

Institution: University of Essex		
Unit of Assessment: 28 History		
Title of case study: Advancing business objectives, protecting archive services, and transforming professional practice in business archiving		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: September 2016 - December 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Alix R. Green	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Senior Lecturer in History	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: September 2016 - present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: September 2016 - December 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>Business archives are valuable resources, not just in historical terms but as unique, irreplicable organisation-specific assets. They are, however, vulnerable to cuts and closure, and even more so in the context of COVID-19. Using a distinctive, co-designed approach, Green's research has shown business archivists how to demonstrate the business benefits of their holdings through targeted academic collaborations. A collaborative project with the John Lewis Partnership (JLP) Heritage Centre and Archives proved this concept, influencing JLP's attitudes to risk, experimentation and Partner reward in pay policy at senior level. Further, this success helped protect the archive service within the business and advocate effectively for wider use of the collections. Green's research also led to and informed a co-productive process that generated guidance materials tailored to the particular needs of the business archive community. This work increased the profile of archive services within their holding businesses and enhanced professional practice. The guidance materials are hosted by the Business Archives Council and have been adopted for the training of new archive professionals.</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>Green's work examines ways in which historians can work with external partners by integrating their needs into research from the design stage onwards, to the mutual benefit of both parties and without compromising scholarly standards. While originally focused on government policy, she has argued for the wider applicability of her approach to other decision-making contexts, including businesses. These arguments have also been made in the context of education; she made a broad case for scholars, archivists and educators shifting from a model of delivering inert historical information to their audiences to one involving active, open and collaborative relationship-building in 'Professional identity and the public purposes of history' [R1].</p> <p>The key insight from her research on history and policy was that historians have most to contribute when working on the 'inside' of non-academic organisations. In September 2016, at the start of her employment at Essex, Green used this central idea to shape a new collaboration with the John Lewis Partnership (JLP) Archives and Heritage Centre. The JLP archives consist of objects, photographic collections, textile designs and business documents, including the UK's longest-standing internal magazine, the <i>Gazette</i>, first published in 1918.</p> <p>Green conducted extensive, original research in the company archives, and in constant dialogue with the archives team. The resulting research focused on the blacklisting of the Partnership and the politics of pay in 1970s Britain [R2] and demonstrated the importance of business archives to political historians. It added to current scholarly debates reappraising the 1970s and to work on the intersections between history, policy and management and organisation studies. Importantly, this research established an authoritative academic platform from which to demonstrate the value of archival material to the JLP Personnel Leadership Team's (PLT) discussions on present-day pay policy.</p> <p>Green's research demonstrated to JLP the business value of its historical collections, when mobilised in a rigorous way to answer questions of present-day relevance. She recognised,</p>		

however, that her work raised broader questions of method and practice for both historians and archivists. To explore these issues, Green co-authored a peer-reviewed article, 'From transaction to collaboration' [R3] with the Head Archivist of the National Theatre (NT). This article offered an original, theoretically- and methodologically-informed, cross-disciplinary analysis of the barriers to collaboration between historians and business archivists. It addressed questions of professional culture and practice, and proposed an agenda for 'good' collaboration based on an open and dialogic approach to research design. This approach acknowledges the different constraints and imperatives of the two communities of practice while recognising the complementarity of their expertise. The article proposed a method to mobilise business collections in rigorous ways to meet present-day business priorities, and so to demonstrate to parent organisations the value of their archives and of expert company archivists [R3].

3. References to the research (can be supplied by HEI on request)

R1. Green, A. R. 2018. 'Commentary: professional identity and the public purposes of history'. In M. Demantowsky (ed.), *Public History and School: International Perspectives*. Basel, Switzerland: DeGruyter <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110466133-012>

R2. Green, A. R. 2019. "“Secret lists and sanctions”": the blacklisting of the John Lewis Partnership and the politics of pay in 1970s Britain'. In *Twentieth Century British History*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/tcbh/hwy056>

R3. Green, A. R. & Lee, E. 2019. 'From transaction to collaboration: redefining the academic-archivist relationship in business collections'. In *Archives and Records*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23257962.2019.1689109>

Rigorous peer-review processes in place for the journals *Twentieth-Century British History* (article R2 submitted as output to REF2021) and *Archives and Records* provide clear assurance that the co-designed approach to Green's research on pay and the cross-disciplinary co-writing of Green and Lee's article on academic-archivist collaboration meet scholarly standards of research quality. Lee is Head Archivist at The National Theatre. The edited collection, *Public History and School* underwent an extensive and exacting open peer-review process under the direction of international editors and the established German academic press, DeGruyter.

4. Details of the impact

Green's research has led to specific business benefits for JLP and for the JLP Archives through their collaborations. It has also created benefits for the wider business archive community through enhancements to professional practice and to the profile of individual archive services with internal stakeholders.

Influencing pay strategy in the John Lewis Partnership

After a preliminary stage in Autumn 2016, the main phase of Green's co-designed research with the JLP Heritage Centre & Archives was carried out in 2017-18. Unusually for an academic history project, it demonstrated to an executive leadership team how research using the archives could directly inform their present-day work. The research on pay policy in the Partnership provided a lost historical context which reframed present-day thinking within the Personnel Leadership Team (PLT). Leading a discussion at their quarterly strategy meeting in June 2019, Green helped them, as the Director (Personnel, John Lewis) put it, to 'draw a line from the debates we're having today right back to... periods of time and critical decisions... Sometimes we spend a lot of time thinking that we're having these thoughts for the first time... so I think actually having courage in what we've managed to achieve previously will really start to influence the context in which we make decisions' [S1 4'28"]. Green targeted her research to inform the Partnership's thinking at a critical moment for the company, with competitors such as Tesco, Sainsbury's, Aldi and Lidl announcing significant advances in base rates of pay, funded in part by the erosion of other forms of reward [S1 6'45"]. To understand the historical debates within JLP about the balance of cash pay and benefits within the overall package 'really lifted people's eyes and helped at a crucial moment for us as a leadership team looking at how we pay Partners in the business right now' [S1 2'04"].

Green created a short film about her research in late 2020, 'Fairness under Fire: The Partnership's Pay Policy and the Blacklisting Controversy of 1977-8' [S4] to share the research more effectively beyond the leadership team to the 700 members of the People Directorate Google Community (this platform is the main channel for sharing information and discussion within different parts of the business). During the COVID-19 pandemic, both the film format and its topic were especially pertinent and appropriate. The film helped Partners working in the Directorate recognise the particular significance of historical perspective in a context of upheaval: *'During times of unprecedented change and uncertainty in the retail industry, our history is a valuable and stabilising anchor to hold on to while we ride out these new commercial and social storms'* [S5, p.3]. Green's research was not only *'a great tool to support meaningful pay conversations'* [S5, p.1] but a prompt for the company to be a *'pioneer and lead by example in new debates on the National Living Wage'* [S5, p.3].

PLT executives identified further benefits of Green's historical research beyond those relating to the specific topic of the 1977-8 blacklisting. The research highlighted important long-term continuities in the principles underpinning pay policy – such as fairness – while showing how the changing context in which the business was operating provided opportunities to ensure those ideals were still being realised. The research *'reminds us that experimentation is part of our DNA [and] our pay policy doesn't need to be static'* [S2 p.4]. Green's recovery of the company's historical record of policy experimentation to realise Partnership aims will, according to the Chairperson, help us *'be bolder and more experimental'* in delivering what's best for the Partner [S1, 11'45"]. The Director (Personnel, John Lewis) agreed, pointing to how the research will help the company *'rebalance our risk appetite'* [S1 9'30"].

Strengthening, promoting and safeguarding the archive as a key business resource

Green's project raised the profile of the archives as a valuable business resource, changing the mind-set of executives accustomed to hiring consultants for projects and *'prov[ing] that archive-based historical research can be highly relevant, accessible and useful to an organisation if conducted collaboratively'* [S3].

Although archives are often seen as a low-priority, expendable overhead, in the first wave of subsequent restructuring in the John Lewis Partnership, Heritage Services was retained in full and moved into the 'People' Directorate, along with Personnel. The manager attributes this in part to Green's research [S3]. After the initial reorganisation, she and Green were invited back by the PLT in February 2020 to offer further research-based advice (this time on 'Partnership reward in historical perspective'), which *'cemented in their minds the value the archive can bring, that the company's historical records are resources that give the Partnership an edge over other businesses if they're put to use'* [S3].

External validation of the significance of Green's role in securing the sector-leading status of the JLP archives was given in the 2020 independent review of the 2009 National Strategy for Business Archives: *'The John Lewis Partnership archives continues its run as an exemplar in how to advocate for a business archive by continuing its long collaboration with Dr Alix Green to inform current issues e.g. in pay and employment policy'* [quoted in S3].

Raising the profile of the archive within JLP also led to a decisive shift in how the archive approaches its research remit, from responsive to pro-active mode: *'It is now very much a two-way process in which we seek to build long-term relationships with academics that enable us to co-design projects, bringing that intellectual credibility and expert contextualisation and interpretation of the records to what we offer the business. This is very much [Green's] legacy'* [S3]. The co-design model – researchers working **with** the archive service rather than just **on** the archival collections – has allowed Heritage Services to take a more dynamic role in research relationships: *'What this [research] has done is change the balance of power... it puts the archive in the driving seat when it comes to linking up the agenda of the business with the academic research that can be undertaken'* [S1 13'23"]. This has resulted in Heritage Services securing senior management commitment and allocated resources (£2k/annum cash from the archives budget plus in-kind contributions) to support a Collaborative Doctoral Award (CDA) student at Essex to work on the history of the Partnership's co-ownership model [S3].

Transforming professional practice in the business archives sector

Green's research informed a suite of guidance resources, consisting of a concise 'roadmap' document and accompanying short film series [S6], produced in collaboration with a small group of archivists who came forward to contribute in the light of her research. The business archives community faces distinct pressures and operates within different constraints from the larger public archives sector. Already vulnerable to cuts and closures as they come off the bottom line of company budgets, COVID-19 has made the status of many business archives services even more precarious. Green's research offers a fresh solution as indicated in the improved status of the JLP archive. The research has opened up routes to research funding, adding capacity and expertise, and facilitating projects that mobilise the collections to meet organisational priorities. In this context, Green's guidance resources met a pressing need.

The research has improved the profile of business archives within commercial organisations and also enhanced the professional practice of archivists. The Head of Heritage and Archives at BT noted the resources are a *'credible set of resources which we are using as part of our business case to the wider organisation'* and has: *'helped raise the profile of the archive within the company'* [S8]. As the National Theatre (NT) Head of Archives put it, the materials: *'enable archive services to assemble a more compelling business case for archival projects... The materials give business archivists for the first time a framework to design and implement an academic collaboration with confidence'* [S7].

The guidance resources equip business archivists with a new framework that is changing professional practice. The Head of Heritage & Archives at BT attests to their value across the sector: *'Even for experienced archivists, Green's work has significant value as a toolkit to re-evaluate and enhance our practice... [Her] project has established a benchmarking resource for BT and for other business archives'* [S8]. The BT archives has taken active steps to implement Green's framework: *'It has changed our approach not only to existing projects – which we've reviewed to ensure our engagement with internal stakeholders is effective – but also to how we have set up new projects'*. She goes to explain the impact of the guidance on how those new projects are designed: *'One important example of how [the guidance] has changed my practice is in taking an embedded approach, ensuring that the purpose and aims of the project are 'baked into' the project from the outset'* [S8, referencing S6 pp.7-8].

Green's work has been equally influential for archive services with less experience of collaboration. The NT archives had not undertaken collaborative work before, but as a consequence of engagement with Green's work, has now initiated three CDAs and is considering applying for Independent Research Organisation Status: *'Without your project, I would certainly have remained working in a silo at the NT and the majority of business archivists would still be very unsure, even suspicious, about the academic sector and how historians use their collections. You have broken down the barriers between archivists and researchers and your work will have a lasting impact on how business archives work with academia'* [S7].

Green's resources are now hosted by the Business Archives Council (BAC) on its own website and on 'Managing Business Archives', a site it co-runs with The National Archives [S6]. The materials were commended in the 2020 independent review of the National Strategy for Business Archives as the key piece of work at strategic level on academic-archivist collaboration [cited in S9]. Green's work – in the form of a short film [S10] on the resources and including her JLP pay policy research as a case study – was selected through a competitive process to be shown at the September 2019 International Council on Archives Section on Business Archives conference in San Francisco, reaching over 120 in-person and virtual attendees from 14 countries [S11].

In 2020, the BAC Executive invited Green to stand as a Trustee (duly elected) as *'a direct consequence of our assessment not only of the impact [Green] has achieved already within the sector, but the potential we saw for embedding [her] research impact into our ongoing core work as the professional body for business archives'* [S9]. This ongoing impact includes incorporating a session using the resources into the BAC's regular programme of training days for postgraduate student archivists. Through her modelling of co-designed, business-relevant historical research and her *'leading and unrivalled resources to enable business archivists to collaborate'* [S9], Green's work has influenced professional practice in a lasting way. As the BAC Chair put it: *'your*

research impact is unique in having cross-sector applicability and value. As such I regard you as the leading proponent in this field' [S9].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- S1.** Filmed testimonial interviews with John Lewis Partnership Personnel Leadership Team (PLT) members and Heritage Services Manager on the impact of Green's pay policy research (on external hard drive)
- S2.** PDF of responses from further PLT members on the impact of Green's pay policy research
- S3.** Testimonial letter from Heritage Services Manager, John Lewis Partnership Heritage Centre
- S4.** 'Fairness under Fire: The Partnership's Pay Policy and the Blacklisting Controversy of 1977-8': short film produced to share Green's pay policy research within the Partnership (on external hard drive)
- S5.** Table of responses to the pay film (S4) from Partners in the 'People' Directorate, JLP
- S6.** PDF with links to the Business Archive Council and Managing Business Archives websites to access the guidance materials (document and accompanying short films), including example screenshots
- S7.** Testimonial letter from Head of Archive, The National Theatre
- S8.** Testimonial letter from Head of Heritage & Archives, BT
- S9.** Testimonial letter from Chair, Business Archives Council
- S10.** 'Academic-Archivist Collaborations in Business': short film selected to be screened at International Council on Archives, Section on Business Archives conference, San Francisco, September 2019 (on external hard drive)
- S11.** PDF with email acceptance of short film, screenshot of conference homepage with attendance numbers and geographical spread, and relevant page of conference programme