productive space in

which research of mutual benefit to historians and business archivists can be conducted, but we hope that archivists and academics from a range of professional backgrounds and intellectual vantage-points will find it of some interest.

Project outline

One of the authors, Alix Green, has been working since 2016 with Judy Faraday, Heritage Services Manager at the John Lewis Partnership (JLP), with the aim of informing current strategic thinking on pay.[17] The 'Pay and the Partnership Difference' project was, in effect, a pilot for the JLP archive service, the aim being to demonstrate how the collections could be mobilized to address present-day business priorities. Green and Faraday recognized, however, that it was potentially also a pilot for academic-archivist collaboration in business repositories and that there was scope to develop models and guidance to support the creation of such projects elsewhere.

To establish whether there was wider interest among business archivists, Green and Faraday gave a presentation at the 2017 Business Archives Council (BAC) conference, asking attendees to complete a questionnaire at the end. Follow-up emails were sent to the 17 archivists who did so, requesting a phone conversation to understand their particular interest in academic collaboration and to identify the issues on which a future workshop could most usefully focus. All those who replied were invited to the first workshop, held at the HSBC archives in London in September 2018. Eight business archivists — joined by representatives from TNA, doctoral students and academics — discussed the prospects for and challenges involved in creating collaborative projects in business archives. Filming the workshop and interviews with participants allowed their experiences of collaboration, concerns about organizational barriers, and ideas about solutions to be captured.[18] A subset of participants volunteered to form a writing group, which used the information gathered from the day to develop — collaboratively — an outline for a guidance document designed to address the specific needs of business archives.

The writing group identified sub-headings for the guidance document; these were 'tested' with a wider audience through further filmed interviews with business archivists conducted at the BAC conference in November 2018 and an anonymous online survey, which was promoted on social media during and after the event.[19] While the survey received a small number of responses (21), they allowed us to check and refine our understanding of the key messages that had emerged from the initial workshop, particularly in terms of the obstacles to collaboration. The writing group's draft guidance document was then 'workshopped' at a second event, held at the Transport for London HQ in February 2019. Those discussions helped the group to refine the document further and led to a series of short films being produced to accompany the guidance. These films — reflecting the different sections of the guidance and edited from further interviews organized around the working document — bring together archivists' experiences of and advice on undertaking the various aspects of the collaborative process.[20] These resources will be 'launched' at the 2019 BAC conference and made publicly available on the Council's website.[21] The intention is that these are working resources, which will be revisited, revised and expanded as more collaborations happen.

The approach we have taken in the project is as important as our findings: an organic and iterative process of discussion, consultation and reflection — but also a pragmatic one.[22] The group of people actively involved changed organically over time. A small core

team of four emerged, which includes the two co-authors of this article; others contributed when and to the extent they chose to do so, a reflection of how business archivists' professional commitments and priorities can impinge on their capacity to undertake collaborative work. Our hope was that this process of engagement would produce outputs able to give new momentum to academic-archivist collaborations in business contexts.

Findings from the consultation process

We turn now to three key themes that emerged during the project, which reflect the distinctive concerns of archivists working in organizational repositories and the factors that influence their pursuit of academic collaborations. As such, they have also informed the guidance document in significant ways, although the latter — in line with its purpose as a working tool — is structured not thematically but processually, with sections taking the archivist from 'Developing and securing support for research ideas and strategies' to 'Evaluating success'. We draw in the following discussion on contributions to workshop discussions and responses to the survey, which were anonymized in both cases. We only name quoted interviewees where informed consent was given at the point of recording.

Time and resources

The commitment of resources is a major consideration for any organization: staff time, infrastructure, purchasing and so on. Business archives tend to be small units serving 'organizations that are much larger, geographically dispersed, and complex than typical non-profits'.[23] Structurally, they are often adjunct to a larger entity, such as Marketing/ Communications, Information Services or Legal. A few archives are in a position to earn revenue through a substantial licencing operation; others can ascribe a monetary value for their work in promoting (and defending) company brand and reputation.[24] But most archive services are a net cost to the parent organization, which, combined with their small size — both in terms of budget and staffing — makes them vulnerable and constrains archivists' capacity for collaboration in significant ways.[25]

Most obvious among these constraints is lack of time. Collaborative work would generally be undertaken in addition to the routine work of an archivist. Where respondents were familiar with academic collaboration, they tended to have experience of formal programmes such as Collaborative Doctoral Awards (CDAs). These PhD programmes involve a joint supervision team from the HEI and the external partner and so call on a substantial investment of archivist time as well as access to archival resources over an extended period. If there are already 'too many priorities and pressures' — as one interviewee put it — how can collaboration be accommodated? There is certainly potential to create new models of collaboration to address this problem: more agile, shorter time-frame projects become possible once a long-term relationship is built between archivist and academic; sharing of resources with a university can reduce demands on the archive budget; access to HE funding streams can help to fund the archivist's time and demonstrate the archives' capacity to bring in money.

That the collections have a research value may seem to the parent company a less compelling argument for maintaining an archive than using historical records to bring authenticity and visual appeal to marketing or brand awareness campaigns. Yet David Hay, Head of Heritage and Archives at British Telecom, commented that identifying the research value of their archive had opened up opportunities for external funding 'which would be normally closed to us unless we were applying for it in partnership'.[26] Finding and responding to funding calls from outside the HE sector is, however, a challenge; alerts are targeted at academic institutions, which employ specialist staff to assess and disseminate grant information and to assist with bid writing.

The collections themselves are, of course, a key resource for any archive-based collaboration. For business archives, however, confidential and sensitive records as well as uncatalogued materials bring added complexities. The issue of confidentiality is one that can be constructively addressed — at different levels of formality — as part of the process of designing a collaborative project (and we consider it in the guidance). In workshop discussions, some participants suggested that uncatalogued materials are as much an opportunity to be realized as a risk to be managed. As their contribution to the collaborative effort, academics can, for example, produce box lists or finding aids for collections they have used that were previously inaccessible. They can also build provision into collaborative funding bids for the archivist to catalogue such collections, potentially bringing further research projects and funding opportunities for the archive.

Finally, there are some basic problems of accommodating a collaborative partner. Archives tend to be under-resourced parts of businesses and often do not have the workspace or the kit (such as a computer) for an extra person. With the partner more than a conventional archive user but not a member of staff, determining the researcher's status on company IT systems is not straightforward in some businesses: can the researcher have an email account, passes for restricted locations or certain staff benefits that affect their use of a particular workplace, for example? Appropriate protocols may not even exist, potentially leading to access being delayed or refused. These difficulties point to a larger issue about the role and status of the academic as collaborative partner within the company: are they 'insiders' or 'outsiders' — or, to borrow from Williams' work on collaborations in a policy context, 'boundary spanners'?[27]

Connecting archives and HEIs

The second key strand to emerge from the consultation concerned the connections — or, more often, disconnects — between the archive and HE sectors. An overarching issue here is that HE operates in many ways as a closed system. Universities and academics may well be keen to engage more with external constituencies, but if those groups cannot access core information such as research funding calls then opportunities will be missed. Scholarly journals are another part of the closed system. Business repositories may be less concerned than public record offices with providing academic journals for their users but the archivists themselves often need access to carry out research. Company archivists usually have a primary responsibility to their parent organization; internal queries and requests may require archivists to conduct research related to their business sector and beyond in order to understand better the context of record creation, to assist with their research service and out of general interest.[28] Purchasing institutional licences for

relevant journals is often prohibitively expensive for archive departments. Open Access (OA) promises to break down the barriers between HE and the potential users and beneficiaries of academic research, such as archivists. But OA is not a silver bullet. There are major issues for the sustainability of humanities journals, which run on the free labour of peer-reviewers and editors.[29] How 'open' OA is to authors is a serious question. One survey respondent commented that they would like to be 'able to submit journal articles in the absence of academic affiliation' but the charge for OA contributions means publication is 'largely closed to all but academic institutions.' With funding for OA not evenly available to academics, there is a substantial risk that OA policy acts to exclude particular sets of researchers; indeed, it may only reinforce the tendency noted by Adkins and Benedict for business archivists to contribute rarely to professional literature.[30]

A further obstacle respondents identified was finding academics with relevant interests and expertise. Without access to articles written about or using an archive, or to conferences where researchers network and share their latest work, it is difficult, as one survey respondent commented, to 'know where to start about finding someone to collaborate with'. University websites are often hard to navigate, requiring external visitors to negotiate their way through complex and opaque institutional structures to identify which department, centre, cluster or individual to approach.[31] Some contributors had experience of dealing with a university research or innovation office, as staff will often have an index of academic specialisms or at least a good knowledge of individual areas of expertise. We would add one caveat: genuinely collaborative projects will tend to involve both parties exploring new territories and gaining fresh insights. So, finding the 'right' partner is not just about matching an archivist's collaborative project idea with an academic's past record or current interests. 'Mind-set' or attitude to the collaborative undertaking is also important. Limiting the search to academics they already know or to universities nearby is one strategy for archivists but will not always yield the best 'fit'.

'Fit' is, indeed, a complex matter. Business archivists oversee heterogenous collections with many potential routes for business-relevant research. As Jill Moretto, Heritage Archivist at GSK, observed: 'I can only see a tiny snapshot. There is information locked in there . . . [and] massive collections that could be studied for years perhaps but we don't know what is there and we certainly don't have the time to sit and read in that depth.'[32] The challenge for the archivist is to maintain an overview while also being able to 'cut' the collections in different ways to find productive linkages with academic fields of study. A theatre collection, for example, is not only useful to those interested in the history of the theatre as a business, but also to Literature and Performance scholars and to those who work on architecture, government funding for the arts, advertising and social history, and so on. Focusing on themes that reflect the priorities of the parent organization will help narrow down the options (see below), but connecting potential research topics to potential researchers remains difficult.

Alignment with the business

Archivists are not typically involved in the forward planning of organizations. Stereotypes of documents as 'dead knowledge' can make it hard for archivists to make the case for their relevance — and the relevance of their collections — to the present and future of the business.[33] So, O'Toole and Cox's argument that archivists need to become both 'astute

observers of the larger institutional culture' and 'articulate advocates of the archival mission' can be recognized as particularly important in a business context.[34] Collaborative projects are one way to demonstrate how archival collections can benefit the business, but to do so, archivists need to be involved in the production of, or at least become familiar with, strategic documents that express the vision of the organization, its 'direction of travel' and current priorities. Our respondents were generally confident that they understood current business strategy; how to align archive-based projects with that strategy was often less straightforward. Archivists for companies in which research or information management is a primary purpose — in the technology or pharmaceutical sectors, for example — may find it easier than colleagues elsewhere to make these connections (although a corollary could be closer scrutiny of and control over their findings).

The role and status of academic partners is also a consideration for collaborative projects aiming to benefit the business. If partners can be viewed as adjunct staff or quasi-insiders, then they may find the research process smoother and more productive and the outputs better integrated within the organization. As noted above, there are practical and technical problems of space and access to systems, but our discussions brought the larger question of trust into the foreground. Partners may need access to data or documentation held in other parts of the company, for example, or to attend particular meetings. The prospect of academic outputs being published that draw on information gathered by the researcher by virtue of their insider status can add to the sense of risk around collaborative arrangements. These concerns are understandable, especially as academic collaboration is a largely unfamiliar model. Yet without trust — whether it is underpinned by a formal agreement or not — the academic's experience will not be qualitatively different from that of a conventional archive user. In such an instance, the collaborative project is fundamentally undermined and unlikely to produce research of clear benefit to the parent organization.

Reframing these risks was a common strategy proposed by project participants. The independent, rigorous approach of the academic, enriched by the archivist's understanding of the records in their organizational context, allows a new and valuable perspective to be taken on the collections. Academics were recognized as offering greater credibility than other potential researchers or consultants: a kind of quality assurance that work had been done rigorously and would withstand scrutiny. That assurance serves important purposes: to underpin particular claims or narratives made by a company — which may otherwise be treated with scepticism — and, further, to foster a sense of transparency. Being seen to be transparent about 'history and all aspects of … [the] past is only good in building up trust in the company so in that sense having an academic from outside … is very good for the business'.[35]

Willingness to be transparent about the corporate past is now extending to what Ted Ryan, Archives and Heritage Brand Manager for Ford, called the 'tough questions'.[36] Through commissioned histories, German companies have been addressing charges that they profited from the Aryanization of Jewish businesses, forced and concentration-camp labour, and the exploitation of occupied territories as well from providing the industrial architecture of the Holocaust — to varying assessments from scholarly reviewers.[37] UK and US businesses have been under less pressure to deal openly with what are, for them, troublesome pasts, such as the enslavement of and trade in millions of Africans and the exploitation of indigenous peoples and colonial subjects.[38] But there is

certainly some evidence that companies are recognizing the benefits of a more open and critical approach to their own history.[39] The opportunity — and the challenge — in terms of academic-archivist collaboration is to ensure that integrity and honesty in the use and interpretation of the records are part of the project design conversations with internal stakeholders from the outset.

Cultural and professional contexts

There is an understandable tendency to see projects purely in logistical terms: agreements, resources, milestones, deliverables and so on. Business archivists are often accustomed to this terminology, not least because it is a language spoken within their organizations. Our guidance document aims to give archivists starting-points for approaching the practical and operational aspects of collaborative projects, yet we recognize that an effective collaboration also draws on factors that are not amenable to project control measures. So, this section is concerned with what we are terming issues of 'mind-set': those often-uninspected matters of professional practice or intellectual stance that can influence attitudes to and pursuit of collaborative projects. Our sense is that both historians and archivists need to be open to some re-orienting of their own modes and habits of working — as well as their engagement with each other — if we are to make collaboration a more common and mutually beneficial activity.

That historians and archivists tend to read different journals, belong to different associations and attend different conferences acts to reinforce potential misperceptions and limit the opportunities for creative dialogue. Yet it is striking that the two communities have been confronting the same sets of challenges to the validity of their work, albeit in parallel rather than in dialogue. Particular attention has been given by scholars in both fields to the postmodernist depriviledging of 'historical scraps': those traces of the past that had formerly been ascribed a privileged status as windows on the knowable past.[40] To question the meaningfulness of the record — and the neutrality of the archivist in appraising and submitting it to archival organization — is also to question the authority of any explanatory claims derived by historians from its contents; there were efforts to resist these arguments within both professions.[41] Yet the postmodernist challenge also nourished efforts to democratize practice; the de-centring of the historian and the archivist created space for new forms of agency that in turn could formulate new, multiple and multi-vocal narratives through collaborative undertakings.

The relationship between historians and archivists has been inflected — but not profoundly influenced — by these parallel re-examinations of practice. Historians have certainly been interested in the constructed nature of the archive (singular), its role as a repository of memory and identity, and the silences that record creation imposes.[42] There have also been reflections on archival 'encounters', challenging the privileged status of formal written records and reading new and subversive narratives against the grain of power.[43] Within this diverse work, historians are self-conscious and politically-attuned users of the archive, but users nonetheless; archivists may be present to administrate those encounters — or, indeed, to hinder or divert them.[44] The critical stance *on* the archive cannot, we would argue, easily integrate perspectives from *within* the archives as operational sites of professional practice and from archivists as active mediators of historical records. These are, by contrast, central concerns for archival studies scholars and

practising archivists, who proceed from 'archives — emphasis on the "s" — [as] collections of records, material and immaterial, analog and digital … the institutions that steward them, the place where they are physically located, and the processes that designated them "archival".'[45]

The tendency for historians to view the archive from the standpoint of the critical user becomes something of a challenge in the context of collaborative modes of research. Such approaches rely, we suggest, on mutual recognition of the partners' contexts of practice, the distinctive contributions they can make to the collective endeavour and the purposes they envisage for it. To view archivists as administrators of historians' archival encounters is potentially to miss (to disregard?) the complex organizational realities within which they are operating and the multiple audiences and accountabilities they must manage to ensure continuity of staffing and core functions (particular pressures in business collections). This inattention on the part of historians finds, perhaps, its equivalent where archivists retain latent misgivings about sharing 'their' content; this sense of proprietorship may be more pronounced in business archives given that companies do, indeed, own the records and are not required to open them to researchers. While archivists may have genuine concerns about mis-crediting of sources or lack of understanding of (or respect for) archival processes, there is certainly scope for a more open-minded approach to access, which recognizes and welcomes alternative ways of thinking or approaching materials from academics and others.

The limited interest in archives as workplaces and in archivists as practitioners has some important consequences. 'Time in the archives' retains its status as a marker of historical scholarship but the archivist's role in mediating access to and contextualization of the records is not usually visible in the historian's final outputs (a mention in the acknowledgements section of a publication is a professional courtesy, but the archives' presence is a marginal one). Cook's argument that 'the archivist is an active agent shaping the archive, a mediator and interpreter of meaning' is well-established in the archive world, yet historians have been slow to recognize and respond, especially in terms of engaging archivists as partners in research processes.[46] The characterization of archivists as gatekeepers obscures the distinctiveness and complementarity of their skills to those of historians and so also, we argue, the potential for genuinely collaborative work. This difficulty is compounded in the case of business archives, where both records and recordkeepers may be regarded by the historian with scepticism.

How do we account for this? While some historians have given serious attention to how, why and with whom we collaborate, these are not yet mainstream concerns within the discipline.[47] Engagement with non-academic audiences may be regarded as simply the dissemination of findings rather than an on-going conversation that shapes the research design itself. Even where research is conceptualized as a genuinely cooperative, negotiated enterprise, informed by fundamental intellectual commitments and values, there can be notable and problematic asymmetries in historians' collaborative inclinations (and disinclinations, among which we see engagement with businesses and business archives). It may be that academic historians are generally most familiar with local and county record offices and national collections — an affinity first established at undergraduate level — but this cannot fully explain why such forms of co-creation and co-production with archives as exist are focused on the public sector.

Seeking a fuller explanation of this lost potential for academic-archivist collaboration in business contexts requires us, we propose, to understand the issue at different organizational levels. That is, identifying the entity with which a particular problem is associated (or imagined) gives us clues as to how to address or confront it. So, does the concern lie with the company itself, for example, its environmental record? Is it with the archive service as an operational unit balancing business interests with researcher access? Or is it with the archivist, paid by the company but also responsible for upholding professional standards? These questions may be framed in rather simplistic terms, but they serve to show the value of thinking in terms of levels, given the complexities of a business archive's accountabilities.

At the organizational level, a 'business' can be imagined in an undifferentiated way as a powerful entity and so an unconducive partner for democratic and cooperative modes of history-making. For some, the pursuit of profit would alone render a company a problematic institutional partner; for others, there may be concerns about managerial practices or inequities in pay. While there is always space for historians to refrain from a project based on ethical concerns, it is highly problematic if the historian is claiming the entitlement to judge who does and does not hold power and, on that basis, to decide whether to 'share' historical authority. This entitlement is methodologically dubious in two important ways. First, as Frisch insists, such authority is already inherently shared — historians do not 'own' the making of historical meaning.[48] Second, simplistic assumptions about the holding of power break down on inspection once differences in company size, structure and ownership model are considered. Projects located within business contexts may focus on elite or corporate perspectives but could, equally, foreground stories of activism, of marginalized working lives or models of industrial democracy. Decisions about engaging in collaborative projects should be informed and take into account not only the complexities of any organization but also the purpose and orientation of the project itself.

An issue for an archivist at organizational level is their role as custodians of the company's past, which creates twin accountabilities: to the business and to the profession. The latter brings wider obligations; archivists in the UK and Ireland must abide by the Archives and Records Association Code of Ethics, article 31 of which states that: 'Members should act on the wishes of the owners of documents to have them removed from a record-keeping service unless doing so conflicts with the public interest.'[49] They are, therefore, placed in a potentially difficult position when responsible for a corporate collection, given that within operational businesses there are inevitably commercial sensitivities as well as 'difficult pasts'. The question of whether business archivists owe primary loyalty to their profession (embracing the wider public interest) or to their employer has been hotly debated in the US context;[50] we suspect it also inflects academic attitudes to collaboration. Historians could be valuable allies to archivists negotiating a tricky terrain, faced with criticism from within their organization and their profession. Taking a position of remote moral superiority serves no one well, and certainly does not aid the creation of more open, honest and thorough histories of business.

At the level of the archive service, there is a perception among some historians that business collections are 'too self-serving of the businesses they represent'.[51] Concerns about restrictions on academic freedom to access and use documents can contribute to a scepticism about the scholarly value of business archives. For our purposes, it is the disinclination to regard businesses and business archives as potential collaborative

partners that is the key concern. The validity of working in cooperation with those who may be deemed to *hold* and to exercise power, such as businesses, is difficult to establish under this model and may even be regarded as methodologically suspect; is historical work in a commercial setting no different than asking history to 'pay a dividend' in the service of the state, as V H Galbraith warned?[52] Commissioned histories capture this anxiety well; critiques of 'corporate history' as rehearsing a 'teleology of success' have emerged in particular from the Management and Organization Studies field.[53]

The image of the commissioned historian 'expected to write a history that is constrained from the very beginning by the restricted materials they can see' renders the archive service itself complicit.[54] The integrity of the archive function is called into question, not just for academic historians but also for fellow archivists. The presumption of inevitable ethical compromise in private sector repositories is, however, reductive and unhelpful. Archival scholarship recognizes that archives 'legitimize and sanctify certain documents while negating and destroying others; and provide access to selected sources while controlling the researchers and conditions under which they may examine the archival records.'[55] The pertinent issue is what agenda governs these decisions. As Bruemmer has pointed out, public sector archives are not immune from the 'tension between accountability, responsibility, service to your employer, and service to the public good'; it 'will eventually visit you,' he cautioned.[56] The now well-established destruction of government records during decolonization 'to remove documents that were deemed inconvenient, either for Britain or for its collaborators' provides an important counterpoint to preconceptions about business archives.[57]

So, if questions of professional standards and ethics are part of determining whether an archive is an appropriate collaborative partner, it is not sufficient, we suggest, to know whether the parent organization sits within the private or public sector, is profit-seeking or non-profit and so on. The role and status of the service within the company are also relevant. That is, how the business itself uses its archive and how it presents the role of the archive give an important signal to potential partners about how open the collections are and how receptive staff are able to be to collaborative research.

The level of the individual is worth considering because it is where the collaborative labour happens. Projects envisaged as co-productive involve some conciliation of the co-producers' positionalities, their motives and aims and the skills and resources they bring to the endeavour. If the historian is, at some level, sceptical about the legitimacy of partnering with a commercial firm, about the integrity of the archival collections and/or about the professional stance of the archivist as 'gatekeeper' to these 'difficult' collections, then there would seem to be little basis for genuine co-production. The prospect of any collaborative project reflecting company priorities or informing company strategy or decision-making — an important objective for archivists, who need to be able to articulate the value of the service to the parent organization — only emphasizes that conciliation. While the consequences (in terms of missed opportunities or failed collaborations) are felt in the realm of practice, one root of the problem is conceptual. Critical inspection of the assumptions and pre-conceptions brought to the project should be a habit developed through self-conscious practice and open dialogue with partners — public and private sector, businesses, government, charities, or community-based organizations.[58]

Archivists also face mindset challenges with collaborative working. Many archivists are researchers or specialists in their own right, which is often not recognized either by academics

or within the parent businesses.[59] There will be archivists, however, who — despite often holding postgraduate-level qualifications — do not view themselves as specialists and may lack confidence in developing collaborative projects with academics. This lack of confidence speaks to a wider issue within public history; even where notions of co-production are being invoked, authority and expertise tend to adhere to the academic. By contrast, partners such as archivists, curators, librarians, artists and so on may be cast as 'practitioners', their contribution acknowledged as valuable but not 'expert' in the same way.[60] As Caswell has argued: 'archivists have been relegated to the realm of practice, their work deskilled, their labor devalued, their expertise unacknowledged.'[61] This reading of the archive identity is, of course, gendered. The 'feminization' of work such as teaching, social work, librarianship and archiving has acted to undermine its status: 'who is doing the work determines what is valued as work'.[62] Approaching the collaborative endeavour conscious of these implicit but longstanding hierarchies of expertise is a first step towards creating a genuinely co-productive process.

Such a process seems to us to lend itself to the building of long-term partnerships — within which project ideas may be formed, developed, discarded, redirected and so on over time — rather than transactional or task-based relationships. We have rejected here academic (mis)conceptions of archivists as gatekeepers; the corollary is to destabilize assumptions about academics as only intermittent visitors in the research room, end-users of the collections as made available by the archivist. If the researcher's role can be reframed, new routes for collaboration throughout the archiving process are revealed: cataloguing and opening up materials for research; making the service more accessible; interpreting collections; and — our main interest — conducting research for business purposes. This agenda is about bringing complementary forms of expertise together, creating an enhanced capacity to allow the archive to work in ways not possible on its own, and to the benefit of academic, archivist and parent company.

Conclusions

Our first version of a guidance document on academic-archivist collaborations in business repositories and the accompanying films will be available for all to use on the BAC website; we welcome comments and suggestions. We wish to conclude this article by proposing three key qualities of 'good' collaboration between business archivists and academic historians, framed in terms of ideas and questions.

First, good collaboration takes archivists' and historians' skills to be complementary and draws on that complementarity throughout the collaborative process. Rather than a sequential model where the archivist's role ends where the historian's begins, we argue for an iterative or conversational approach, in which the historian turns, for example, to the archivist for expert understanding of records not just as archival items but also as records produced by and retained within the business i.e. within their 'pragmatic contexts'.[63] Co-writing and co-presenting are logical extensions of this process and would allow historian-archivist teams to bridge existing professional divides. One way our project aims to facilitate this is through building a library of case studies featuring both perspectives. Together with the written guidance and short films, the case studies should offer a useful set of resources for historians and archivists. Building on this foundation, how can we — as symbiotic professional communities — proactively address the mutual misperceptions, misgivings and gaps in knowledge that impinge on our collaborative potential?

Second, good collaboration recognizes the structures and systems within which both historian and archivist are operating: the incentives and measures of performance and esteem; the constraints of time and money; the accountabilities, reporting lines and so on. Expectations of what each side will contribute to and achieve from the collaboration are better seen as the product *of* initial discussions rather than brought as assumptions *to* those discussions. Preconceptions about resources, capacity or parameters for action on either side will need to be replaced by an informed understanding. This re-framing is also reflexive, that is, there is scope for both parties to revisit their own and their own institution's processes and priorities and differentiate what is essential from what may be simply established practice. For example, a formal Memorandum of Understanding may be appropriate for large-scale partnerships, but are there new types of agreement or resource models which could be established and then used for other projects? Can existing structures such as Visiting Fellows at universities or internships at archives provide a way for collaborators to access resources, networks and funding at the partner organization to facilitate joint working?

Third, good collaboration allows for change. In history, the research process is rarely linear and, indeed, is often experienced at the time as 'messy', with dead-ends, diversions and unexpected discoveries. The records themselves may constrain or divert a particular enquiry or the historian may find a more compelling or significant route to follow. Yet, if the collaborative project is an ongoing conversation, we should acknowledge that the archivist or the research users within the parent organization can also have legitimate reasons for seeking a shift in emphasis or focus. Check-in points can be built in throughout the project to share emerging findings, explore the implications for present-day work and discuss future directions for the research. These discussions occur most productively within the framework of expectations set through the initial conversation. How can we, more broadly, ensure that, throughout the collaborative process, the needs and aims of both archivist and historian are given equal weight and recognition?

We make with these proposals no claim to be definitive or comprehensive and put these ideas and questions forward as a basis for further debate between academics and archivists. Opening up opportunities and interfaces for communication between these two groups is perhaps the most important first step towards encouraging collaboration. Our training and practice tend to happen in parallel, but there is scope to create points of diversion and intersection, such as joint conferences, seminar programmes and professional exchanges such as secondments and fellowships — and the funding schemes to support them. We certainly have common cause to make when it comes to bringing the value and significance of skilled care, appraisal and interpretation of historical records to bear on matters of present-day concern. The conduct of business is intertwined with questions of how public policy is formulated and implemented, how society at the broadest level is organized and how communities function. The hope of historical professionals of all kinds can be that — through our collaborative efforts — this conduct is informed more consistently and consciously by a contextualized understanding of the past.

Notes

1. Tosh, *Why History Matters*, The National Archives, *Archives Unlocked*.
2. The National Archives and History UK, *Guide to Collaboration*.
3. See: https://re.ukri.org/research/ref-impact/ [accessed 24/07/2019].

4. See: https://www.ukri.org/innovation/excellence-with-impact/pathways-to-impact/ [accessed 24/07/2019].
5. The value of a 4* impact case study in the 2014 REF has been estimated at £324,000. Data and analysis at: Reed and Kerridge, *How Much Was an Impact Case Study Worth* [accessed 24/07/2019].
6. See note 2 above.
7. See for example: Evans and Simpson, "Assessing the Impact"; Ravenwood and Zijlstra, "Business Archives"; and Crookham and Wragg, "Curatorial and Archival Approaches."
8. See for example: Lloyd and Moore, "Sedimented Histories"; Harvey, "Envisioning the Past"; Green, *History, Policy and Public Purpose*.
9. See for example: Conard, "Pragmatic Roots"; and Tosh, "Public History."
10. Editorial collective, "Editorials: History Workshop Journal," 2. So, as Ludmilla Jordanova has pointed out, for some, '"public history" is a central part of radical history movements' and so a deliberate attempt to dismantle existing disciplinary structures: Jordanova, *History in Practice*, 168.
11. In addition to previously cited works: Boon, "Co-Curation and the Public History"
12. Cook, "Evidence, Memory, Identity, and Community"; Shilton and Srinivasan, "Participatory Appraisal and Arrangement"; Stevens, Flinn, and Shepherd, "New Frameworks"; Eveleigh, "Crowding out the Archivist?"; Flinn, "Archival Activism"; and Caswell, "Seeing Yourself in History."
13. Cook, "The Archive(s) Is a Foreign Country."
14. Blouin, "Evolution of Archival Practice."
15. For a critique of REF Impact as 'top-down' 'soft paternalism' see: King and Rivett, "Engaging People."
16. A useful overview of the business archives sector and its distinctive challenges is offered by Turton, *Managing Business Archives*.
17. The academic output from the project (Open Access): Green, 'Secret Lists and Sanctions.'
18. University ethics procedures governed the conduct and use of filmed interviews.
19. The results can be viewed at: https://www.surveymonkey.com/results/SM-FKTPWZGYV/#.
20. While we are aware that there is extensive theoretical and methodological literature around the collection of oral testimony, the project team did not understand or frame the interviews conducted for the project in these terms (although an oral history of business archivists would be a valuable undertaking). The workshop and conference-based interviews were conducted with specific questions about their professional practice and the barriers to collaboration. The interviews for the short films invited archivists to describe examples from their career of specific issues or points raised in the guidance, on which they had chosen to speak.
21. Please refer to https://www.businessarchivescouncil.org.uk/ for further details on the resources once they are made available (due November 2019).
22. Although not our concern here, a valuable project could use social-science methods to look at the sociology of historian-archivist collaboration.
23. Adkins and Benedict, "Archival Advocacy," 46.
24. Wirth, "Advocating Business Archives"; Ataman, "Archives Mean Money."
25. Bruemmer sees the corporate archive as existing within a 'hostile environment', where poor financial performance of the parent company, mergers, acquisitions and changes of leadership can mean closure or cuts: Bruemmer, "Brown Shoes" 164–5. Adkins and Benedict offer a rough estimate that there is an order of magnitude difference between corporate and state archive in the US in the ratio of archive staff numbers to overall employees: Adkins and Benedict, "Archival Advocacy," 65 n.3.
26. Interview with David Hay (Head of Heritage and Archives, BT), conducted 14/11/2018 by Alix Green.
27. Williams, *Collaboration in Public Policy*.
28. Marini, "Archivists, Librarians," 26.
29. On the complexities of OA in the humanities, see: Royal Historical Society, *Plan S*.
30. Adkins and Benedict, "Archival Advocacy," 47.

31. Burns and Squires, *Embedding Public Engagement*.
32. Interview with Jill Moretto (Heritage Archivist, GSK), conducted 15/11/2018 by Alix Green.
33. On 'dead knowledge': Cox, *Archives and Archivists*, 194.
34. O'Toole and Cox, *Understanding Archives & Manuscripts*, 115.
35. Interview with Sebastian Wormell (Archivist, Harrods), conducted 15/06/2018 by Alix Green.
36. Interview with Ted Ryan (Archives and Heritage Brand Manager, Ford Motor Company), conducted 14/06/2019 by Alix Green.
37. Booth et al., "Accounting for the Dark Side"; Gregor, "Big Business." Gregor was acerbic in his review of Krupp's efforts to present itself as 'a victim of history, not one of its perpetrators': Gregor, "Buddenbrooks on the Ruhr."
38. As Stephens has pointed out, the abuses and exploitation that characterized corporate conduct during the Holocaust are 'not a relic of the past', nor confined to German businesses: Stephens, "Amorality of Profit." See also: Biondi, "Rise of the Reparations."
39. See for example: Hammond, Arnold and Clayton, "Recounting a Difficult Past"; Markley, "Coca-Cola Company Archives."
40. Ankersmit, "Historiography and Postmodernism," 149.
41. For example: Evans, *In Defence of History*; and Brothman, "Declining Derrida."
42. For example: Steedman, *Dust*; and Decker, "Silence of the Archives."
43. Burton, *Archive Stories*.
44. MacNeil, "Review "Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and The Writing Of History" Antoinette Burton (ed.)."
45. Caswell, "The Archive."
46. Cook's Foreword to Ridener, *From Polders to Postmodernism*, xvii.
47. In addition to work already cited, oral history has provided a conducive methodological framework for collaborative historical projects, see, for example, the articles in special feature on the theme of 'shared authority' in *Oral History Review*, vol. 30, no. 1 (2003).
48. Frisch, *Shared Authority*.
49. Archives and Records Association (UK and Ireland), *Code of Ethics*.
50. See Bruemmer's discussion of 'Raisingate': Bruemmer, "Brown Shoes," 162–3, 170 n. 18.
51. Greenwood and Ingram, "Sources and Resources."
52. Galbraith, *Introduction*, 59.
53. Delahaye et al., "Genre of Corporate History." The notion of 'rhetorical history' has also emerged: works, usually commissioned by a corporation, which aim to 'valorize the corporation and advance its purposes': Suddaby, Foster and Quinn Trank, "Rhetorical History."
54. Jordanova, *History in Practice*, 184.
55. Jimerson, "Embracing the Power," 20.
56. Bruemmer, "Brown Shoes," 168.
57. Sato, "Operation Legacy." See also: Banton, "Destroy? 'Migrate'? Conceal?"
58. On 'reflexive critique' see: Antonacopoulou, "Beyond Co-production."
59. Marini, *Sources and Methodology*, 162.
60. Dingwall has argued that archiving shares characteristics with the 'semiprofessions': "Trusting archivists," 18. The term is from Etzioni ed., *Semi-professions*. Of particular relevance here is the chapter by Simpson and Simpson, "Women and Bureaucracy."
61. Caswell, "The Archive."
62. Shirazi, *Reproducing the Academy*. See also: Moravec, "Feminist Research Practices." The gendering of public history as feminine (and 'academic' history as masculine) adds interesting complexity to the understanding of historian-archivist collaboration and co-production. On 'feminization' of public history: Meringolo, "Capturing the Public Imagination."
63. Adapting Blair's term in "Knowledge Management." See also Loew on the 'advantages of partisanship': "Do Archivists?" 32–4.

Acknowledgments

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