

# Making history

The Foyle Foundation project at LSE Archives has opened up access to a wealth of previously unseen social and political material. Alumna Lindsey Hall finds out more.

In 2005 the Foyle Foundation, a body which awards grants to libraries and museums, gave three payments of £35,000 to the LSE Library for cataloguing its social and political history archives. Already a daunting task when it began with 500 boxes, the project nearly doubled in size by its completion in March 2009, expanding to include 900 boxes. According to Sue Donnelly, LSE's head archivist for the past ten years and the driving force behind the project, this is the biggest cataloguing project in the Archives' long history.

So what makes the Foyle Foundation project stand out among LSE's many archives? Eight diverse collections range from Federal Trust for Education and Research documents to archives of politicians' personal papers, providing a broad view of the UK and Europe over the course of the 20th century. The collections have a diverse social and political dimension, evident in the documents of MPs from all three main UK parties. The information is also newly available, comprising material which has only just become accessible through the project.

The goal is to make the files, which used to sit collecting dust, into a resource for researchers. Information from the 900 boxes has been carefully indexed and listed online. Once a document is in the online archive, researchers and historians alike can contact the LSE Library and come and view them in person. Sue explains that there is a direct link between putting archives online and their use; when they first put archive listings on the web in 2005, there was an immediate 30 per cent increase in use.

The LSE Library began collecting material two years after it opened, in 1898. However cataloguing began in earnest with the appointment of the first archivist in 1975, so there is a backlog of work. While archives may evoke images of dark, dank basements and endless stacks of files, this is far from the truth of LSE's modern facilities; located in the Library basement, the rooms are light, bright and air-conditioned. And the process of opening, reading, filing and then cataloguing archives by subject, while daunting, is also dynamic.

Sue emphasises LSE's role as a leading tool for the greater social science community. A quarter of the people who use LSE archives are from the School, but the majority of patrons are academics from around the UK. The archivists work hard to publicise their projects, attracting scholars from across London and around the world. The Foyle

Foundation Project, for example, will have implications for British scholars as well as international ones. 'It is a major resource for anyone researching European institutions post 1945,' Sue explains.

The boxes have yielded a wealth of new information. One of the collections, for example, focuses on actor and Labour MP Andrew Matthew Faulds. His catalogue alone is 318 pages long – and this is just the list of available documents from his career and personal life. The actual archives fill 254 boxes, ranging from 1960 to 1997, and covering everything from immigration, Palestine, and support of the arts, to the intriguingly labelled 'Racist and Rude' file and documents from a libel case between Faulds and *The Sun*. 'He was quite vocal in the House of Commons,' says Rebecca Webster, who was involved in cataloguing the archives. 'It was very amusing to do his collection. His personality and his passion really shine through.'

Much of what archivists discovered in the course of the project was quite unexpected. For example, there is a poem by MP Sir Gilbert Longden, written in response to a little boy's letter complaining about school. 'You never know quite what to expect when opening hundreds of dusty old boxes, which is what makes archiving exciting,' she explains. According to Sue, it's the sense of mystery and the inability to leave a file unopened, which motivated the team throughout the massive job. It is also the simple fact that these files are important – historians need these archives. 'Nobody would write any history without us,' she says matter of factly, and urges future funders to remember how important this basic work is. She quotes Socrates for support: "The unexamined life is not worth living", and if we don't carefully preserve history we'll become like a society with amnesia.'

The Foyle Foundation catalogue is available online and in the Library. For more information on LSE Archives and the Foyle Foundation project, see [www.lse.ac.uk/library/archive](http://www.lse.ac.uk/library/archive) ■



**Lindsey Hall**

(MSc Media and Communications, 2008) is an editorial assistant at the *Financial Times*.

Main picture: Photograph of Gilbert Longden, 1955  
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Below: Invitation addressed to Andrew Faulds to the inauguration ceremony of the Palais de l'Europe, Strasbourg, 28 January 1977; excerpt of speech by Gilbert Longden at the 1st Committee of the United Nations, 13 December 1957  
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