Getting off the verandah: managing the archives of anthropologists and anthropology at LSE

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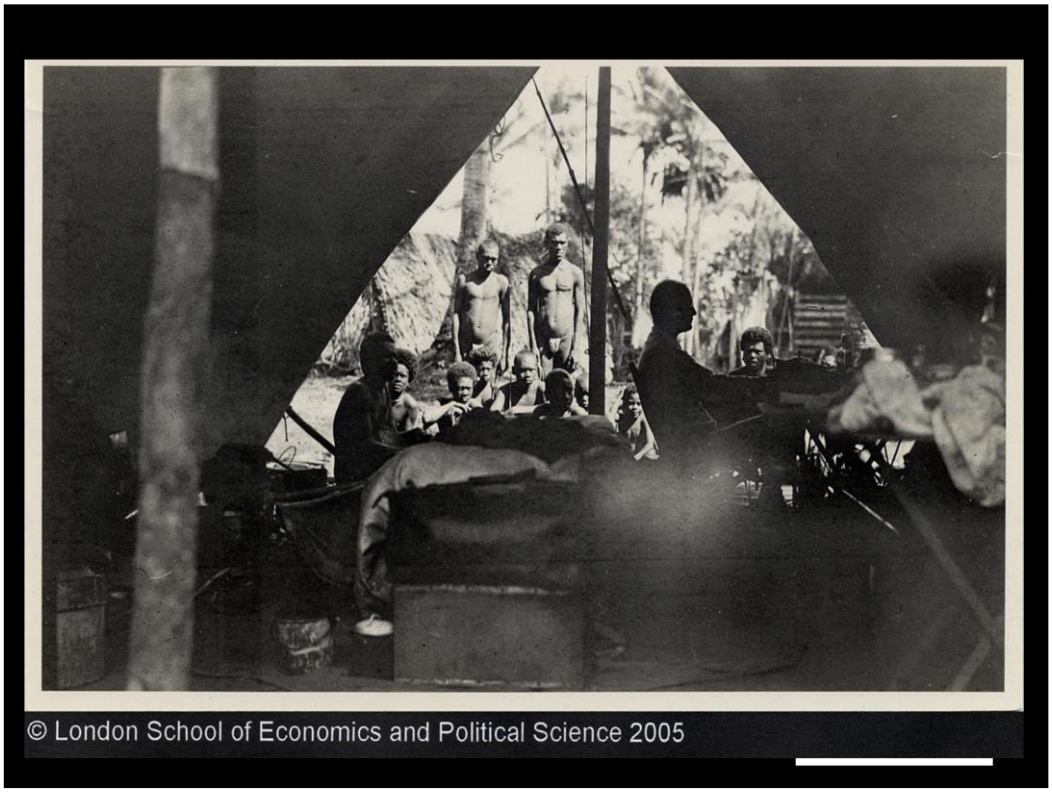
Nanterre, 24-25 January 2013

LSE Library
British Library of Political and Economic Science

Head of Archives at LSE since 1997

LSE large general archive covering all of the social sciences with significant holdings in politics, sociology and economics.



Aim of talk is to give an overview of anthropology at LSE and the anthropology archives.

Talk about current challenges for archives which impact directly on anthropology.

Describe the general coverage for anthropology archives in the UK.

And think about the need to get hands on involved with the work of anthropology archives much as Malinowski had to get out of his tent!

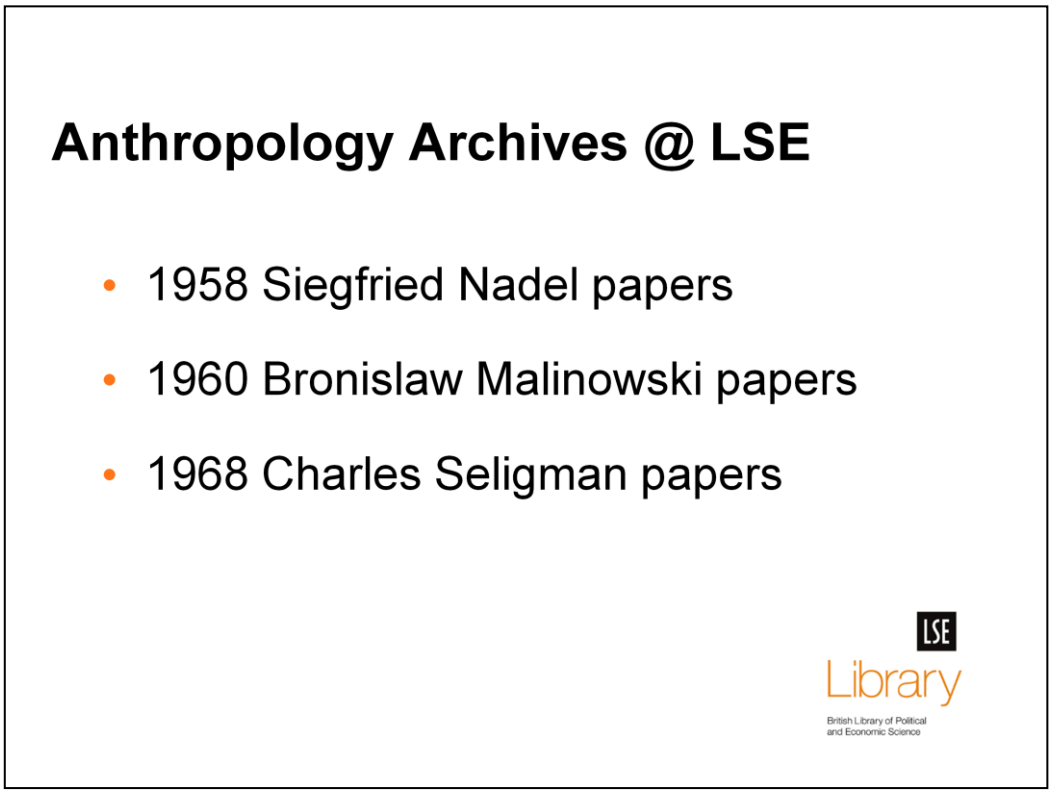
The beginnings of Anthropology at LSE was in a course in ethnology which appeared in the LSE Calendar in 1904-5 as part of a new sociology degree. The course was taught by AC Haddon who had led the 1898-9 expedition to the Torres Strait and New Guinea. The LSE calendar described the course as being aimed particularly at 'Civil Servants destined for the tropical portions of the Empire, and Missionaries'. Edward Westermarck continued to lecture in anthropology for some time.

In 1910 the study was put on a firmer footing with the appointment of Charles Seligman, who had also been part of the Torres Strait expedition, to the ethnology lectureship. The department began to take shape with his appointment to a p/t professorship in 1913. Seligman lobbied to expand anthropology teaching and research at the School, and by 1923 he had significantly increased the number and range of courses available, as well as securing a permanent teaching post for his former student Bronislaw Malinowski. However there were some setbacks – in particular Seligman failed to get the School to commit any money to support anthropological fieldwork.

In 1927 Malinowski was appointed Professor of Social Anthropology and from then on the department was at the forefront of anthropology in UK and further afield – students and staff included Raymond Firth, E.E. Evans-Pritchard, Hortense Powdermaker, Audrey Richards, Edmund Leach, Michael Taussig, Jean and John Comaroff, Maurice Bloch and Jomo Kenyatta.

Today the anthropology department remains a relatively small (or compact) department but with an active and engaged staff and student body.

Audrey Richards among the Bemba people – photo taken by Malinowski in 1934.

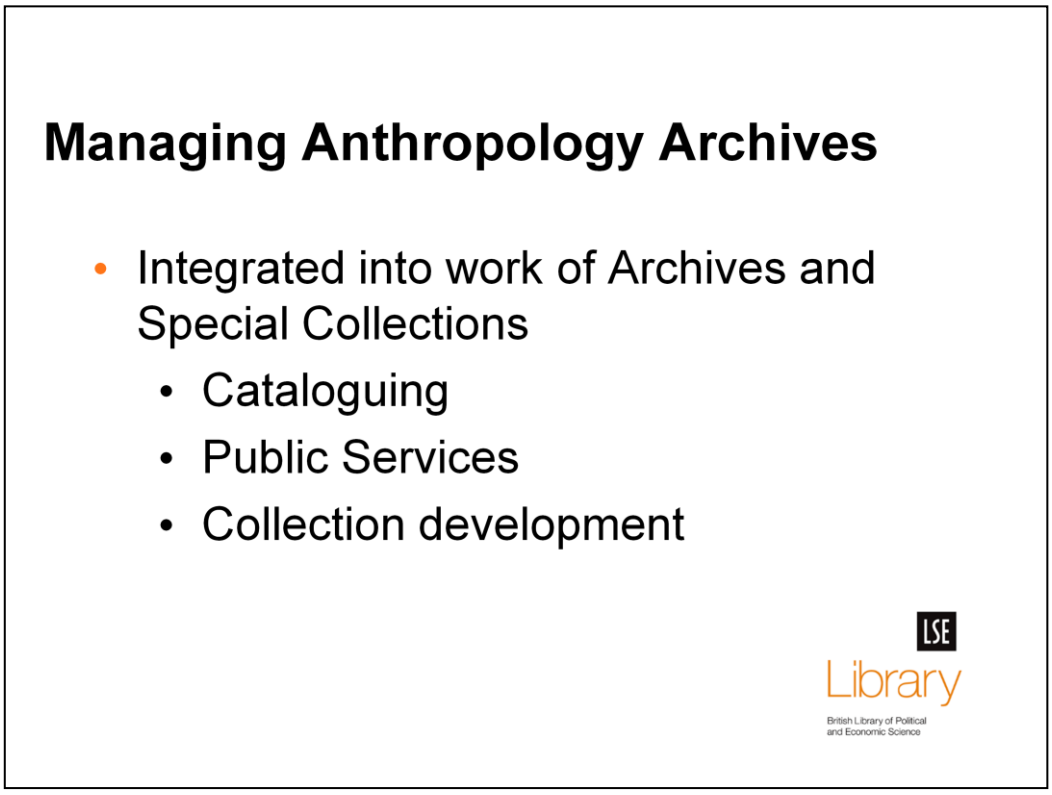


Library at LSE was established to support research in the social sciences and it was always part of the vision of its founder, Sidney Webb that it collect primary as well as secondary sources to support research. The Library received its first archive collection 1898.

However the first anthropology archive only arrived in 1958 with the papers of Siegfried Nadel followed in the 60s by the papers of Bronislaw Malinowski which were returned from the States by his family – and Charles Seligman's papers in 1968.

The majority of the collections have been received since the 1990s showing an increased awareness of archiving by anthropologists and also an increased activity by archivists. Also reflects the fact that anthropologists continue to develop their work throughout their life and are loathe to part with early field notes or photographs that they might use later. Raymond Firth – finally transferred his papers at 93 – saying he wasn't going to write anything else.

Most of the collections are the papers of anthropologists but there are also some organisational records eg papers of ASA, Colonial Research Council, International African Institute.



So how do we manage anthropology archives at LSE -

Anthropology archives are fully integrated into the work of the Archives and Special Collections team working across the social sciences. There are no staff working solely on anthropology archives but all staff must expect some involvement at some time.

Archives appear on the main Archives Catalogue – with appropriate keywords and indexing

Access and enquiries are dealt with through the Archives Reading Room and Archives Services Team

Collection Development is undertaken by myself alongside other duties.

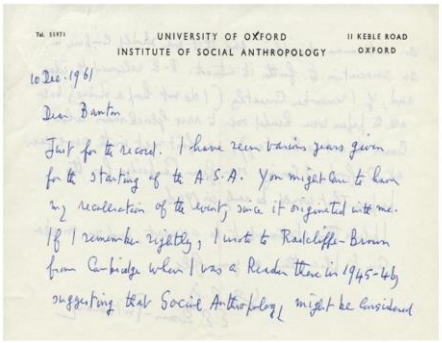
Advantages are that we have flexible working arrangements, users don't always have to wait for specific people, or have gaps in service. Share expertise across the team.

Longer opening hours and better supported reading room

Benefits from developments across the department.

Probably reduced the amount of time we have for doing concentrated liaison work with anthropology department and also for working on anthropology projects.

Current issues for Archives



UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD
INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY
11 KEBLE ROAD
OXFORD

10 Dec. 1961

Dear Barton

Just for the record. I have seen various years given for the starting of the A.S.A. You might like to have my recollection of the event, since it originated with me. If I remember rightly, I went to Radcliffe-Brown from Cambridge when I was a Reader there in 1945-46 by suggesting that Social Anthropology might be considered

- Confidentiality v access
- Digital archives
- Developing new audiences

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The issues facing anthropology archives in the UK, are problem not much different from those facing the wider archive field though the prominence or perception of them may differ.

Here we have a letter from Evans-Pritchard about the foundation of the ASA IN 1961.

Confidentiality v access

- Data Protection Act, 1998
- Freedom of Information Act, 2000
- Ethical concerns

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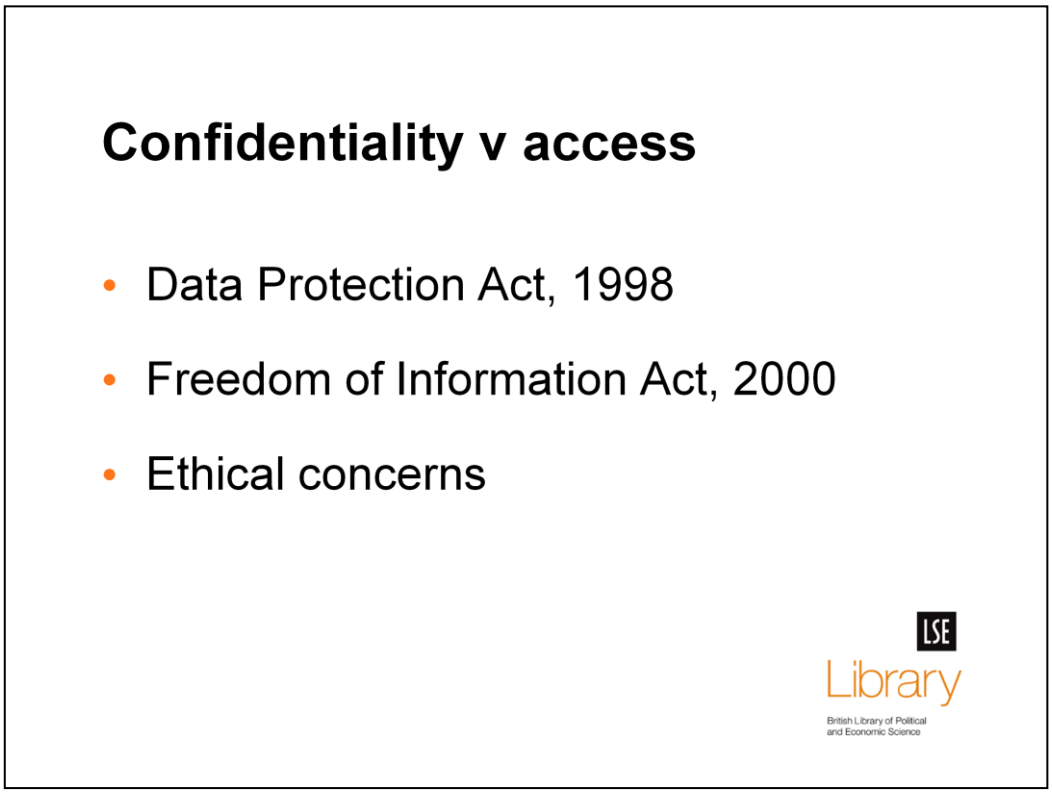
Although archivist have always had concerns about access and confidentiality these have been heightened by implementation of a legal framework in the past 10 years within Europe.

Data Protection Act – placed a requirement on archives to protect personal data relating to living individuals - in particular where it relates to some particular issues eg religion, political affiliation, sexuality, or health. Provided it is noted in their registration research institutions can retain personal data indefinitely for the purposes of research and research can be permitted under certain controlled conditions.

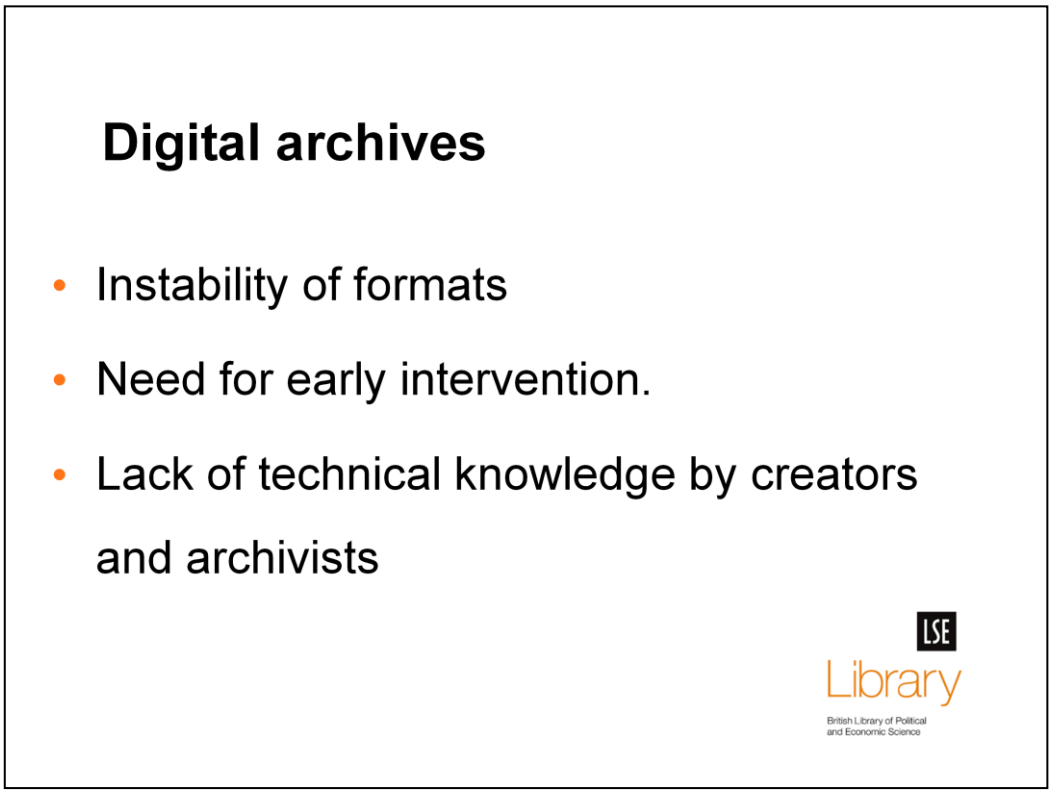
On the other hand FOI permits the public to access information held by public bodies (which includes universities in the UK) unless they are claiming particular exemptions eg data protection. Sometimes there is some tension between these two areas.

This is further compounded by the ethical concerns which anthropologists, and other researchers dealing with qualitative and quantitative data about individuals may have. It is a hard situation – I have had situations where a sociologist was very unhappy about some anonymisation done to her archive by another archive.



Key to managing these issues is developing a good relationship with depositor allowing the archivist to acquire all the information required to make decisions about levels of access to files and also the appropriate exceptions to apply under the law to ensure that confidentiality is applied. One area that can cause difficulties is remembering that the assessment has to be made on the basis of the content of the information not the status of the applicant. So you can't allow access to home staff but not externals, or academics but not journalists and once a piece of information is open to one person it needs to remain open for everyone.

In the UK academics and journalists are actively using FOI to obtain access to closed files – sometimes successfully – but careful handling at the point of deposit can help with this. Sometimes access can be given under clause 33 often covering qualitiative research which will not identify individuals.

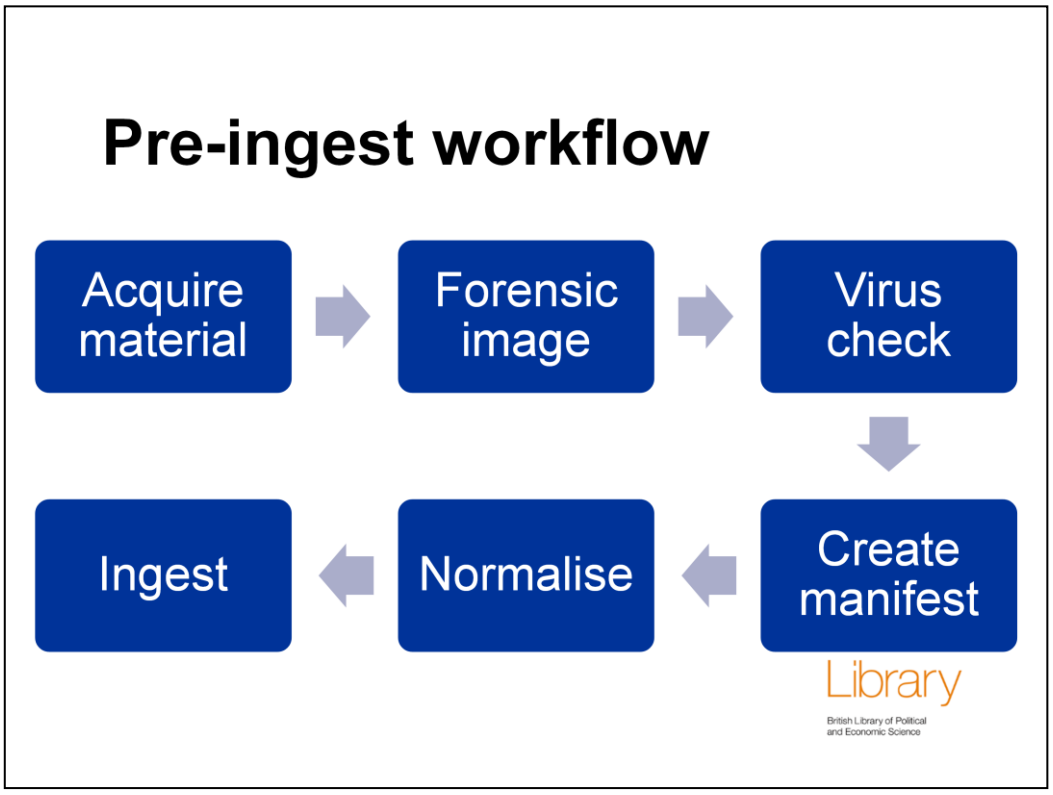


The management and collection of born-digital archives is a major challenge for all archivists – and work has been very slow in developing robust and routine methods of dealing with this.

Everyone is aware of the instability of digital formats, frequent changes and upgrades and the dangers of data being corrupted.

This means there is a need for very early intervention in the management of digital materials if they are to have a long term future – something which the late deposit of anthropology materials militate against.

We've been doing work in a couple of areas and ways on this:



Managing digital archives is a high priority for the library and in 2011 we appointed a digital archivist to work with the library's digital library and repository team to develop systems and procedures and we made the decision that our first priority was to develop systems to manage acquiring and securing digital archives – we will think about processes for access at a later date. We've also spent time surveying existing holdings.

As a result we have spent a lot of time working on our acquisition and accessioning processes.

Slide is an outline of the current workflow for accessioning:

Acquire material usually by hard drive or memory stick – try not to get things arriving by email! – we then take a forensic image and copy that to secure server space > virus check and quarantine > create a manifest of the contents > identify and normalise the files into a preservation format and then ingest/ add to the digital repository.

Access currently on a case by case basis on a stand alone pc in the reading room.

Aim is to develop standard processes and procedures automating much of the work so that all staff are able to handle and manage the acquisition of born digital materials.

We've also been concerned about how we ensure that research is preserved for the future. We are also aware that there is a need to make researchers aware of the need for sound digital data management.

Last year LSE had a 6 month project – DICE - project funded by JISC – supports digital developments in the UK HE sector.

Project undertook a researcher survey and a literature review and produced materials and training for researchers – in particular early years researchers.

Sending your research into the Future provided support for early years researchers looking to ensure that their research materials survive including a handout, training session and an online training course – encouraging some simple steps to preserve items.

Developing new audiences

- Digitisation
- Anthropology photographs

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Within institutions key that we have a clear idea on why we are retaining these materials – in the UK increasing, broadening and diversifying audiences is a key driver for many archives.

Impt to remember that there may be interest in anthropology archives from other disciplines – eg history, international relations, geography, development studies.

Also the important of making many of the records available to the communities recorded and discussed.

Digitisation – development of digital content is important in ensuring the anthropology archives are findable by other groups and organisations. – LSE Digital Library which will be the central point for providing access to digital contact both digitised and born-digital records – among our earliest items digitised was the Malinowski photographs.

Raising the profile with anthropology department had a contemporary projects selecting and archiving contemporary photographs. Asked all staff to select 30-50 of their photographs for inclusion in the project where they would be made available through the Archives Catalogue.

Also some very basic approaches – online catalogues, inclusion in online resource discovery systems – making sure anthropology is visible in wider resource sets eg Archiveshub.

Using the archives to train young anthropologists – something we have not done a great deal of but there should be some potential.

Anthropology archives in the UK

- National Register of Archives
  - 118 anthropologists archives
  - 9 anthropology organisations

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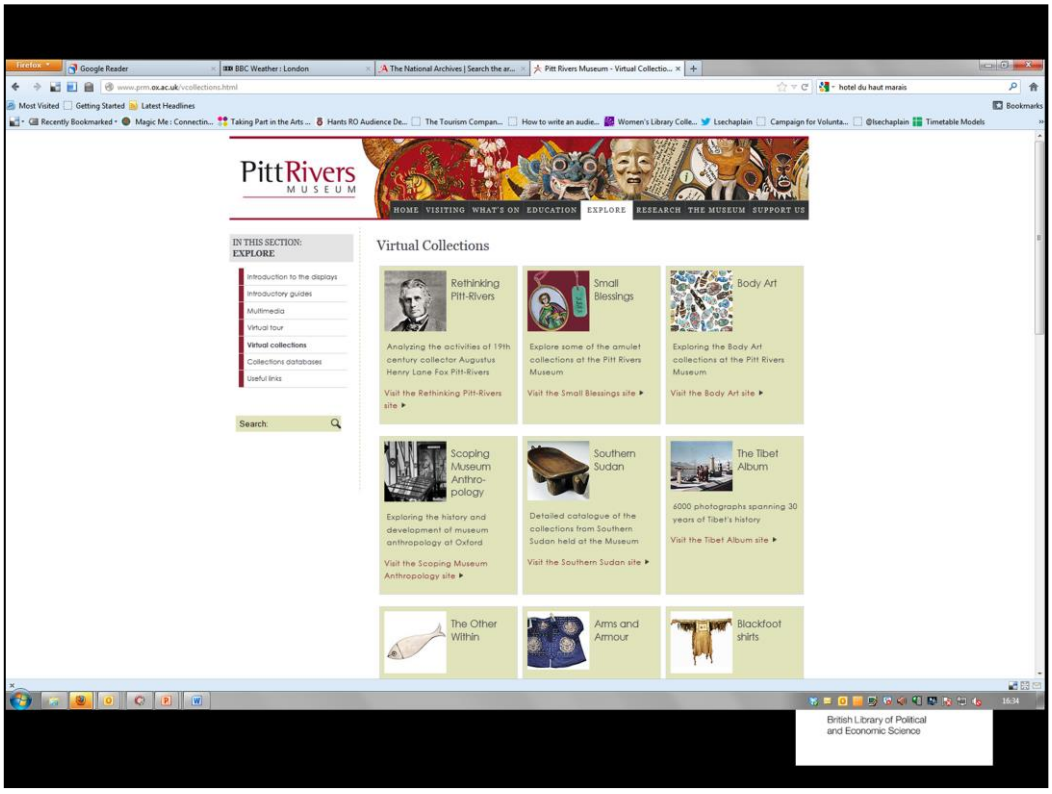
NRA – notes that 118 archives have been deposited that are noted as relating to anthropologists.

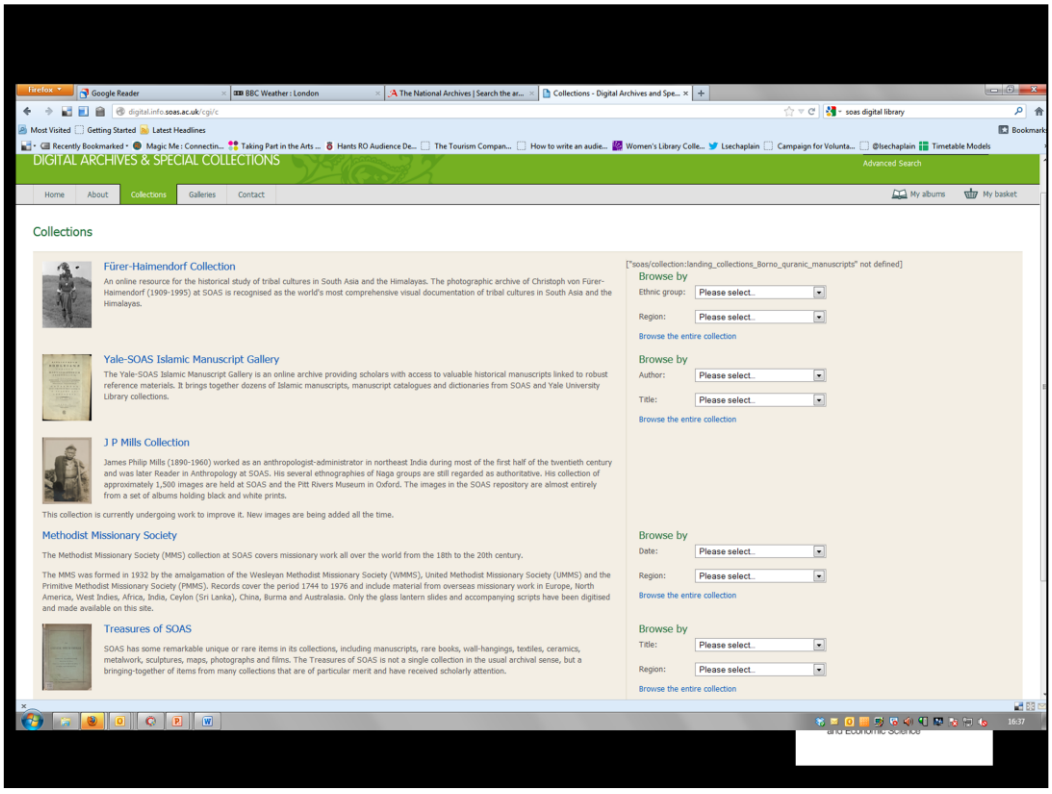
9 anthropology or ethnography organisations

While the RAI is noted as having the highest number of anthropology collections many of these are fairly small and the archive does not have extensive resources although the staff are knowledgeable and helpful.

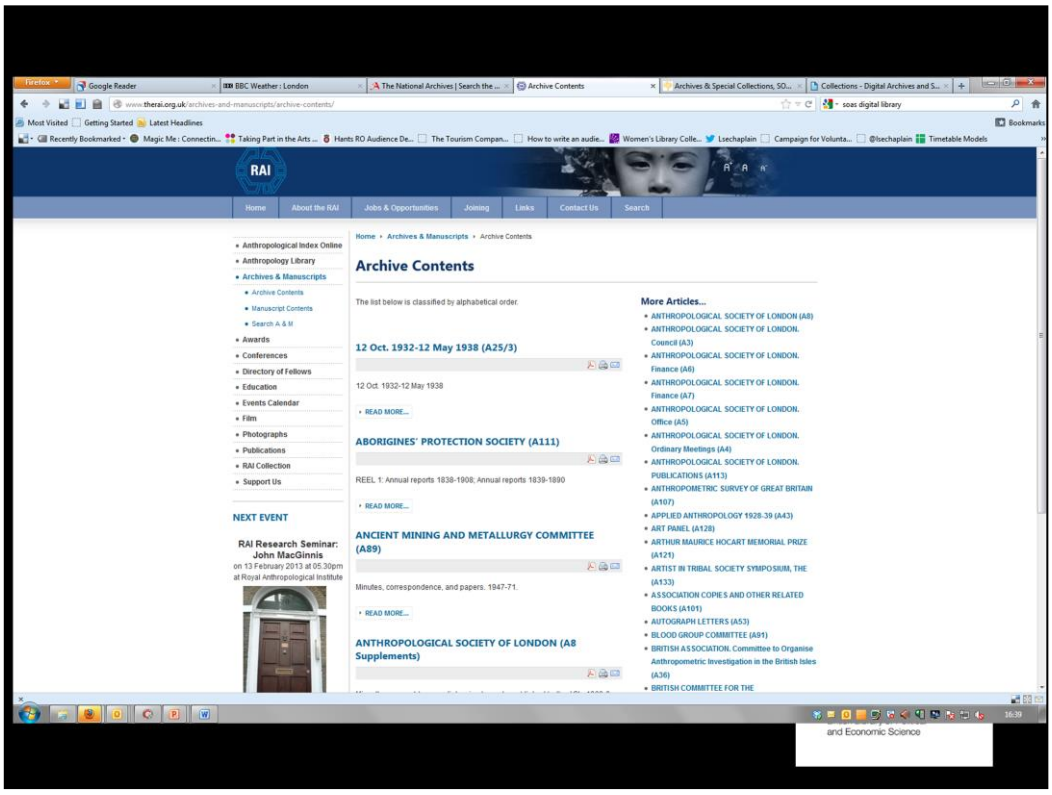
But here is a brief overview of a few projects



A very typical example of the kind of work undertaken is the Pitt Rivers Museum Virtual Collections which allows users to explore and find out more about the collections without visiting the museum. The emphasis here is often on non-academic audiences and Pitt Rivers has just received over £1m from the Heritage Lottery Fund to encourage great engagement with the museums collections particularly in the area of crafts.



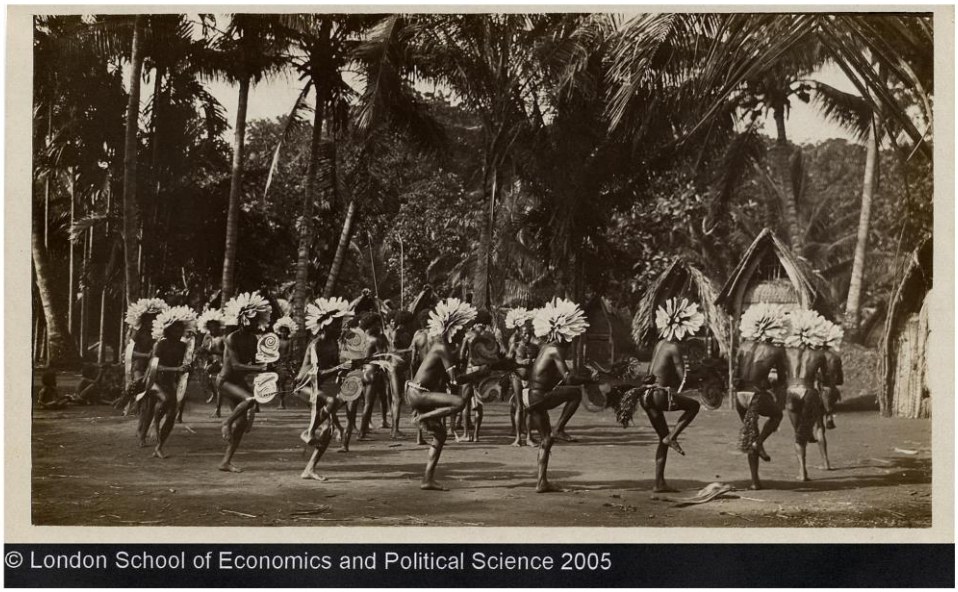
SOAS – again some emphasis on digital and have developed digital colelctions – in particularly the Fuhrer-Haimendorf collection



RAI – put a lot of effort into cataloguing and providing online access to collections in past few years and now have a good and informative site –

Munro project – also been part of a collaborative project between RAI. LSE, Scottish National Museums and National Museum of Japanese History and Historical Museum of Hokkaido aim to re-unite and re-create the archive of Neil Munro on the Ainu of Hokkaido. The project has been successful in digitising a wide range of material but has flagged up the difficulties of large scale international projects were institutions have very different aims, objectives and funding situations. Perhaps one of the most exciting parts of digital work is that look at bringing together separate collections.

Future …..



Future – want to transform collections with digital access, collect digital archives and see a new generation of researchers begin to use the collections.

But key to this is that we must get active and involved with collections, creators and users – must try things out – some will fail and some will be successful but we need to get hands on with the archives.