

Cambridge University Libraries Decolonisation Working Group Update 2 (September 2021)

Welcome to our second update for library and archive staff across Cambridge! For anyone reading about the Decolonisation Working Group (DWG) for the first time, you can find out more about the group on [its webpages](#) or you can read an introduction to the group in the [previous update](#), which was the first.

Since the first update (May 2021), the DWG has met three further times, in May, June, and July. We agreed not to meet in August since so many of us would be taking leave then.

What have we managed to do over the last few months?

We had a good discussion with Jacky Cox and Natalie Adams, staff connected to the new **ArchiveSearch catalogue**, about how best to approach the issue of **historic language** (both from the archival material itself but also from earlier cataloguing metadata) which is problematic and unacceptable. Given the scale of the catalogue, it is important not only to alert users to potentially upsetting language that they may come across but also to enable them to alert staff easily to such terms.

The DWG gave feedback to Jacky and Natalie about how the catalogue alert might be worded, recognising the importance in a shared catalogue of discussing wording and agreeing changes with all contributors. We also emphasised the need to make sure that previous versions of metadata would nevertheless be retained. While a shift away from offensive terms is purely a positive step, those terms have been part of our institutional catalogue history and need to be recorded behind the scenes.

We have also discussed various opportunities to build up **local, national, and international connections**. Jenni Skinner, the Centre of African Studies Library manager and an HSS rep on the DWG, talked the group through an initiative Cambridge is involved in to help find and deliver materials to help rebuild the University of Cape Town's African Studies collections destroyed in the appalling Jagger Library fire in April. Do look out also for news about the exciting African Poetry Digital Portal, in which Jenni and Cambridge are also involved.

In terms of local connections, Mel (the DWG convenor) is reaching out to various University decolonisation groups, letting them know about the Decolonisation Working Group. The DWG is considering a possible event in the 21/22 academic year to bring these groups together to discuss shared aims and activities and/or to consult the wider University and local community about our work.

We tidied up some **administrative details**, updating our Terms of Reference on the [main DWG page](#) to show that standard membership lasts for two years in the first instance. Our student reps join the group automatically on the basis of the positions they take up in the combined Students' Union, and that means that over the summer we said goodbye and thank you to Siyang Wei and Howard Chai and welcomed their successors Amelia Jabry and Tara Choudhury to the group.

The DWG has continued to work with the Cambridge Cataloguing Advisory Group and its Digital Services rep in particular to bring in **local changes to iDiscover** to replace the Library of Congress Subject Heading terms 'Illegal aliens' and 'Aliens'. Look out for an update about that work in due course.

We in the DWG also want to take the opportunity this regular update gives to promote the work of our wonderful **Decolonising through Critical Librarianship** colleagues, who are represented on the DWG and who help lead the education strand of our work through their tailored sessions. Since the last update, four new posts have appeared on their blog:

- A summary by one of the DWG college reps about the project in [Pembroke College Library to reclassify their history collection](#)
- A synopsis of the June 'Postcolonial Print Cultures and their Digital Afterlives' event hosted by Cambridge Digital Humanities, from the graduate trainee at Newnham College Library
- A post about [cataloguing/recataloguing official publications in the University Library](#) (a pilot project commissioned by the DWG)
- And last but by no means least, a [summary of the Decolonising through Critical Librarianship group's own reclassification workshop](#) which covered subject heading issues as well classification

Finally, work on preparing cross-Cambridge training for all library and archive staff continues gradually. As Mel mentioned in her presentation about the DWG's work at the June CUL all-staff briefings, we are really keen to ensure that everyone feels sure and confident about what decolonisation means for their work. It can be easy to feel uncertain and out of step – please don't worry! In the meantime, do feel free to contact your DWG rep with any questions you may have, or of course to contact Mel at decolonisation@lib.cam.ac.uk.