Committee(s)	Dated:
Culture, Heritage and Libraries Committee	06/02/2017
Subject: London Metropolitan Archives: digital transformation update	**Public**
Report of: Assistant Town Clerk and Cultural Hub Director	**For Information**
Report author: Director of London Metropolitan Archives	

Summary

This report summarises progress made since January 2016 in the digital transformation of LMA's services to improve public access to the 100 kilometres of archival collections that it manages. This includes the digitisation of archival material, the overhaul of its public online presence, key academic partnership projects and the development of a more robust technical infrastructure.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to note the report.

Main Report

Background

1. LMA has been steadily improving its digital offer for a number of years but 2016 has seen a step change in the way people in London and across the world can engage with the richness of the archival collections that it manages. The key successes are noted below as well as high profile improvements that will be introduced in 2017.

Current Position

Digitisation

2. The current commercial digitisation agreement with the online genealogical service Ancestry.co.uk continues with several new collections scanned during the year, including membership records of the London Stock Exchange and nineteenth century school registers. The first package of new material was published on the Ancestry.co.uk website in January, adding 385,000 digital images and the names of 270,000 Londoners. Further newly scanned material will be added to the service throughout 2017 and it is estimated that over 70 million names of Londoners will have been added from the collections at LMA by the time that the final digital images are published. This will mean that since the start of the project in 2008 some 150 million names will have been made publicly available through this partnership.

3. Following a period of market testing, senior LMA staff continue to work with colleagues from Chamberlain's and Comptroller's departments on a new agreement for an online genealogical service provider to replace the current agreement with Ancestry.co.uk when it terminates later in 2017. Detailed negotiations are in hand.

4. Alongside commercial partnerships, formal discussions have also taken place with both the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and the Wellcome Trust over the potential for them to fund larger scale digitisation projects. With the Wellcome, LMA has recently been successful with a bid for some £58,000 to conserve and digitise the medical records of the Foundling Hospital. These records provide a detailed and complete account of the health and medical treatment of the children in the Hospital's care from the 18th to the 20th centuries. With the HLF, discussions have centred around the digitisation of the huge quantity of material that LMA holds on the lives of children and young people in London from the thirteenth century to the present day. A key question from HLF is how such a project will fit in with the long term future plans for LMA, not least its physical location. A piece of work on LMA's present and future accommodation led by City Surveyor's and working with consultants who have a great deal of experience in this field, is due to begin very shortly and the report is due before Easter.

Collage

5. The Collage image website was re-launched on 21 July 2016 as 'Collage – The London Picture Archive'. The website, which had been in essence the same one as had been introduced in the 1990s, was completely redesigned and rebuilt, particularly taking into account the views of users and a review of current industry standards.

6. Over 80,000 photographs and prints from the collections were digitised to provide high quality 'deep zoom' images within the new website viewer. New collections were added for the launch, including a unique set of photographs of the construction of Tower Bridge, images of the Great Fire of 1666 and a set of compelling photos of Victorian street life. The website now provides free access to over a quarter of a million images of London dating from 1450 to the present day – probably the largest collection of images of the capital in the world.

7. Among the new features of the site, the London Picture Map provides a unique way to access images of buildings and places which no longer exist, presenting a searchable vision of a lost London which allows visitors to view pictures of their neighbourhood on a contemporary Google map. Commercial processes have also been improved, reducing the number of 'clicks' necessary to make a purchase and providing online calculators for image licensing enquiries. Film material has also been added to the site for the first time.

8. The launch of the new website was widely reported in both local and national media, with pieces filmed at LMA for BBC London News, ITV London News and London Live. Online and print coverage included the Evening Standard, The Guardian, Time Out and The Londonist. In the wake of this publicity in the month

following the launch, visitors to the website increased by 2400% to 83,091 while image views increased by 1000% to 1,350,937. Usage has remained very high since then.

Collections catalogue

9. A programme of work to improve the LMA Collections Catalogue (the public online version of the catalogue to the archive collections) is currently underway. Given the size of LMA's holdings, this is inevitably a very large and long term enterprise but during the first quarter of 2017/18 a new more accessible 'front end' will be launched to give both the casual visitor and the dedicated researcher much better ways to navigate through the mass of information available on the collections.

    One key strand will be the linking of catalogue entries to digital images of the document (s) described. Technical systems to deliver this are being developed with the Wellcome Trust and a further partnership is currently being started with Google. The launch this year will see 950 'Digital Documents' (around 12,000 digital images) made available via the online catalogue for the first time This is designed to link to *950 years of London's archives*, a year-long promotion and celebration of the archive collections based on the 950th anniversary in 2017 of the oldest document in our collections (the 1067 charter of William I to the City). More information about *950 years of London's archives* is provided in a separate report to this Committee today. Some of the City's finest treasures, including the deed signed by William Shakespeare and Magna Carta, will be available to view anywhere in the world for the first time.

Trusted Digital Repository

10. A Trusted Digital Repository (TDR) is the technical term used for a system that supports the long term preservation and integrity of digital records. This is an increasing requirement for all organisations as they manage material that was born digitally and needs to be kept and accessed in the same way. LMA has been working with the software provider of its archival catalogue to introduce an integrated TDR package and it is currently being tested by LMA staff before existing digital deposited archive collections are processed. As well as providing assurances on the long term integrity of digital records, the TDR will also provide the public with direct access to born digital archives via the Collections Catalogue.

British Library Unlocking the UK's Sound Heritage Project

11. The British Library (BL) is working on the first stage of a £9 million Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) project to save unique and at risk sound recordings kept in archives across the UK. These recordings are those still stored on an analogue, not digital basis; their formats are at risk of decay within the next ten to fifteen years and the equipment needed to play them is equally vulnerable.

12. As part of this project ten Hub Partners across the UK are needed to work on a regional basis in their areas to digitise local materials from archives, museums and other cultural institutions (sending them to the BL to make them available) and run outreach and education programmes and events. LMA is the preferred Hub Partner for the London region in this project and for the last year has been supporting the BL and the other nine Hub Partners as the BL has prepared to submit the second part of their HLF application. This was sent to HLF in December 2016.

13. The BL expect to hear in the spring of 2017 if their application has been successful. If it has, LMA will start work on the project in 2018 with three fixed term staff being recruited to do final selection; digitise; clear rights where necessary and start to plan the London outreach programme.

14. The project will be an opportunity for LMA to play a major role in this UK wide project and bring the service into contact with some cultural partners which it has not worked with in the past. It will also enable LMA to support London Borough archives that hold relevant sound archives by including them in the project. It will of course be possible for some of the LMA's own holdings, particularly those owned by the City of London, to be digitised and made available to the general public.

University of London *Layers of London* project

15. The Institute of Historical Research, part of the University of London's School of Advanced Study, received initial support from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) in 2016 for the '*Layers of London: mapping the city's heritage'* project and LMA, along with the British Library and The National Archives, will be a key player in the developing this multi-partner project to create a new interactive website for London's heritage which will be at the heart of extensive public engagement and schools programmes across the London boroughs.

16. The website and mobile app, will allow the public to create and interact with many different 'layers' of London's history from the Roman period to the present day. These include historic maps, images of buildings, films as well as information about people who have lived and worked in London over the centuries. Volunteer, internship and schools education programmes in the London boroughs will allow individuals and groups to create and upload new content, including photos, film clips, personal memories, and audio recordings.

    Working alongside the project team at the Institute of Historical Research, LMA is contributing digital copies of images, maps and films as well as taking a leading role in developing the public engagement and schools programmes.

OCR and HTR

17. Research into the development and application of OCR (Optical Character Recognition) and HTR (Handwritten Text Recognition) technologies is currently ongoing at LMA as new methodologies are developed to make digitised archives from the collections more accessible and fully searchable online. Earlier in 2016,

LMA joined the EU funded Recognition and Enrichment of Archival Documents (READ) program as a memorandum of understanding partner and gained access to the Transkribus service platform. Transkribus provides access to automated recognition, transcription and searching of historical documents, training computers to read handwritten text in a way that could revolutionise access to archives. An LMA pilot focussing on mid seventeenth century City of London records started in December and we hope to have a good indication of the usefulness and potential application of Tranksribus later in 2017.

Public access infrastructure

18. A new public Wifi service was installed at LMA in October. The service is part of the City's contract with O2 (Telephonica) and provides a significant upgrade to the previous Wifi service, enabling visitors to use our digital services on site without dependence on the public network (PUBNET) and public computer terminals.
19. The public computer network (PUBNET) will be upgraded in January/February as part of the overall programme to improve the system across the City's library and archive services. Once installed, it is expected that the new service will provide a significant upgrade and enable visitors to experience greatly improved (and robust) access to our digital services via the public computer terminals at LMA.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

20. The programmes outlined in this report align with the City of London Corporate Plan 2015-19. The proposals support the strategic aim *to provide valued services, such as education, employment, culture and leisure to London and the nation'* as well as Key Policy Priority 5 *increasing the outreach and impact of the City's cultural, heritage and leisure contribution to the life of London and the nation.*

Conclusion

21. Significant improvements in LMA's digital presence have been introduced during the last year and this will continue during 2017. These cover both new initiatives as well as developments to ensure that support systems are both robust and sustainable.

Appendices

None

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