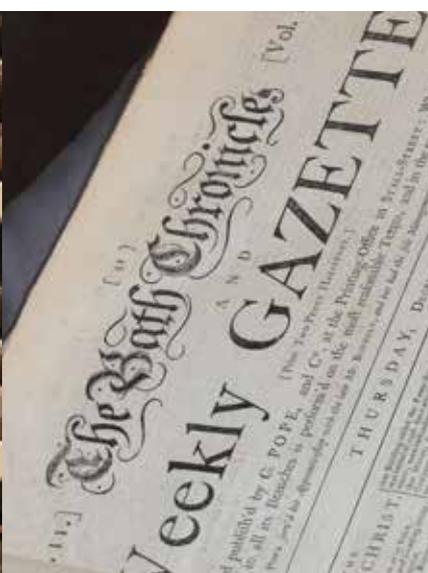


FINDING THE WORDS

Addressing language in archive collections as archivists, heritage professionals and volunteers



Guidance aimed at archivists, heritage professionals and volunteers as an invitation to pause and consider the implications of derogatory language.



Written by Lisa Kennedy in collaboration with the Bath and Colonialism Archive Project

Funded by the National Archive Testbed Fund

2022

Introduction

Language is constantly in flux, evolving to suit the needs of shifting contexts. Ironically, this presents a challenge for archivists and heritage professionals. Due to their practice of preservation, this may appear to be at odds with addressing the culturally insensitive language in archival material and associated material culture – becoming problematic from a contemporary lens.

Drawing from theories of decoloniality¹ and anti-racism² problematic language can be understood as language used (written or spoken) which has legacies of derogatory or oppressive meanings experienced by the group of people it is applied to. Usually, this language is used with little or no context (or warning) provided, meaning its continued use can offend the group of people it is applied to.

The question of *how* to approach problematic language within the very material archivists, heritage professionals and volunteers are responsible for remains an ongoing debate within the United Kingdom (UK).

At both a national and international level, engagement within this discourse has existed for decades but has steadily gained traction within the public domain.³ Connections between archives, heritage organisations and societal inequalities have been increasingly emphasised and scrutinised – partly as a result of the Black Lives Matter global protests in 2020, as well as public calls to reassess how, and why, certain histories are remembered and interpreted.

With several institutions pledging to self-reflect and take actionable steps towards anti-racism, addressing problematic language has sparked divisive rhetoric within the wider context of the so-called 'culture wars' or 'war on woke'. Hence attempts to reconsider how archives are described and / or interpreted are often equated to erasure or re-writing history. How can archivists, heritage professionals and volunteers realistically approach addressing problematic language?

Fortunately, there are international examples of policy changes and suggested protocols available in North America⁴, Australia⁵, Aotearoa New Zealand⁶ and the Netherlands⁷.

However, within the UK there are fewer contemporary examples of resources available to support the archive and heritage sectors to address problematic language consistently and iteratively⁸.

For this reason, there remains a gap in how problematic language can be addressed practically and how professionals – and by extension institutions – are held accountable for ensuring sustainable anti-racist measures are embedded for the long term.

With that in mind, this guidance builds on previous scholarship, centering on a shift away from inaction due to a 'fear of failure' or 'doing the wrong thing' as a necessary component to incorporate within the process of addressing problematic language within archives.

This guidance is aimed at archivists, heritage professionals, and volunteers as an invitation to pause and consider the implications of derogatory language. Particularly focusing on how archival material has been positioned, shared and ultimately valued, both in the past and at present.

It is important to note that this guidance recognises the limitations of the terminology used to address problematic language, which is also always evolving.

This should therefore be viewed as a working document to facilitate action in the form of testing, learning (from success and failures) and implementing improvements via feedback.

This guidance was funded by the National Archives from the Archive Testbed Fund in 2021-2022.

Scope of this guidance

This guidance document was initiated by a network of heritage organisations in Bath, the UK.

A fundamental outcome of this project was researching how three identified examples of problematic language could;

- serve as a case study to analyse the purpose of wording and;
- explore how archival material and other documented records can be interpreted today.

Alicia Chilcott's model of good, better, best practice was applied to these examples, with the additional accountability component featuring as a further step for archives and heritage organisations to take on board as part of their commitment to anti-racism.⁹



This guidance does not address all the identified problematic language raised by staff and volunteers from the network of heritage organisations in Bath. However, this guidance will signpost readers to resources that have identified several problematic terms currently used within archival material and collections globally.

Where is the archive and heritage sector currently?

While this document intends to provide practical guidance when addressing problematic language, part of this process requires archivists and heritage professionals to consider these three questions:

1. Why should problematic language be addressed in the first place?
2. What are your intentions behind your rationale?
3. How subjective is objectivity?

As custodians of historical records, archivists and heritage professionals should be at the forefront in advocating for and undertaking the increasingly important work of contextualising historical thinking, ideas and writing from a holistic perspective.

Applying the two principles of 'provenance and original order' of a record can only tell us so much about the context of an archive.¹⁰ Interpretation is necessary to make meaning of the archival material and demonstrate its significance to society beyond the professional and academic barriers.

The UK's National Archives current guidance (2017) suggests the following when encountering problematic language:¹¹

1. To use an alternative but equally meaningful and accurate term;
2. To include the term but put it into single quotation marks, making clear that it is a quotation from the record and not a statement of fact.

However, this does not fully address the breadth of complexity when archivists and heritage professionals encounter problematic language.

The same guidance does acknowledge the potential harm of repeating problematic language within descriptions, but does not provide any suggestions for determining how terms can be suggested, assessed and understood as 'meaningful and accurate'. In addition to this, which stakeholders would need to be included in these conversations?

Unfortunately, if an archive or heritage organisation lacks experience in house, via lived experience or cultural awareness, it becomes inevitable that expertise from outside the profession will be required at some point. Furthermore, the bulk of description writing remains firmly within the remit of archivists and heritage professionals. This means that archivists, heritage professionals and volunteers draw from their expertise, lived experience – and inevitably their own biases – to provide context through interpretation. Similarly, Chilcott notes 'just as the language adopted by record creators is unavoidably subjective and reflective of a broader social environment, so too is the language used by archivists in describing records'.¹²

Thus, once archival material has been catalogued and interpreted, what is the process for reviewing descriptions as language evolves? And where does this responsibility lie?

Ideally, everyone working with archive material would be responsible. Yet as mentioned in the introduction, there are few structures in place to embed the level of accountability that is required. Whilst archives and heritage organisations have long faced a reduction in funding which has squeezed resources in terms of staff and time, there is a clear need for problematic language to be continuously addressed sustainably.

Understanding why problematic language should be addressed in the first place serves as a starting point to build accountability from the ground up before any endeavours are undertaken.

What direction should archives and heritage organisations be heading towards?

This section outlines a set of broader provocations archivists and heritage organisations need to consider before releasing any plans, policies or statements committing to addressing problematic language.

From both an individual and institutional perspective, understanding the rationale and intention behind any proposed action is integral to assessing the authenticity and transparency of proposed approaches to address problematic language.

Pre-statement evaluation

Ideally, before any statement or policy is written and published, archives and heritage organisations should take stock of their current reality by undertaking a SWOT analysis or reflecting on these questions:¹³

- What statements have you committed to in the past?
- What was the outcome?
- How were you held to account?
- What would you do differently?

Embedding accountability

- Any envisioned accountable actions should be guided by informed intentions. There should be a process of self-reflection and facilitated conversations for staff across the organisation to;
 - a) gauge how problematic language is currently understood and how the organisation intends to address problematic language ethically, and:
 - b) understand what rationale is this pursuit based on.

From that point, the process for strategising, prioritising and ring-fencing resources authentically stems from informed intentions – as colleagues from all levels are included in this self-reflective process on both an individual and institutional level.

Working in collaboration is one practical solution archivists and heritage professionals can take to pool resources together and foster accountability through a purpose-built peer network. The network of heritage organisations in Bath commissioning this guidance serves as an example.

- Furthermore, knowledge and expertise can be found in many arenas – from staff members in various positions, volunteers, communities, artists, researchers and young people – providing these consultations are remunerated and occur in a non-exploitative manner.
- Borrowing from Piper Anderson's *Building a Culture of Accountability*, on the understanding of accountability from an anti-racist perspective, 'accountability requires communication, negotiation of needs [and]...the opportunity to repair harm', whereby archives and heritage organisations have a chance to prove that they can change and be worthy of trust.¹⁴

Thus, accountability is a key component of this guidance to ensure archives and heritage organisations:

- **Communicate progress**

Sharing how problematic language is being addressed during the process, encouraging archivists, heritage professionals and volunteers to self-reflect on the process in real-time and make changes iteratively. Consider recording changes, and the process behind them, as a note in a future lessons learnt document. In addition, this would demonstrate externally what work is currently being undertaken by the archive or heritage organisations.

For transparency, it would be useful to also communicate the progress that has not occurred within a timeframe, with reflections on a) why this is the case, b) an update on the timeline (if known) and c) lessons learnt as part of this process.

- **Initiate a clear review process**

Identify what type of framework or methodology is best suited to review the work being undertaken. Be clear and specific if this framework or methodology may change between projects or programmes due to the nature of the work.

Clearly communicate who is part of the review process, length of tenure and the recruitment / appointment process for future stakeholders.

Outline how the organisation balances its responsibility to address problematic language and available resources.

- **Encourage commentary, feedback and critique**

Create channels that encourage commentary and welcome feedback from a wide range of people, facilitated in-person or online. Manage expectations by outlining response times to queries, reviewing content and providing an update on submitted requests via an automatic email or a message on your website for example, to build trust between organisations and stakeholders, and reinforce that all submitted commentary is handled consistently and fairly.



The Bath Chronicle, 14 June 1764. Bath Archives and Local Studies Collection.

Problematic language in the newspapers of Georgian Bath

This section introduces the context of the *Bath Chronicle*, an 18th century newspaper with several examples of problematic language. Using three case studies highlighted by staff and volunteers from the Bath and Colonialism Archive Project it intends to analyse:

- Why was this language used?
- The purpose of the wording.
- How would this wording be read today?

Chilcott's good/ better / best practice model applies as an example of practical guidance, with the addition of the accountability component mentioned in the previous pages.

Established in 1760, the *Bath Chronicle's* focus on foreign news provides key insights into social, economic and political events situated against the backdrop of British imperial policy. This reporting style reveals how ideas of the Georgian city were articulated, what language was used and why it was used in that way. For example, there are frequent examples of racist and derogatory language used to describe Black people who were enslaved, as well as nuanced language to downplay or overlook the intentional imposition of colonial violence upon people and nations that were colonised. At the height of the colonial era, Bath had a direct connection to the transatlantic slave trade – particularly in how slavery was understood and was memorialised, as case studies from the *Bath Chronicle* will demonstrate.

Introducing the three *Bath Chronicle* case studies

Before delving into the examples of problematic language identified by staff and volunteers from the Bath and Colonialism Archive Project, this is a warning for readers that there will be limited use of identified problematic terms for reference purposes only.

When not directly quoting from source material these terms will be emphasised in double quotation marks and contextualised for the meaning of its original use to be understood as part of this guidance.

Each case study includes an image of the source material, a verbatim transcription of the article, an example of an initial description, an example of an enhanced description, and commentary in the form of a micro literature review.

The use of problematic language in these case studies serves as a reminder of the importance of unlearning dehumanising ways to describe colonial violence within archive material and collections.

Chilcotts' key recommendations include:¹⁵

- Presenting offensive terms taken directly from the record in single quotation marks,
- Not substituting offensive terms with a modern equivalent,
- Subject index records using a thesaurus created or approved by relevant communities,
- Including a content warning on the catalogue homepage, outlining why offensive terms appear in records and why they are reproduced in the catalogue,
- Applying these methods to newly created catalogue entries

All case studies

Area of concern: Should the terms 'slave' and 'blacks' have quote marks around them in the descriptions?

As noted by the UK National Archives (2017)¹⁶ and Chilcott (2019)¹⁷ it has been suggested to present offensive terms taken directly from the record in quotation marks. However, unless directly quoting from the archive material, the term "enslaved" [person / woman / man / child] rather than "slave" should be used when describing people held in bondage, as suggested by the Archives for Black Lives in Philadelphia (2020) guidance.¹⁸

Archivists, heritage professionals and volunteers should avoid using the term "Blacks" as a descriptor and instead use the term Black people (without quotes). As this description is currently widely used by Black people and is not an offensive term that requires any emphasis. Archivists, heritage professionals and volunteers should make sure that the whatever approach taken should be:

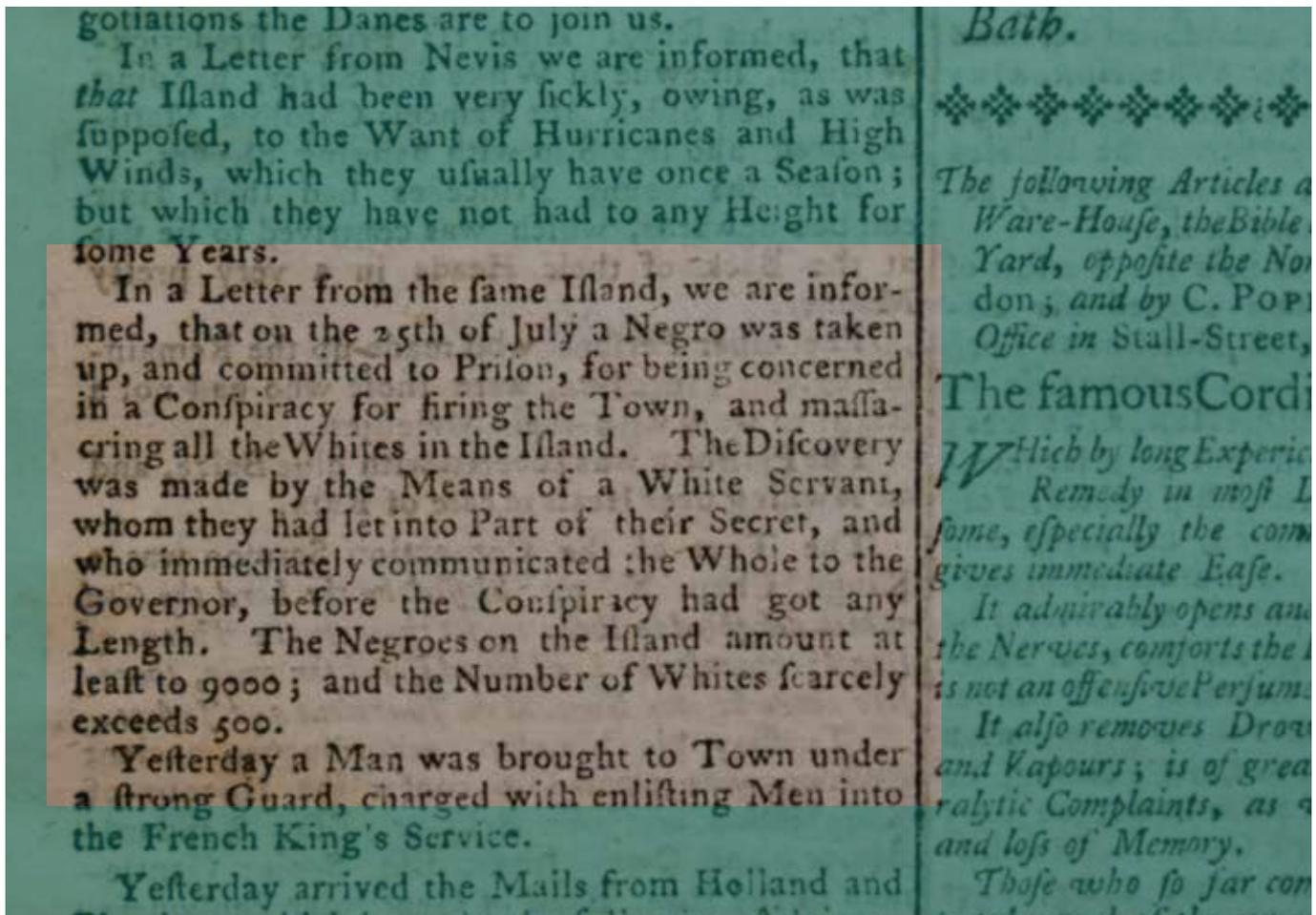
- a) consistent and
- b) stated clearly at the outset of any project and ideally within the cataloguing standard or guidance, especially when working with volunteers.



Case Study 1

Keyword searched: 'negro'

Date: 1 October 1761



The Bath Chronicle, 1 October 1761, page 2. Bath Archives and Local Studies Collection.

1. Transcription of article:

'In a Letter from the same Island, we are informed, that on the 25th of July a Negro was taken up and committed to Prison, or being concerned in a Conspiracy for firing the Town, and massacring all the Whites in the Island. The Discovery was made by the Means of a White Servant whom they had let into Part of their Secret, and who immediately communicated the Whole to the Governor, before the Conspiracy had got any Length. The Negroes on the Island amount at least to 9000, and the Number of Whites scarcely exceeds 500'.

2. Example of an initial description:

From the Island of Nevis comes news that a 'negro' was imprisoned for being involved in a conspiracy to set fire to the town and kill all white people on the Island. This conspiracy was discovered by a white servant who had been let into the secret and then immediately reported it all to the Governor before it could really start. There are about 9000 'negroes' on the Island and only about 500 white people.

3. Example of an enhanced description:

From the Island of Nevis comes news that a 'negro' [a Black person] was imprisoned for being involved in a conspiracy to set fire to the town and kill all 'the whites' [White people] on the Island. This conspiracy was discovered by a White servant who had been let into the secret and then immediately reported it all to the Governor before it could really start. There are about 9000 'negroes' [Black people] on the Island and only about 500 'Whites' (White people).

Commentary on Case Study 1

Area of concern

The initial description used the term "white people" instead of "whites", but deliberately kept the use of the term "negro" in the same description for historical context.

Why was this language used? | The purpose of the wording.

Here is an example of where the term "negro" was retained but the term "whites" was changed to "white people".

The purpose of the wording infers that there is a disconnect in terms of consistency in terminology, i.e. on using historical terminology in brackets or changing historic terminology in favour of more contemporary examples.

The retention of "negro" points to the harmful continuation of describing Black people in a derogative way, without providing context as to:

- a) why this term is problematic historically and
- b) failing to acknowledge that this term is problematic and no longer acceptable to use when describing Black people.

To explain why the term "Black people" is currently the most culturally sensitive description that should be used when cataloguing archive material, a comparison between culturally sensitive and culturally insensitive terminology can be discussed.

As outlined in the *Writing About Race, Ethnicity, Socioeconomic Status and Disability* writing guide¹⁹ while 'using adjectives as nouns is not only grammatically incorrect, it is often demeaning to the people you are describing. For example, use the term "Black people", not "Blacks", which also applies when describing "White people" and a range of people if their ethnicity or race is relevant to the context.

Similarly, the UK Archival Thesaurus 2021 also suggests using "Black peoples" instead of "Blacks" but does not provide any context as to why "Black people" is more of an appropriate term.²⁰ Interestingly, this suggestion draws from the UNESCO Thesaurus which includes some questionable terms to describe "Black people", when using the search term "Blacks".²¹

In this case, the archivist, heritage professional or volunteer should consult guidance either created with or by Black heritage professionals; as some examples of existing guidance do not currently provide updated and culturally sensitive guidance to adequately address problematic language.

Examples of useful material to navigate this debate includes the Archives for Black Lives in Philadelphia resource or An Intern's Investigation on Decolonising Archival Descriptions and Legacy Metadata written by Laurier Cress (2021).^{22, 23}

Area of concern:

What is the best terminology to use when the source material refers to white people as 'whites'?

In the UK Archival Thesaurus, there is no alternative term suggested when searching for the term "Whites".

Chilcott's good practice model cautions against substitution. In this case, however, it would be most appropriate to either use the term "White people" instead or to make use of square brackets to add "[White people]" after the term "Whites" has been used in a description.

The approach taken must be consistent, as differences in cataloguing could hinder people's ability to search for relevant material using terms linked to ethnicity. In addition, this also presents a potential hierarchy in how different people are described through this lens of identity. The *Archives for Black Lives in Philadelphia* reminds us to 'focus on the humanity of an individual before their identities'.

Capitalisation

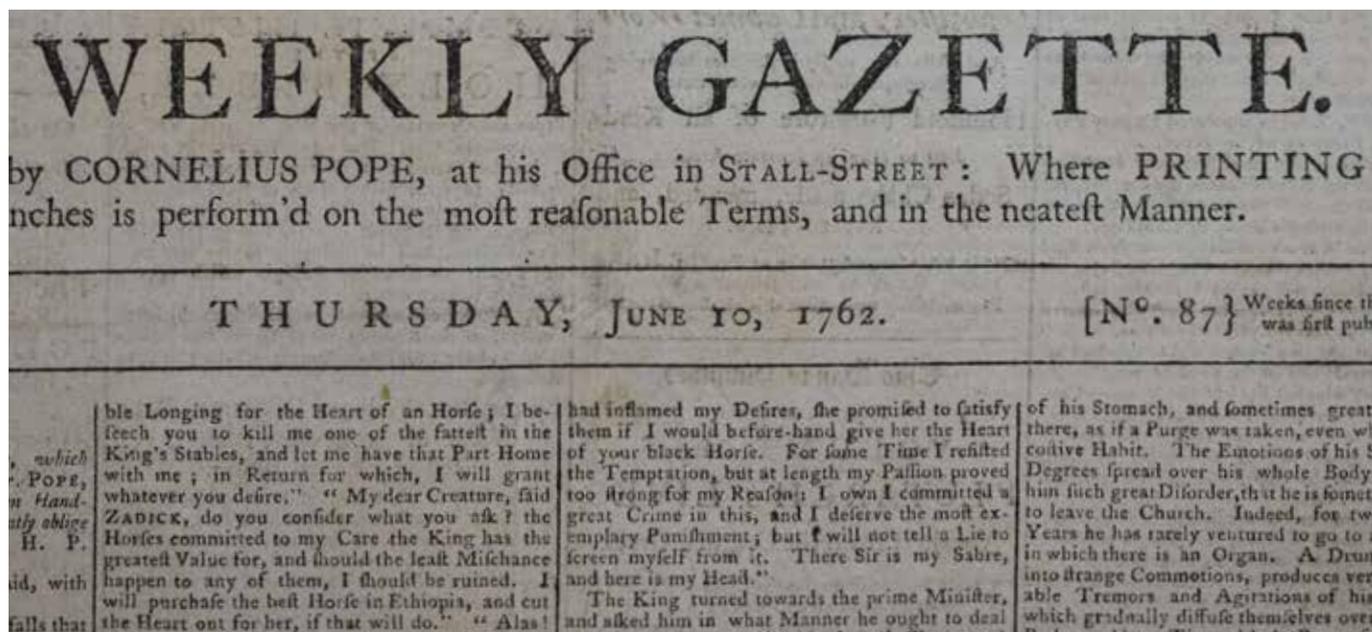
In the enhanced description for this case study, you will notice that there is a capitalisation of "Black" and "White" as signifiers of a person's identity as opposed to the respective colours these terms can also be applied to.

Whilst this is an ongoing debate on the use of the capitalisation of "Black" both within and outside of the Black community, recent style guides from the Associated Press (2020), the Race Disparity Unit in the United Kingdom (n.d.) and the MacArthur Foundation (2020) have explained the rationale to capitalise (or not capitalise) "Black" when reporting on ethnicity.²⁴

For example, the Associated Press emphasised their decision as a result of in-depth research and consultation and stressed 'the lowercase black is a colour, not a person'.²⁵ Similarly, the MacArthur Foundation has also explained 'the lower case "b" fails to honour the weight of this identity'.²⁶ However, The Race Disparity Unit has outlined the UK Government's preferred style to not to 'capitalise ethnic groups, (such as 'black' or 'white') unless that group's name includes a geographic place (for example, 'Asian', 'Indian' or 'black Caribbean')'.²⁷

In contrast, the authors of the Archives for Black Lives in Philadelphia decided not to capitalise the word "white" per contemporary style guides 'because it is a practice commonly used by white supremacists'.²⁸ While the MacArthur Foundation and the Centre for the Study of Social Policy both explain why they have chosen to capitalise "White". The MacArthur Foundation notes 'keeping White lowercase ignores the way Whiteness functions in institutions and communities'.²⁹ Similarly, Nguyen and Pendleton (2020) stress, it is 'important to call attention to White as a race as a way to understand and give voice to how Whiteness functions in our social and political institutions and our communities', of which archives process material that either reflects or responds to in both overt and covert ways.³⁰

The summary of the commentary above should provide an entry point for archivists, heritage professionals and volunteers who are cautious about which approach to take when describing people drawn from archive material, where race and ethnicity is concerned.

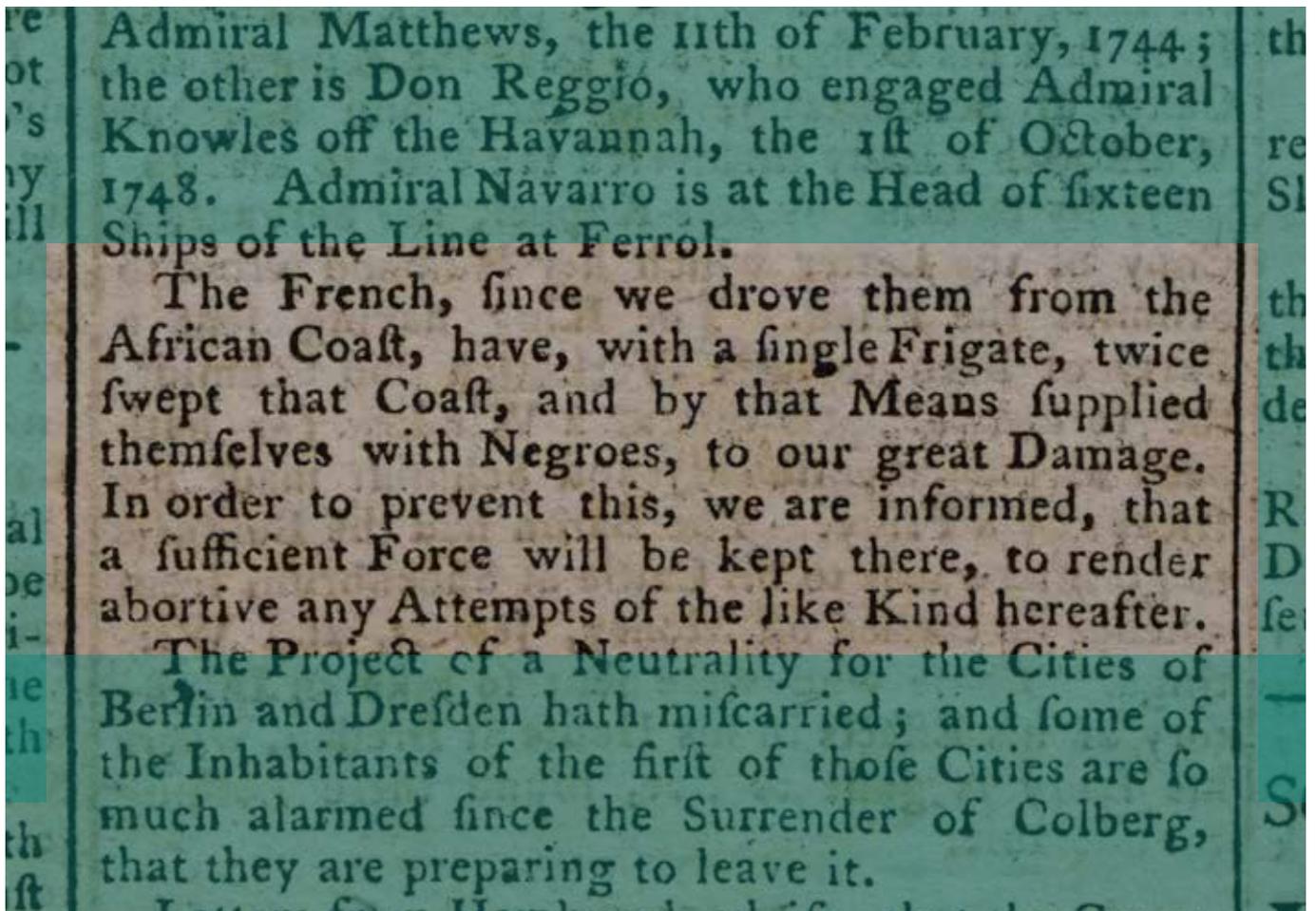


Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette, 10 June 1762. Bath Archives and Local Studies Collection.

Case Study 2

Keyword searched: 'negro'

Date: 21 January 1762



Bath Chronicle, 21 January 1762, page 3. Bath Archives and Local Studies Collection.

1. Transcription of article:

'The French, since we drove them from the African Coast, have, with a single frigate, twice swept that coast, and by that means supplied themselves with negroes, to our great damage. In order to prevent this, we are informed, that a sufficient force will be kept there, to render abortive any attempts of the like kind hereafter'.

2. Example of an initial description:

Since we drove the French from the African coast, with a single frigate they have twice swept that coast and supplied themselves with 'negroes' which greatly harms us. We are informed that in future we will keep a force strong enough to withstand any future such efforts.

3. Example of an enhanced description:

Since we [British armed forces] drove the French from the African coast, with a single frigate they have twice swept that coast and supplied themselves with 'negroes' [enslaved Africans / people who were enslaved] which greatly harms us. We are informed that in future we will keep a force strong enough to withstand any future such efforts.

The terms "we" and "us" have been used to refer to British armed forces during the Seven Years War (1756 – 63).

Commentary on Case Study 2

Area of concern:

How should the term 'we', meaning Britain, be referred to in the description when it is used in the newspaper article?

Why was this language used? | The purpose of the wording.

Here archivists, heritage professionals and volunteers should consider providing additional information to explain why the term "negroes" was retained in the description, and use culturally sensitive terms such as 'enslaved Africans' or 'people who were enslaved' in square brackets following it (as seen in the enhanced description example).

As commentary from Case Study 1 outlined, the retention of "negro" points to the harmful continuation of describing Black people in a derogative way, without providing context as to a) why this term is problematic historically and b) failing to acknowledge that this term is problematic and no longer acceptable to use when describing Black people.

Case Study 2 however, also uses a passive voice to describe the oppressive relationship between European colonists and Black people who were then enslaved. As noted by the authors of *Archives for Black Lives in Philadelphia* 'use an active voice in order to embed responsibility within descriptions', rather than maintaining a neutral position which distances the violence experienced by Black people.³¹ Additional information has therefore been added in square brackets to enhance description.

The use of the terms "us" and "we" should be explained, either within the description itself (as seen in the enhanced description example) or within the catalogues additional notes field, to explicitly state that this terminology refers to the British armed forces.

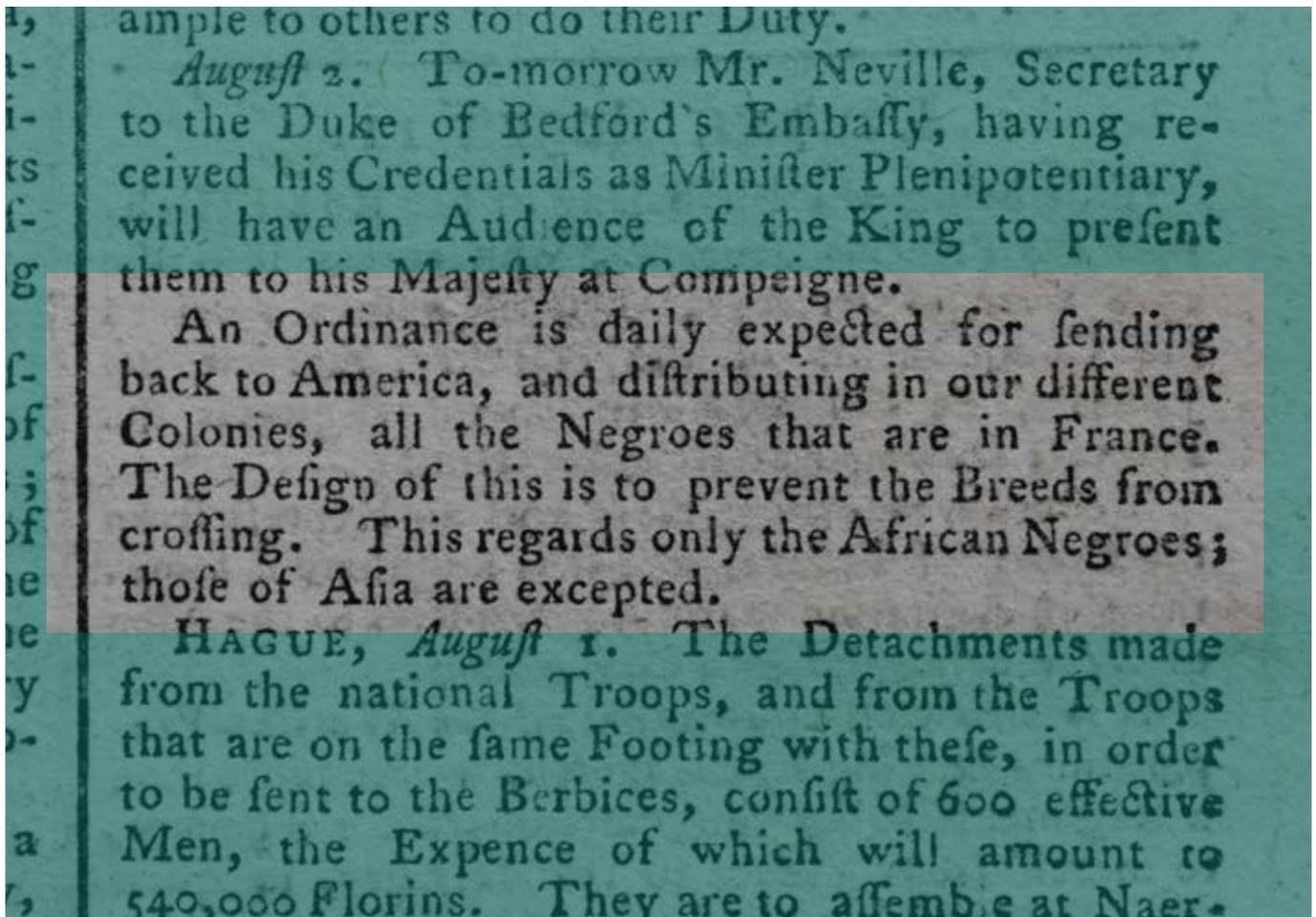
By including the British armed forces, this provides the archivist, heritage professional or volunteer the opportunity to:

- a) link this source material to the colonial backdrop of the time,
- b) to underline *why* driving the French from the African coast was of importance during the Seven Years War,
- c) counter how the sentence 'supplied themselves with 'negroes'' glosses over this direct reference to the Transatlantic slave trade and its importance to Britain's imperial interests.

Case Study 3

Keyword searched: 'Africa'

Date: 18 August 1763 (Thursday)



Bath Chronicle, 18 August 1793, page 1. Bath Archives and Local Studies Collection.

1. Transcription of article:

'An ordinance is daily expected for sending back to America, and distributing in our different colonies, all the negroes that are in France. The design of this is to prevent the breeds from crossing. This regards only the African negroes; those of Asia are excepted'.

2. Example of an initial description:

It is reported that an ordinance is daily expected for sending back to America, and distributing in Britain's different colonies, all the Negroes that are in France. The aim is "to prevent the breeds from crossing". This is said to relate to only the African Negroes – those of Asia are excepted.

3. Example of an enhanced description:

It is reported that an ordinance is daily expected for sending back to America, and distributing in Britain's different colonies, all the 'Negroes' [Black people] that are in France. The aim is 'to prevent the breeds from crossing'. This is said to relate to only the African 'Negroes' (enslaved Africans) – those of Asia are excepted.

The sentence "to prevent the breeds from crossing" presents the idea of Black people's inferiority, by drawing on the common trope of likening them to animals, which therefore justified continuous efforts to dehumanise Black people. During the 18th century, advancements in natural history and science more generally were weaponised and used by

and aligned with White supremacy and racism to establish hierarchies between different races, with White European's at the pinnacle and Black Africans at the bottom. Thinkers such as Carl Linneaus and Johan Blumenbach published influential material which supported the rise and adoption of pseudoscience, to reinforce differences between races based on ideas of superiority and inferiority.'

Commentary on Case Study 3

Area of concern:

How should we describe the line "to prevent the breeds from crossing"?

Why was this language used? | The purpose of the wording.

Here archivists, heritage professionals and volunteers should consider providing additional information to explain why the term "negroes" was retained in this description, and use culturally sensitive terms such as 'enslaved Africans' or 'people who were enslaved' in square brackets following it (as seen in the enhanced description example).

In regards to the sentence "to prevent the breeds from crossing", the subsequent sentence does not explain the meaning of this statement and the connotations surrounding the use of the term "breeding". Breeding usually applies to animals regarding the reproduction process. Unfortunately, this is just one of many examples where Black people have been dehumanised and related to animals, as noted by Tiedemann (1836).³² As such, Black people having children – or offspring, following the animal association – has been relegated to this demeaning depiction, reinforcing the historic separation and dehumanisation of Black people in reality and within documented archival material.

Furthermore, taking this direct quote as a whole, the connotations are markedly negative, in that the use of the term "crossing" within this sentence suggests preventing the possibility of interracial relationships between Black people and White people.

While both the UK National Archives and National Archives in America do not recommend altering original records, the latter does suggest 'harmful language descriptions be changed where appropriate and properly contextualised where it should not be changed'.³³

Therefore, context should be provided to explain how the so-called 'innate superiority of one race and the inferiority of all others by what passed for rational and objective demonstration' was created and reinforced by publications by Carl Linneaus and Johan Blumenbach for instance.³⁴

Building on this, the further development of pseudo scientific beliefs, such as craniometry, established and upheld harmful ideas on the racial superiority and purity of White people, and any challenge to this through interracial relationships was actively discouraged. To paraphrase Dr Edward Scobie's foreword in Eric Williams *British Historians and the West Indies* (1994), the misuse of words 'attributed false claims to science, fabricated alleged genetic deficiencies and perverted morality turned intelligence'.³⁵

The example of an initial description above echoes Scobie's point but also reinforces these notions of Black people's supposed inferiority if no context is offered as part of this record. Moreover, the Archives for Black Lives in Philadelphia (2020) stresses the importance of describing relationships of power is pivotal for understanding the context of records.³⁶

Racism, slurs, White supremacy, colonialism and histories of oppression are important contexts. Therefore, there is a clear need to provide informative context – using active language – to unpick the numerous examples of damaging perceptions of Black people across archival material held in the United Kingdom.

What can be learnt from these case studies?

Through this analysis, references to recent developments in archival practice have informed the guidance suggested for archivists, heritage professionals and volunteers. In particular, Chilcott's good practice recommendations are a useful frame of reference to consider possible ways of addressing problematic language within archive descriptions.

While many of the sources consulted in this section engaged with the nuances of why specific terminology was or was not used, this was not necessarily a focal point of sources from the UK. In addition to this, the lack of updated thesauri of alternative terms available for archivists, heritage professionals and volunteers to draw from, or stakeholders to consult upon, appears to be an area that colleagues have to work out for themselves – the Collections Trust (2009) outlines approaches to do this.³⁷

Furthermore, suggestions by staff and volunteers from the Bath and Colonialism Archive Project centre on dealing with the nuances of specific descriptions which encompasses a significant part of this guidance. However, this is where accountability plays a central role to ensure changes go beyond just the wording of these descriptions.

Accountability for action (and inaction) must become embedded within the fabric of institutions. Hence, informed intention to commit to addressing problematic language, coupled with the understanding that reviewing language is an ongoing process, forms the foundation of any transformative work to address problematic language. Thus, reconstructing how we interrogate archive material is essential.

Summary of Recommendations

The following recommendations have been suggested as a practical entry point for archivists, heritage professionals and volunteers to address problematic language (once understanding their rationale for doing so):

- Identifying recurring problematic language, either as a search term or within descriptions.
- Creating a content warning explaining why problematic language is in use within the catalogue, especially if the catalogue is accessible online.
- Collaborating with peers, colleagues, critical friends and communities to establish how problematic language is currently addressed and shape how problematic language can be addressed when writing descriptions.
 - Avoid deleting historic problematic language. Instead, embed context in description fields within the catalogue or in working documents that can be edited easily online to explain *why* problematic language was used and how this archival material would be read today. Equally, if problematic terminology is edited, keep a record of these iterations as evidence of the evolution of language over time.
 - As a minimum standard, newly-created records should be reviewed to ensure the use of problematic language within contemporary descriptions does not continue unless appropriate context is provided.
- Being specific and transparent.
 - How will identified problematic language be addressed?
 - Effectively communicating the chosen strategy to test approaches to addressing specific examples of problematic language.
 - Ensure time is ring-fenced to review progress and chart opportunities to scale this approach to other areas of the archive catalogue / collection in future.

- Embedding and embracing a culture of accountability.
 - Addressing problematic language is everyone's responsibility within an institution, with individuals having different roles to play. Anderson's (2021) identification of three types of accountability provides clear direction on how individuals within archives and heritage organisations can build accountability measures from within:³⁸
 - **Self-accountability:** a 'practice of taking responsibility for your actions and the consequences of those actions', for instance refraining from being defensive when questioned about your progress in addressing problematic language (or lack thereof).
 - **Mutual accountability:** 'defining a shared agenda for change', for instance facilitating collaboration with staff across the organisation, as well as including critical friends, community groups and volunteers.
 - **Community accountability:** a space of support and development of all community members to transform behaviours through the facilitative process of holding people to account. For instance, a clear process should be established for reviewing work undertaken and sharing lessons learned widely to ensure transparency as well as inviting commentary from critical friends, community groups and colleagues from external institutions.
 - **Institutional frameworks** need to support cultures of accountability as it is often institutional structures (such as policies, the remit of responsibilities and organisational hierarchies) that are obstacles.
 - How can accountability measures involve senior management and open up dialogue on feedback about the institution's progress without fear of undue repercussions?
 - How can policies directing projects or programmes to address problematic language be shaped with archivists, heritage professionals and volunteers?
 - How can channels be established between senior management teams, archivists, heritage professionals and volunteers to figure out what support and resources are required for addressing problematic language?
 - How can addressing problematic language become embedded within the wider organisation, without the hindrance of bureaucratic structures?
- Welcome commentary, feedback and suggestions about this process, as well as a mechanism to report problematic language which may not be a current focus or priority.
 - Acknowledge and remunerate people who share expertise in the form of lived experience and other knowledge sources, as a lot of this work would be impossible without them.
- Understanding that addressing problematic language within archive material and collections is an ongoing project as language continues to evolve. Hence, working from a place of iteration should be encouraged within the archives and heritage sector, which can oftentimes be resistant to implementing change in this way.

As mentioned within the introduction, several resources have been outlined for archivists, heritage professionals and volunteers to explore addressing problematic language in further detail:

- Laurier Cress created a *Decolonization Project Folder* on Google Drive: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1GU_cBYEOgn0DGAZs9lw6PfV0FmTQg8mg
- Laurier Cress created a *Harmful Statement Research Log* which outlined preliminary research of how other institutions were addressing problematic language
- The University of Minnesota guidance on researching through an anti-racism lens: <https://libguides.umn.edu/antiracism/lens>
- Grace Muñoz wrote an article *Reframing Reparative Description Initiatives through Critical Race Theory and Black Feminism*: <https://saadescription.wordpress.com/2021/04/22/reframing-reparative-description-initiatives-through-critical-race-theory-and-black-feminism/>
- Jenny Bunn's *Born Digital Archive Cataloging and Description* publication: <https://www.dpconline.org/docs/technology-watch-reports/2468-born-digital-archive-cataloging-and-description/file>
- *Inclusive Metadata & Conscious Editing Resources* compiled by the Sunshine State Digital Network Working Group: Alejandra Barbon, Sai Deng, Carady De Simone, Patricia Fiorillo, Rory Grennan, Karlen Harrison-Kane, Xiyang Mi, Matthew Miguez, Marina Morgan, Wilhelmina Randtke, Kaleena Rivera, Madeline Sims, Ximena Valdivia, José Vila, Elliot Williams (Chair), Gabriella Williams, and Keila Zayas-Ruiz: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1APavAd1p1f9y1vBUudQlulsYnq56ypzNYJYgDA9RNbU/edit>

Conclusion

The recommendations contained in this guidance largely respond to the examples highlighted by staff and volunteers based at Bath Abbey, Bath Record Office and Bath Preservation Trust. However, with the inclusion of several resources, particularly material from America, this guidance aims to provide a practical gateway for archivists, heritage professionals and volunteers to take the necessary first steps to address problematic language within the UK.

Whilst the practicality of addressing problematic language through the use of case studies can be somewhat translated to an archive or heritage organisation's specific context, an emphasis on rationale, intention and accountability are central for any work addressing problematic language to be considered meaningful and genuine – both within and outside archives and heritage organisations.

In the Summary of Recommendations section, a series of practical steps have been suggested for archivists, heritage professionals and volunteers to consider applying to their unique context to address problematic language. Once these conversations have been held with a range of stakeholders, with the intention behind this work agreed upon with a commitment of time and resource, the next step is action.

Inaction is no longer an acceptable position.

Therefore, by fostering a culture of responsibility, accountability and change, archivists, heritage professionals and volunteers have an opportunity to regain trust as institutional storytellers.

Preservation of archival material can no longer draw from narrow pools of institutional knowledge alone to provide the necessary context of such vast material. Readdressing language written from a different era activates our understanding and ability to create meaning between source material, the present and the future.

Language does not remain stagnant, so why should our interpretation of such material conflict with this notion? Widening entry points and welcoming more knowledge systems to become more embedded in this continuous work of reviewing language is crucial.

Thus, archival descriptions must become more holistic, respectful and inclusive to provide a thorough context of the archival material held in trust for the general public, today and for future generations.

References

- 1 Mignolo, W. (2012) *Delinking, Decoloniality, & Dewesternisation: Interview with Walter Mignolo (Part II)*. Available from: <https://criticallegalthinking.com/2012/05/02/delinking-decoloniality-dewesternization-interview-with-walter-mignolo-part-ii/> (Accessed 15 September 2021).
- 2 Archives for Black Lives in Philadelphia (2021) *Anti-racist Description Resources*. Available from: https://archivesforblacklives.files.wordpress.com/2019/10/ardr_final.pdf (Accessed 17 September 2021).
- 3 Williams, E. (1994) *British Historians and the West Indies*. New York: A&B Books Publishing; Dodsom, E. (1993) *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Library and Information Resources Network Protocols*. Available from: https://www.wipo.int/export/sites/www/tk/en/databases/creative_heritage/docs/atsilirn_protocols.pdf (Accessed 15 October 2021); LSE Library Online Learning (2021) *The Civic Archivist: Arike Oke*. Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ouf7Fmp9LRg> (Accessed 20 October 2021); Tate (2021) *Provisional Semantics*. Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ouf7Fmp9LRg> (Accessed 17 September 2021).
- 4 First Archivist Circle (2007) *Protocols for Natives American Archival Materials*. Available from: <https://www2.nau.edu/libnap-p/protocols.html> (Accessed 16 September 2021); National Archives (2021) *The Archivists Task Force on Racism: Report to the Archivist*. Available from: <https://www.archives.gov/files/news/archivists-task-force-on-racism-report.pdf> (Accessed 20 September 2021); Archives for Black Lives in Philadelphia (2021) *Anti-racist Description Resources*. Available from: https://archivesforblacklives.files.wordpress.com/2019/10/ardr_final.pdf (Accessed 17 September 2021). and University of Waterloo (2020) *Language in Archival Descriptions Changes*. Available from: <https://uwaterloo.ca/library/special-collections-archives/news/language-archival-descriptions-changes> (Access 25 September 2021).
- 5 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Library and Information Resources Network (1990) *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Library and Information Resources Network Protocols*. Available from: https://www.wipo.int/export/sites/www/tk/en/databases/creative_heritage/docs/atsilirn_protocols.pdf (Accessed 3 October 2021).
- 6 Lilley, S. and Paringatai, T. P. (2013) *Kia whai taki: Implementing Indigenous Knowledge in the Aotearoa New Zealand Library and Information Management Curriculum*. Available from: <http://library.ifla.org/id/eprint/97/1/125-lilley-en.pdf> (Accessed 27 September 2021).
- 7 Tropenmuseum (2018) *Words Matter: An Unfinished Guide to Word Choices in the Cultural Sector*. Available from: https://issuu.com/tropenmuseum/docs/wordsmatter_english (Accessed 15 September 2021)
- 8 With the exception of the Collections Trust's Revisiting Archive Collections Toolkit (2009) Available from: <https://collectionstrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Collections-Trust-Revisiting-Archive-Collections-toolkit-2009.pdf> (Accessed 5 October 2021).
- 9 Chilcott, A. (2019) Towards Protocols for Describing Racially Offensive Language in UK Public Archives. *Arch Sci* (19) 359-376 (Accessed 23 September 2021).
- 10 The National Archives (2016) *Archive Principles and Practice: An Introduction to Archives for Non-Archivists*. p.7. Available from: <https://cdn.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/archives/archive-principles-and-practice-an-introduction-to-archives-for-non-archivists.pdf> (Accessed 15 October 2021).
- 11 The National Archives (2017) *Cataloguing Paper Records: Guidance for Government Departments*, p.32. Available from: <https://cdn.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/information-management/cataloguing-guidance.pdf> (Accessed 15 October 2021).
- 12 Chilcott, A. (2019) Towards Protocols for Describing Racially Offensive Language in UK Public Archives. *Arch Sci* (19) p.361. (Accessed 23 September 2021).
- 13 CIPD (2021) *SWOT Analysis: Learn About the SWOT Framework, the Process of a SWOT Analysis, and its Advantages and Disadvantages*. Available from: <https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/strategy/organisational-development/swot-analysis-factsheet#gref> (Accessed 6 October 2021).
- 14 Anderson, P. (2021) *Building a Culture of Accountability*. Available from: https://ssir.org/articles/entry/building_a_culture_of_accountability (Accessed 11 October 2021).
- 15 Chilcott, A. (2019) Towards Protocols for Describing Racially Offensive Language in UK Public Archives. *Arch Sci* (19) p.372. (Accessed 23 September 2021).
- 16 The National Archives (2017) *Cataloguing Paper Records: Guidance for Government Departments*, p.32. Available from: <https://cdn.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/information-management/cataloguing-guidance.pdf> (Accessed 15 October 2021).
- 17 Chilcott, A. (2019) Towards Protocols for Describing Racially Offensive Language in UK Public Archives. *Arch Sci* (19) p.372. (Accessed 23 September 2021).
- 18 Archives for Black Lives in Philadelphia (2021) *Anti-racist Description Resources*, p.9. Available from: https://archivesforblacklives.files.wordpress.com/2019/10/ardr_final.pdf (Accessed 17 September 2021)
- 19 Hamilton (2021) *Writing About Race, Ethnicity, Socioeconomic Status and Disability*. Available from: <https://www.hamilton.edu/documents/Writing%20about%20Race,%20Ethnicity,%20Socioeconomic%20Status,%20and%20Disability.pdf> (Accessed 17 October 2021).
- 20 *UK Archival Thesaurus* (2021) 'Black Peoples'. Available from: <https://ukat.aim25.com/thesaurus/f4/mt430/1386/6924> (Accessed 14 October 2021).
- 21 *UNESCO Thesaurus* (n.d.) 'Blacks – People of African Descent'. Available from: <http://vocabularies.unesco.org/browser/thesaurus/en/search?clang=en&q=blacks> (Accessed 24 October 2021).
- 22/23 Archives for Black Lives in Philadelphia (2021) *Anti-racist Description Resources*. Available from: https://archivesforblacklives.files.wordpress.com/2019/10/ardr_final.pdf (Accessed 17 September 2021). Cress, L. (2021) *An Intern's Investigation on Decolonizing Archival Descriptions and Legacy Metadata*. Available from: <https://blogs.library.duke.edu/bitstreams/2021/03/25/an-interns-investigation-on-decolonizing-archival-descriptions-and-legacy-metadata/> (Accessed 31 October 2021).

- 24 Inivia (2021) recently hosted an event exploring conversations around the use of the lower case b for "Black", drawing from the following writers: Maud Saulters, Eddie Chambers, Meleanie Keen and Stuart Hall. Available from: <https://iniva.org/programme/events/lower-case-b/> [Accessed 10 September 2021].
- 25 Daniszewski, J. (2020) *The Decision to Capitalize Black*. <https://blog.ap.org/announcements/the-decision-to-capitalize-black> (Accessed 23 October 2021).
- 26 Mack, K. and Palfrey, J. (2020) *Capitalizing Black and White: Grammatical Justice and Equity*, The MacArthur Foundation. Available from: <https://www.macfound.org/press/perspectives/capitalizing-black-and-white-grammatical-justice-and-equity> (Accessed 21 October 2021).
- 27 Gov.uk (n.d.) *Writing about Ethnicity*. Available from: <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/style-guide/writing-about-ethnicity> (Accessed 23 October 2021).
- 28 Archives for Black Lives in Philadelphia (2021), p.2, *Anti-racist Description Resources*. Available from: https://archivesforblacklives.files.wordpress.com/2019/10/ardr_final.pdf (Accessed 17 September 2021).
- 29 Mack, K. and Palfrey, J. (2020) *Capitalizing Black and White: Grammatical Justice and Equity*. Available from: <https://www.macfound.org/press/perspectives/capitalizing-black-and-white-grammatical-justice-and-equity> (Accessed 21 October 2021).
- 30 Nguy?n, A, T. and Pendleton, M. (2020) *Recognising Race in Language: Why we Capitalize "Black" and "White"*. Available from: <https://cssp.org/2020/03/recognizing-race-in-language-why-we-capitalize-black-and-white/> (Accessed 21 October 2021).
- 31 Archives for Black Lives in Philadelphia (2021), p.3, *Anti-racist Description Resources*. Available from: https://archivesforblacklives.files.wordpress.com/2019/10/ardr_final.pdf (Accessed 17 September 2021).
- 32 Tiedemann, F. (1836) On the Brain of the Negro, Compared with that of the European and the Orang-Outang. *The Royal Society* (126), p.519, (Accessed 25 October 2021).
- 33 National Archives (2021) *The Archivist's Task Force on Racism: Report to the Archivist*, p.78. Available from: <https://www.archives.gov/files/news/archivists-task-force-on-racism-report.pdf> (Accessed 3 October 2021).
- 34 Curtin, P. D. (1960) "Scientific" Racism and the British Theory of Empire. *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* (2) p.41. (Accessed 25 October 2021).
- 35 Williams, E. (1994) *British Historians and the West Indies*. New York: A&B Books Publishing.
- 36 Archives for Black Lives in Philadelphia (2021) *Anti-racist Description Resources*, p.3. Available from: https://archivesforblacklives.files.wordpress.com/2019/10/ardr_final.pdf (Accessed 17 September 2021).
- 37 Collections Trust (2009) *Revisiting Archive Collections: A Toolkit for Capturing and Sharing Multiple Perspectives on Archive Collections*, p.11. Available from: <https://collectionstrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Collections-Trust-Revisiting-Archive-Collections-toolkit-2009.pdf> (Accessed 14 October 2021).
- 38 Anderson, P. (2021) *Building a Culture of Accountability*. Available from: https://ssir.org/articles/entry/building_a_culture_of_accountability (Accessed 11 October 2021).

This guidance has been written by Lisa Kennedy in collaboration with the Bath and Colonialism Archive Project.

Lisa Kennedy is an independent curator, historian and writer who advocates for the inclusion of wider perspectives within museums and the study of history. Working across museums, galleries and cultural spaces, Lisa's research interests focus on better understanding the relevance of these spaces to the widest audience possible. Lisa's practice centres on improving access to history, art, and culture from a socially engaged lens.

To find out more about the Bath and Colonialism Archive Project visit www.bathandcolonialism.org