



**Press release
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“Britain’s most wanted” reveals secret hiding place!

The man The Sun once declared the most dangerous man in Britain has now revealed the secret of what he keeps in his garage.

Speaking at the launch of Archive Awareness Campaign on 20 October, former Labour MP, Tony Benn, who has kept personal memorabilia since the thirties, said that the archives which form the basis for his diaries now have their own secret hiding place:

“You never know what is going to be important.” he added. “Who would have thought that the diary kept by a little girl would be read around the world? Well Anne Frank’s diary is! Ordinary people are usually more interesting than the important people.”

Mr Benn was joined by Peter Tatchell, the prominent gay rights campaigner, who spoke passionately about the need for a specialist archive to chronicle the history of gay people in Britain:

“There is a whole generation who have struggled to get us to where we are today and nowhere are their lives recorded. A centre for gay history would hold a warning to future generations that we have to be vigilant in defending the freedoms we have.”

Also speaking at the event was Susan Williams, writer and academic, who described the discoveries she had made during her research on Seretse Khama, Botswana's exiled President, and his English wife, Ruth. Not only had the British government lied about the reasons for exile, but it had lied and lied again. The decision to exile was all about South Africa not wanting a mixed-race marriage on its borders. What had particularly moved Susan while looking through 15,000 files on the subject was the loyalty felt by both South African and Botswanan people to Seretse Khama and Ruth. "Archives" she said, "help to reveal some of the views of the colonised people which challenge the consensus of recent books extolling the virtues of the British Empire".

Marc Morris, broadcaster and historian, was a dissenting voice at the event. He said that having spent an extended period looking at medieval finances for his doctorate "The joy of archives for me was actually disengaging from them!" Marc went on to say that he regained his enthusiasm during a later spell with the Magna Carta: "Nothing compares to the thrill of actually touching medieval documents!"

Bringing together a range of interests and enthusiasms the speakers reflected a growing public interest in archives, encouraged by Archive Awareness Campaign. The campaign sees 430 events taking place this autumn right across the UK. Visit www.archivesawareness.com for more information.

Notes to Editors:

- Archive Awareness Campaign is run by the National Council on Archives (www.ncaonline.org.uk)
- The National Archives (www.nationalarchives.gov.uk) and the Museums, Libraries and Archives council (www.mla.gov.uk). There are over 430 events going on at archive organisations across the UK this autumn. For further information about the campaign visit www.archiveawareness.com

- There are 2000 archives in the UK; 9 out of 10 people who have visited an archive felt they had “learned something”; 85% of archive users believe that archives preserve our heritage (from the Archive Taskforce Report and Survey of Visitors to UK Archives).

For media enquiries, images, interviews or quotes please contact Lucy Fulton, Archive Awareness Campaign Officer at The National Archives on 020 8392 5237 or email lucy.fulton@nationalarchives.gov.uk

The Archive Awareness Campaign launch event was held at The Guardian Newsroom, Archive and Visitor Centre, Farringdon on 20 October. Guest speakers talked about the personal and professional importance of archives to them:

Tony Benn, the longest serving MP in the history of the Labour Party, former Secretary of State for Industry and Energy and keen diarist.

Peter Tatchell, the gay human rights activist, author and journalist who has recently been campaigning for the establishment of an institution to chronicle and celebrate the history of gay people in Britain.

Susan Williams, academic and author of several books including *The People's King: The True Story of the Abdication* (2003) for which she used archives extensively.

Marc Morris, presenter of Channel 4's 2003 series *The Castle*, who is currently researching a biography of Edward I.

Mike Thomson, presenter of Radio 4's Document programme and correspondent for the Today programme, chaired a discussion on archives at the launch.