

Subject Indexing and A2A

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UKAT Project: Workshop on
Thesauri and Subject Indexing in
Archives: 4 December 2003,
ULCC

Introduction

I shall look at:

- What we do in A2A
- Issues raised by this experience
- Our response to these issues

Subject indexing in A2A

- As A2A is mainly concerned with the creation of descriptive archival metadata (retro-conversion or new cataloguing), indexing has taken a back seat.
- Provision, however, is made for authority controlled terms in particular creator names but also places and subjects

UNESCO Thesaurus

Indexing based on UNESCO as:

- PRO experience
- National context
- Indexing topics that records are *rich* in
- Indexing for social inclusion

Subject Indexing in A2A

It follows that:

- We don't provide user access to a thesaurus for browsing or searching, but only a list of subject terms mainly based on UNESCO
- Terms saved in each EAD catalogue as:
<controlaccess><subject SOURCE="unesco">
- Subject terms are usually found at the upper contextual levels (fonds, sub-fonds)
- There is usually no need for a large number of subject terms per catalogue

Process

Contributors of catalogues to A2A supply us with index terms after training (see *A2A - Guidelines for Indexing and Authority Controlled Terms*:

<http://www.pro.gov.uk/archives/a2a/standards.htm>)

- Terms based on UNESCO in the first instance
- If no suitable UNESCO term checks should be made on PRO, NDAD, AIM25, and CASBAH and terms can also be added as A2A terms
- Events also gathered

A2A database

- <http://www.a2a.org.uk/>

Issues: Process

- Subject indexing not necessarily A2A contributors first priority, although high level of indexing does help
- Lack of experience and knowledge of subject indexing amongst archivists:
 - A2A training strengthened
 - UKAT will help
- Competing thesauri –
 - UNESCO v LCSH
 - From many thesauri to one: UKAT

Issues: Process

- Inconsistency in indexing due to:
 - The need to consult disparate sources – UKAT will help!
 - Indexing and checking catalogue by catalogue
- Time consuming and expensive: value for money?

Issues: Use

Use of index searching in A2A disappointing:

- Numbers
 - Less than 5% of searches done are index searches
 - Less than 1% of searches done are subject searches
- Terms entered suggest users don't understand the purpose of index searching
 - Searching for names and places as subjects
 - Searching for types of record or study: *wills*, *genealogy*

User evaluation

Users don't see the need:

- *Fine, if I want to look for it ... I must confess to having completely ignored this feature until [now]. The regular search is quite powerful enough for the type of search I would usually enter*
- *I'm still not sure what to feed into Special Interest ... but I have no need, as the general catalogue is so good (and quick).*

User evaluation

Users don't understand the purpose of the index search:

- *I get a complete rejection when trying to put a selection of general terms into 'Special search' For instance family names which I can get in the ordinary search, or general subjects. I wonder what I'm doing wrong.*

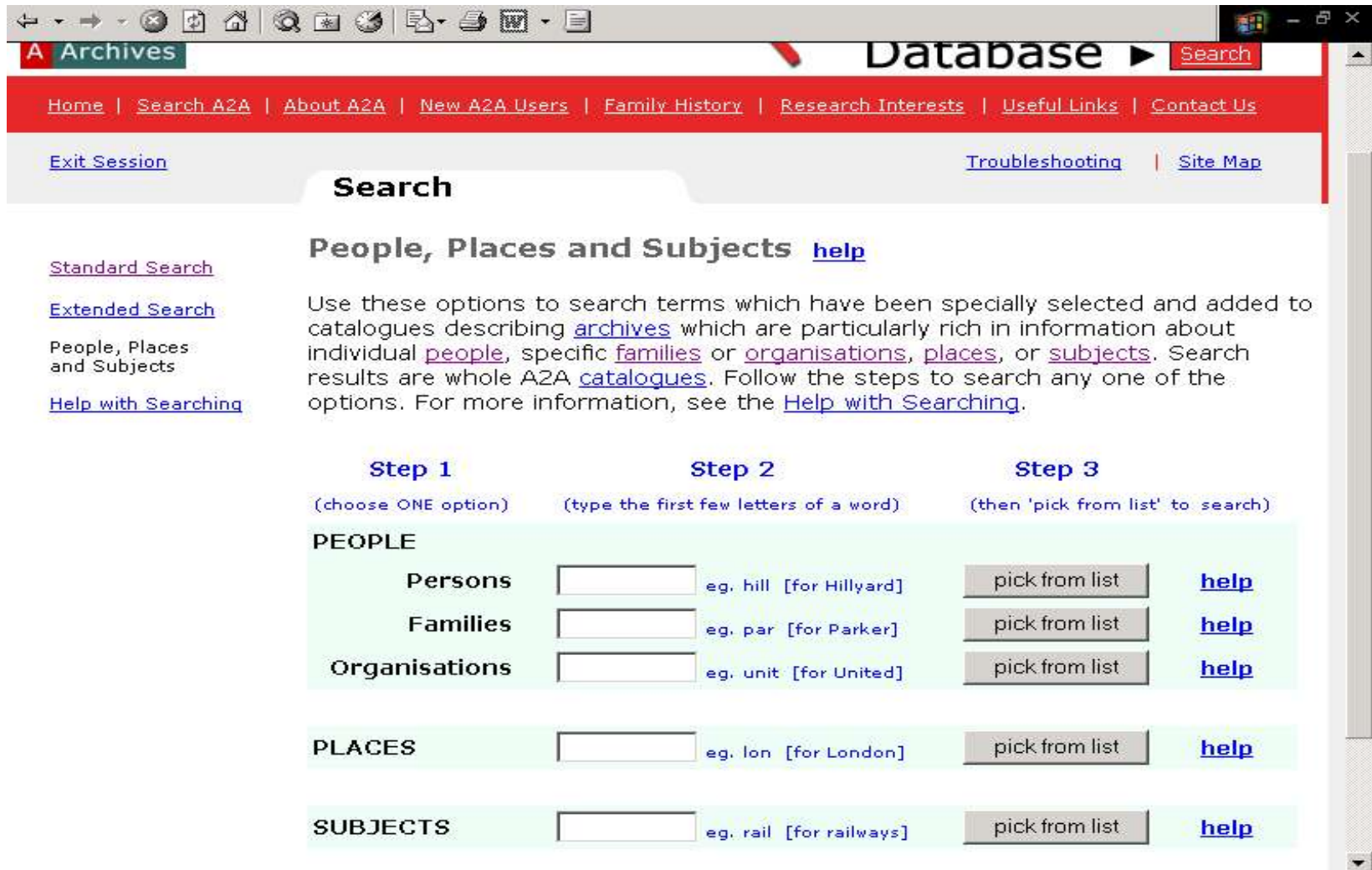
User evaluation

Users think the name 'Special Interest' does not explain what it does

The 'steps' necessary to produce a result are not understood:

- *Hard...the sequence of actions was not clear...*
- *4 boxes (steps) not helpful – unlike basic search which is very efficient and easy*

New functionality



The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying the National Archives website. The page title is 'A Archives Database'. The navigation bar includes links for Home, Search A2A, About A2A, New A2A Users, Family History, Research Interests, Useful Links, and Contact Us. There are also links for Exit Session, Troubleshooting, and Site Map. The main content area is titled 'Search' and features a section for 'People, Places and Subjects' with a 'help' link. Below this, there is a detailed explanation of the search options and a three-step search process.

Search

People, Places and Subjects [help](#)

Use these options to search terms which have been specially selected and added to catalogues describing [archives](#) which are particularly rich in information about individual [people](#), specific [families](#) or [organisations](#), [places](#), or [subjects](#). Search results are whole A2A [catalogues](#). Follow the steps to search any one of the options. For more information, see the [Help with Searching](#).

Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
(choose ONE option)	(type the first few letters of a word)	(then 'pick from list' to search)
PEOPLE		
Persons	<input type="text"/> eg. hill [for Hillyard]	<input type="button" value="pick from list"/> help
Families	<input type="text"/> eg. par [for Parker]	<input type="button" value="pick from list"/> help
Organisations	<input type="text"/> eg. unit [for United]	<input type="button" value="pick from list"/> help
PLACES		
	<input type="text"/> eg. lon [for London]	<input type="button" value="pick from list"/> help
SUBJECTS		
	<input type="text"/> eg. rail [for railways]	<input type="button" value="pick from list"/> help

Conclusions

- Despite issues subject indexing is still a useful thing to do:
 - Working with other sectors
 - Indexing at collection level useful for general resource discovery: Dublin Core, OAI etc
 - May help indicate relevance of particular hits to users
- Need to look more clearly at users needs. There are many types of user perhaps we need many types of 'subject' indexing?