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# A week in the life



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## MONDAY

Back in the office after a week's leave. Not really a holiday, though – I'm editing a book for Facet (LIS New Professionals toolkit, due for publication April 2012), and took a week off to work on it. I did come into the office for a couple of days – I find it easier to concentrate in a work environment and live close enough to be able to pop in. Whether I've been physically here or not, I've still got a week's worth of emails to catch up on. I'm also doing the Copac and Archives Hub<sup>1</sup> queries all this week (usually shared with a colleague), so I don't get onto anything on my to-do list today – it's all responding to queries or things that have come in while I was off.

These include questions from potential Copac and Archives Hub contributors. As Content Development Officer, I liaise with contributors and potential contributors, talk to them about data formats and check their data when they send it through. We don't make any changes to the content of their data, but we will check to make sure that the MARC fields are used in an expected way and that the EAD is valid and meets our cataloguing standards. We have a description in from a new Archives Hub contributor, so I send them some feedback and a 'welcome to the Archives Hub!' email.

One very nice job this morning is to publicise the inclusion of the Middle Temple Rare Books and Manuscripts Collection on Copac. It's always a great feeling to tell people we've added a new collection! I check that they're live and searchable on Copac, then make their information page live. I blog about the inclusion on the Copac news blog, tweet about it and send the announcement round to various mailing lists.

I'm off to Aberystwyth on Wednesday with my colleague Lisa, to do EAD and social media training for the postgraduate archive students at Aberystwyth University. We have a quick chat

about what we're going to do – we've done this teaching before, but we always like to have a quick refresher before we go, to make sure we're not carrying over anything that didn't work. I also have a chat with Jane, the Archives Hub manager, about some EAD training we're doing in Dublin in December.

My train tickets for the Online Information conference arrive. I'm on the Expert Advisory Committee, and will be the official tweeter for some of the sessions. This will be the first time I've actually attended Online – in previous years I've spent three days working on the Mimas stand in the exhibition hall, and while it's nice talking to people, it is hard work. It will be good to be able to attend sessions this year.

Day ends with me writing my Early Careers and Awards report for the Special Libraries Association (SLA) Europe Board meeting, which is scheduled for Wednesday.

## TUESDAY

Just a half day in the office today, as we'll be getting the train down to Aberystwyth this afternoon. The day starts with me receiving two of the case studies I've been waiting for for my book, which puts me in an excellent mood for the rest of the day.

While looking at some Archives Hub descriptions, I notice that there's an oddity with the Persistent Unique Identifier (PUI): it doesn't always contain all the information it should. I talk to colleagues Jane and Steve about this, and Steve clarifies where the Archives Hub EAD Editor pulls its information from. We realise that this will only happen with descriptions which haven't been created in the EAD Editor, but have been imported from somewhere else, and discuss whether we can add an automated check to the upload process. This goes down in our 'wish list' for technical developments, and in the meantime I'm to write some guidance for contributors.

Before we set off for Aberystwyth, I create training accounts for the EAD Editor for the students. We usually recycle one set of training accounts for all the training courses we do, but decided that it would be good for the students to have access to their account for the whole year, so they could carry on working with the Editor, and even use it in conjunction with some of their later assignments.

Last-minute train preparation is printing some of my book chapters out to proofread on the train, and transferring some documents for a CILIP project board meeting to my Kindle. I'll always try and read on my Kindle if possible, to save paper, but I find it much easier to proofread on paper than on screen.

After a constructive journey, we check in to a lovely guest house, then back out for drinks and dinner with Aberystwyth lecturer Sarah. It's her birthday on the Wednesday, and we celebrate by eating lovely north African food – at a restaurant without a drinks licence! Luckily, Sarah knows where the off-licence is, and we wish her 'happy birthday' with a nice glass or two of red.

### **WEDNESDAY**

Our taxi driver gives us some helpful tips on Welsh pronunciation on the way up to the Llanbadarn campus. We're starting the day with EAD and the EAD Editor, and moving on to social media in the afternoon.

An eager group of students – many of them arrive early and are sent off to get themselves some coffee until we're ready to start. The day will be a mixture: a bit of listening to me and Lisa, but lots of chance for hands-on work, too. We make sure that there are enough PCs for the students to have one each, set up our presentations and make sure that the internet is working and that the services we're going to show are behaving themselves. It's always better to know in advance if one of your resources is having problems – you can prepare for it, and leave it out if necessary/possible.

The morning goes well. Most of the group find the EAD Editor easy to use, and are relieved that they don't have to hand-code EAD from scratch to contribute to the Archives Hub! We ask them to write one thing they've learned about EAD/XML on a sticky note before they go for lunch, and as soon as they're out the door we crowd round to see what they've said. It's a useful way of gathering feedback as it's not too onerous for students and gives us a good idea whether anyone has misinterpreted anything we've said, or if there were any gaps.

The afternoon is billed as a bit of light relief after the intensive morning, but there's substance to it, too. Social media may not seem as daunting as EAD, but it's important for these future archivists to think about how to market their services and connect with users and potential users. We also

talk to them about using Twitter and blogs for professional networking and current awareness, and I get to tell my 'social media success story'. This is basically the story of how I came to be writing my book, and we use it as an example in all our social media sessions. I was hugely embarrassed the first time I had to tell it, but I've got more used to it now. I still find myself being very self-deprecating about it, though.

Lisa had asked the students to set up a Twitter account in advance of the session, and say hi to us using the #hubaber hashtag. We ask them to create the accounts in advance for a couple of reasons: it helps us see who's engaging with the pre-course work; it gives us a chance to get to know a bit about some of the students before we meet them; the students get to have a look round Twitter on their own terms before we start directing them; and they all do it at different times, so Twitter doesn't crash when they all hit 'sign up' at once. That happened to us one year, and we've done all we can to avoid it since.

We get the students to look at some Twitter accounts, Facebook pages and blogs, mainly for library and archive services. They discuss them in pairs, and then feed back to tell us what they liked/didn't like about them. As well as the official blogs, carefully chosen by Lisa, I sneak in a few of my favourites at the end. First is 'Derangement and description', an archives webcomic about EAD and issues facing the archive profession. I feel that we've taught them well when they show that they understand enough EAD to laugh at the jokes! I also show them a tumblr photoblog called 'Black and WTF?', which uses photos from the Flickr collections of many libraries and archives (among other sources). Finally, to show them that personal blogs can be fun as well as informative, I show them Helen Murphy's Library Wanderer Blog, and the Prezi she made for one of the '23 Things for CPD' course.

Some of the students come up to us afterwards to thank us for an interesting and informative day. We don't have much time to chat – if we miss our train it's two hours until the next one – so we say our goodbyes and whizz off down to the station. Very little work is done on the train home – teaching is a tiring business...

### **THURSDAY**

The helpdesks have been busy while we were away, and I have lots of queries to respond to. They range from people wanting contact details

for archives, to people looking for information on long-lost family members, to people wanting to know about our Z39.50 connections. Dealing with these takes most of the day – most of them are fairly straightforward, but still take time to deal with.

One of the more time-consuming queries is from someone who's got an error message on a Copac search, saying that one of the records can't be displayed. This happens occasionally, and we have to check the back-end MARC database to find out why the record isn't displaying. This basically involves running the same search on both systems, and identifying which results appears in the MARC result set, but not on Copac. Fortunately, this was quite a small set – only 19 results. We've had some in the past that have been in triple digits!

I stay in the office after the rest of the team has gone home to get some work done on my book. I find it easier to work right through, rather than going home and starting again. I finally leave a little after 8, having got a decent chunk of work done.

#### **FRIDAY**

Finally, it's Friday! And to make it an even better Friday, colleagues have bought in cake to celebrate the completion of the new Zetoc interface. I don't actually hear what type of cake it is, but it has apples in it, and is entirely scrummy. Fuelled by cake, I make some changes I've been wanting to make for a while to the email text on the Archives Hub website. This is the text that you see when you email an archive description to yourself, and it wasn't particularly user-friendly. I change it into something more informative, and ask how I can change the content of the email itself. Apparently this is a bit more complicated, and Steve promises to look into it and let me know how to do it. I have a feeling it may involve javascript...

I'm still looking into the PUI issue from earlier in the week, and email the affected contributors to let them know what the issue is, and how to avoid it in the future. I then amend the descriptions they've already submitted and add the information to a webpage. It will need a webpage of its own, with information about identifiers in general, but that will wait until I have a little more time to pull it together.

A potential Archives Hub contributor emails to ask whether, in the absence of a proper cataloguing system, they'd be better off cataloguing in a text format or a spreadsheet. This is quite a timely query for us, as we're proposing to start a project in January to look at how we can surface descriptions done in various text, spreadsheet and database formats, and hopefully get them turned into EAD. We advise using a spreadsheet, as the data will be more formatted than in a text document, and can be outputted as xml. I agree to create a template spreadsheet for them to use – if it works for them, we'll make it available to other archives. I spend most of the afternoon hearing about some of the weirdest things that librarians and archivists have ever done! I want to include some examples of 'expect the completely unexpected' in the introduction to the Toolkit, so I blog and tweet to ask for examples. I got some great responses, including:

- 'book a scalextrix track for a client event'
- 'search for any articles on the change in sound as a replacement hip joint is banged home' ('ding ding ding donk', apparently...)
- 'hold a horse while the potential donor of archives examined its leg'
- 'go from one part of a campus to another 2 miles away on a camel'

and, possibly my favourite so far,

- 'wake a tramp with a stick'

A lovely – and amusing – end to a busy week.

#### **NOTES**

1. Details of all the services offered by MIMAS are available at <http://mimas.ac.uk/portfolio/>