

THE	
NATIONAL	
ARCHIVES	

Explorer navigation + ContentHubs written content
User testing report v1.0
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Executive summary

This research combined two pieces of work: one examining potential stepped navigation for the Collection Explorer and another exploring users' perceptions of a piece of legacy Titanic content from The National Archives' website. Face-to-face research was conducted with five participants alongside a mix of supplementary unmoderated activities.

Navigation

Research on Explorer 2.2 found participants felt forced to navigate by time period. Instead they wanted to pick a topic of interest to them first and then narrow down by time. With that in mind, Matt Hillyard, drawing from Discovery's existing taxonomy and with input from the Identifier Working Group, designed a Topics and Themes navigation.

Before building pages within the prototype we wanted to test whether users could find the content using the proposed navigation. Additionally we wanted to test whether users could find information using the topics and themes navigation on its own, and whether navigating by time period first was a requirement.

Testing identified the following content as more readily found and good candidates for prototyping:

- Titanic content, under Transport and travel > Shipping and then possibly Disasters
- Maps under Land and buildings > Maps
- Poets or literary figures under Art and culture > Literature
- Indian democracy under International trade and affairs > Asia > Indian subcontinent

While we intended to prototype the Crime, courts and justice section, testing found the sub-categories within the section were not clearly distinguished by participants. Testing also indicated that:

- Having 13 top-level categories was fine – participants did read these
- Participants tended to shorten long labels. For example, 'War and conflict' became 'War'
- There was some overlap between some top-level categories
- At the top-most level participants may be able to navigate the collection without time periods

We recommend further testing to understand whether topics and themes could be the main top-level entry point for the collection. The next rounds of research should also aim to understand whether users need the proposed stepped navigation as it would require extensive testing to make sure users understand and distinguish labels and categories.

Content

Alongside the work on the navigation we also examined legacy content from an online exhibit of the Titanic. Previous research found that as users navigate the collection, they

expect written content and imagery to provide context around topics and record groupings. We wanted to understand how users perceived existing legacy content, and whether this aligned with how the archives wanted to be perceived. For commissioning purposes, we wanted to know whether existing content could be retained, re-purposed, or archived.

Overall, participants perceived the legacy Titanic content as informative. While also perceived as factual, some found the amount of factual content detracted from the piece, and these users also described the writing as dull and wordy. The later part of the piece, the human story, about the Titanic's designer's last moments were seen as the most interesting. Compared with Wikipedia, the legacy content was seen as less interesting.

User feedback contrasts with how the archives would like to be considered: authoritative, reassuring, approachable, trustworthy, surprising, smart, imaginative. Some of this legacy content could potentially be repurposed. We recommend starting the piece with the most salient information, linking to supplementary content to provide context, and potentially cutting back on factual information.

To learn more about users' online reading habits we also conducted brief interviews with participants in the moderated study. Some participants read online, and others did not. Further interviews would be needed in order to produce generalised findings. We would also expect broad market research to be conducted to validate the appeal and market for written content.

Approach

For the navigation tests, we used a mix of unmoderated tests to understand how users navigate Topics and Themes, and moderated tests to probe and understand the thinking behind their behaviour. 11 tasks tested different sections of the structure. Because participants can start to remember the navigation we limited the tests to 6 tasks each. Keeping in mind the content we were planning to build in the next iteration, and our aim of understanding whether users could find this content, every participant did the same 'Titanic' task, and one of two 'Crime' tasks. Unmoderated participants were also asked to mark any labels they didn't understand. For all tests we used [Optimal Workshop TreeJack](#) studies.

Study	Dates	Moderation	Navigation tasks	Content tasks	Participants	Personas
1	24–25 March	Unmoderated	Titanic task, tasks 2-6	TNA Titanic Tone of Voice	15 navigation + 16 content	-
2	26– March	Unmoderated	Titanic task, tasks 7-11	TNA, <i>Irish Post</i> and Wikipedia comparison	16 navigation + 15 content	-
3	29 March	Moderated	Titanic task, tasks 2-6	TNA Titanic opinion, tone of voice, and understanding	3	2 non-users 1 focused expert
3	29–30 March	Moderated	Titanic task, tasks 7-11	TNA Titanic opinion, tone of voice, and understanding	2	1 non-user, 1 new user

We combined the navigation tests with research examining a piece of legacy content from an online exhibit on the Titanic. During the moderated test all participants were given the legacy content and we explored their thoughts, perceptions and understanding of content. Unmoderated testing was less exploratory. In one study participants were given a task to read the Titanic piece and then selected 5 words from a list of 37, that best described the text. In the other unmoderated study, using Smart Survey, participants judged the same legacy content against two different versions of the same event: one from *The Irish Post*, and one from Wikipedia. Pieces were presented in a random order, to reduce order bias in participants.

All moderated tests were conducted using Microsoft Teams and desktop computers. Observations and notes from the moderated sessions were combined with data from the unmoderated tests. The full findings and recommendations are detailed within the report which follows.

Collection explorer navigation

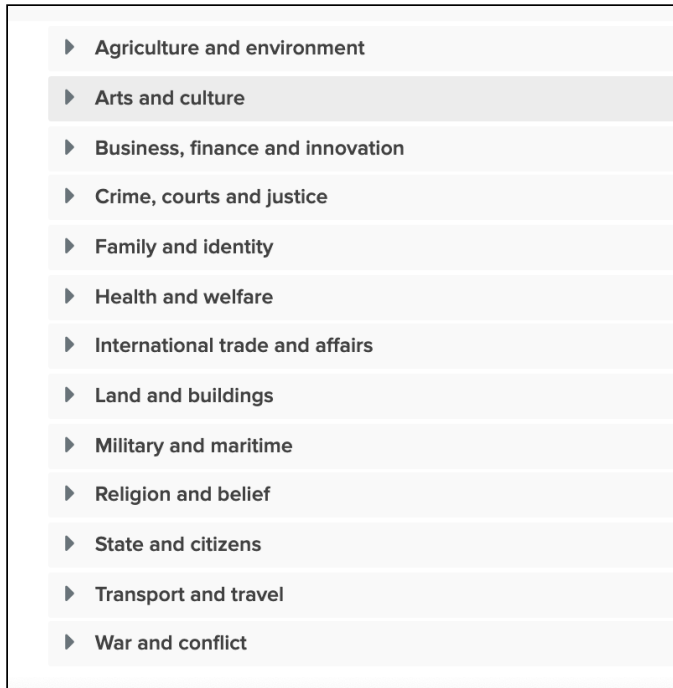


Figure 1: Top level of the Topics and Themes navigation

The complete navigation can be viewed in tab 1.0 of [this spreadsheet](#). Tab 2.0 includes the proposed changes. An interactive tree can be [explored here](#).

Findings

- Participants scanned labels, and often ignored or skipped over the second word. For example 'Religion and belief' became 'Religion'
- 'Military and maritime' could be split
 - For WWI content, participants related 'Military' with 'War and conflict' and found this too similar
 - For the Titanic, 'Maritime' was related to 'Transport and travel'
 - One participant expected content related to people under 'Military and maritime', and 'things' under 'Transport and travel'
- Participants found the following labels unclear:
 - Mutual societies
 - Tithes
 - Chartism
 - Devolution
- When asked to find design registers for fireplaces, no participant went to 'Art, architecture and design'. Most went to 'Land and buildings'
- Under 'Land and Buildings'
 - Most participants were able to find maps in here, although some were less confident

- Looking for fireplace designs, participants went to 'Construction' and 'Housing', although they weren't confident
- Under 'Transport and travel'
 - Half of participants expected Titanic content under 'Shipping'
 - They expected Disasters under Shipping, not alongside it
- Under Crime, Courts and Justice
 - Users struggled to distinguish between sub-categories, e.g.:
 - One user stated they expected 'Legislation' under 'Crime, Courts and Justice'
 - Participants weren't sure what Crime or Legal included and what the difference might be. These were perceived as very broad.
- Under 'Religion and belief'
 - participants struggled to choose between 'Religions' and 'Persecution'. They expected persecution to fall within a particular religion, and for 'Religions' to have a list of religions within
- Under 'State and citizens'
 - Some participants saw this applying to all states and citizens, so expected to find records about the creation of India as a country in this section
 - Participants didn't read all the sub-categories
 - Participants expected information about suffragettes under 'Electoral reform'
- Under 'War and conflict'
 - Participants went into 'Conflict' and 'Battles..' when looking for 'WWII'
 - Under 'Conflict' participants expected specific wars as sub-categories
 - Participants expected battles under specific conflicts, not alongside it
- Under 'Family and identity', participants expected to find everything related to searching for family background
 - One participant expected to see birth certificates in this category

Recommendations

- Consider shortening top-level category names. More detail could be shown once inside, and described in any blurb that accompanies the category name
- Consider splitting 'Military and maritime' and combining 'Military' with 'War and conflict' and 'Maritime' with 'Travel and transport'
- For labels that are unclear, consider the following:
 - Testing new versions
 - Combining the category with something else so it's not a standalone category
 - As a last resort, if all other ideas fail, providing supplementary text
- Don't place the design registers under 'Art, architecture and design'. Consider whether the record's subject-matter could be used to organise the record, rather than the record type. E.g Fireplace designs could go under 'Land and building'
- Under 'Land and buildings':
 - The location of maps, matched users expectations. This was the strongest candidate if we want to create pages that are easy for users to find
 - Consider whether 'Construction' and 'Housing' could be combined

- Under 'Transport and travel':
 - Move 'Disasters' under 'Shipping', 'Railways' etcetera
- Under Crime, Courts and Justice:
 - Create a new organisation.
 - Possibly include 'Legislation' as a sub-category
- Under 'Religions and belief':
 - consider listing different religions under this heading and removing 'Religion' as a category
 - Have persecution as a topic under different religions.
- For 'State and citizens':
 - Label as 'British state and citizens', unless this category really does encompass all states
 - Reduce the number of sub-categories
 - 'Votes for women' should appear under 'Electoral reform'
- Under 'War and conflict':
 - Reorganise 'Conflict' so it has different wars as sub-categories underneath
 - Place individual battles under the named conflicts
- Under 'Family and identity' consider whether birth records should be a sub-category

Tone of voice and reading behaviour

THE STORY OF THOMAS ANDREWS


FIRST CLASS PASSENGER AND
DESIGNER OF TITANIC

Thomas Andrews was born on Friday 7 February 1873 at Ardara House, Comber, County Down, in what is now Northern Ireland. He was the second of six children born to Thomas Andrews, a member of the Privy Council of Ireland, and Eliza (Lizzie) Pirrie, whose brother was Lord William James Pirrie, chairman of the shipbuilders Harland and Wolff.

He married Helen Reilly Barbour on 24 June 1908 and a daughter, Elizabeth, was born on 27 November 1910. On the 1911 census the family are shown as living at Dunallon, 12 Windsor Avenue, Belfast, which was a large detached house, along with five servants.

Thomas Andrews began working at Harland and Wolff as an apprentice at the age of 16 and quickly progressed. He became Managing Director of the design/draughting department and Chief Naval Architect in just over 20 years. By the time the Olympic/Titanic contract had been struck with White Star Line he had already worked on Celtic, Cedric, Baltic, Oceanic and Adriatic. Thomas boarded Titanic on her maiden voyage, as he had done on Olympic and several other ships, to ensure that everything went smoothly, heading up the so-called Guarantee Group. He embarked as a first class passenger with ticket number 112050 and was seen by passengers and crew with his notepad and pencil making notes during the voyage.

At the British Wreck Commissioner's inquiry, Saloon Steward James Johnson stated that he saw Andrews and Captain Smith inspecting the flooded areas of the ship, including the mail room and racquet court. Thomas concluded that the ship would sink in about two hours. Steward John Stewart stated that he saw Thomas Andrews moments before the ship went down, standing silently in the first class Smoking Room, with his lifebelt lying discarded nearby. He did not survive the sinking of Titanic and his body was never recovered.



Photograph of Thomas Andrews, designer of Titanic. Catalogue reference: COPY 1/565 item 209

OTHER STORIES

[VIEW ALL THE STORIES](#)

Figure 2: Sample text. Participants saw a text version, without any styling or imagery

Findings

- Participants who read the Titanic story independently and chose from a list of adjectives, described the piece as:
 - Informative, most participants
 - Professional, almost half of participants
 - Respectful, serious, and matter of fact; some participants
 - Authoritative, a few participants
 - Dry, one participant
- Compared to Wikipedia, and *The Irish Post*, The National Archives' writing was perceived as only subtly different. Compared to Wikipedia it was perceived to be slightly different: less interesting, more plain, more factual, and more formal.
- In the test where participants were given a list of adjectives to choose from, only one participant chose 'trustworthy'. 'Trustworthy', didn't appear to be the first word participants thought of when asked about The National Archives' writing, although the writing was deemed trustworthy, when compared to *Wikipedia* and *The Irish Post*.

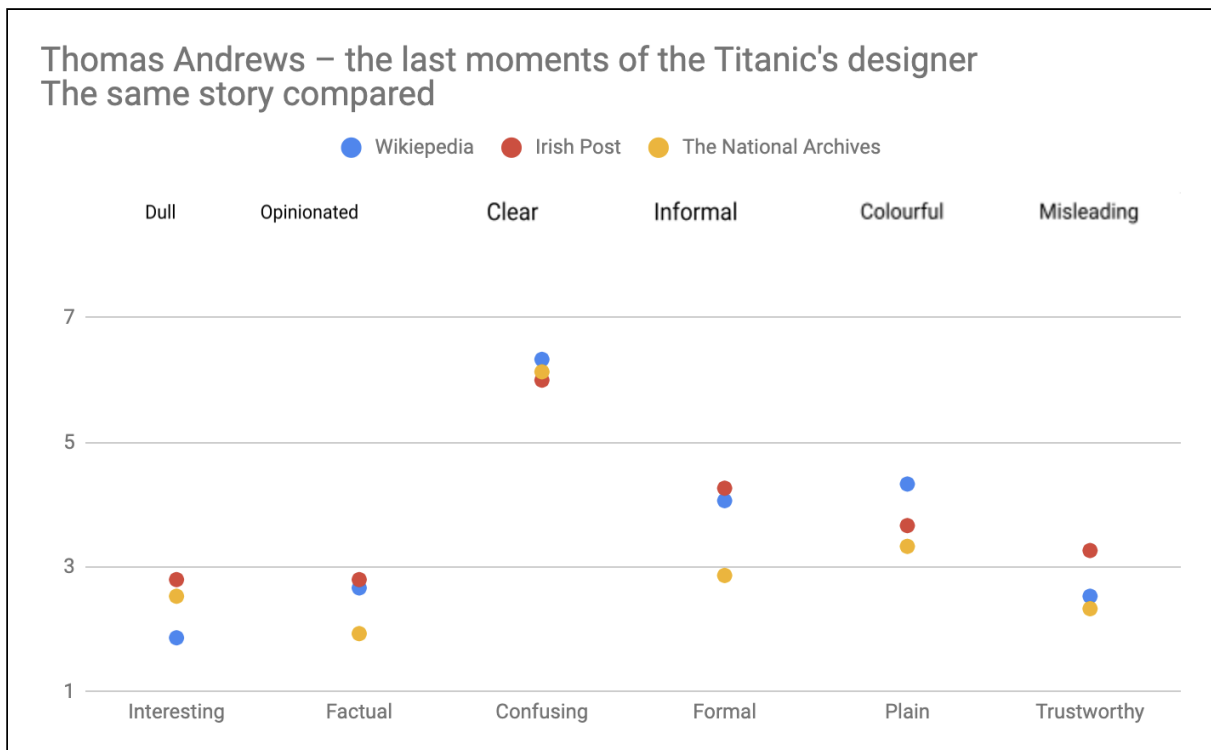


Figure 3: A comparison of The National Archives, The Irish Post and Wikipedia content

- During moderated testing, some participants liked the legacy piece as it was, and some found the emphasis on facts made the piece uninteresting. Participants found the last part of the story, the designer's last moments, the most interesting. They were interested in the human experience of the Titanic drowning, and some expressed an interest in knowing more about the man's work
- Participants in moderated tests said they weren't immediately interested in reading one person's experience about the disaster
- Participants were unfamiliar with certain terms and organisations mentioned in the story and may want the opportunity to learn more, to clarify things that were new to them
- In the moderated study, when asked about reading for pleasure about half of participants didn't read online, and half spent considerable time reading online: science and comics.

Recommendations

- The legacy Titanic content appends the human experience of the Titanic disaster, to a chronological ordering of facts. To broaden appeal, refocus story-type content on the human experience first and foremost, using factual information to supplement the story
- Users were not immediately interested in the story of a random passenger. The writing first needs to compellingly communicate why someone would be interested in knowing more about this person's story. Consider writing using the inverted-pyramid writing style and including a teaser or overview to entice users and help them decide if they would like to read more

- To aid understanding include links and/or references to supporting material such as departments and individual records so users can learn more
- The number of participants in this research was too small to produce concrete or generalisable results around online reading behaviour. We strongly recommend running market research to understand the demand and appeal for different, potential new and re-purposed content. User research could explore people's online reading habits and online reading context. This would require more in-depth interviews with more participants

Study design

Findings

- Internal staff are very accommodating in pilot studies and this means we do not realise study tasks are too difficult until the tests are run
- Participants in moderated tests said they weren't immediately interested in reading one person's experience about the disaster
- For the navigation testing, some of the tasks were multi-dimensional, e.g. looking for information on Oscar Wilde and gross indecency meant participants might consider Oscar Wilde's career or his entanglements with the law

Recommendations

- Pilot the tests with members of the public to better test study design. To facilitate this consider building a separate pool of users available for piloting
- When testing written content, consider a broader subject matter that may have more universal appeal. Consider screening participants so that only those who read online participate in studies with reading tasks
- To improve navigation test findings, reduce the number of topic dimensions within a task. E.g. Focus on Oscar Wilde or gross indecency, but not both in the same task

Conclusion

Topics and themes could be used as an entry point for the Collection Explorer. While there was some overlap between the categories, and the labels were probably too long, the number of categories seemed to work well enough. Deeper down, some sections need refining as some categories overlapped or were too broad, and some labels were unclear. The next prototype could examine whether the Topics and themes navigation is robust enough to be the primary entry point for the archives, or whether the time periods must also appear as an entry point. As the navigation acts as a skeleton for the site, short-term research should seek to understand whether this navigation is needed: it will require extensive testing to make sure users understand the different labels and categories.

The legacy content received mixed feedback. It was informative and factual, but possibly so factual that some users found it less interesting or even dull. It has the potential to be repurposed by giving prominence to the most interesting part – the human story – and by using facts and linked content to provide further explanation and evidence.

Following this research we aren't sure that users spend much time reading online for pleasure. To understand their behaviour and the context for their reading we'd need to conduct further qualitative research. Ideally this would be preceded by market research that reveals who and how many people spend time reading online.

Appendix 1 Test materials

Navigation

[Topic and themes structure](#)

Tone of voice

[Original legacy content within the Titanic online exhibit](#)

[Writing sample used in tests](#)

[List of words for the first unmoderated Tone of Voice test](#)

Appendix 2 Unmoderated test results

Password: TNA2020*

Navigation

Titanic task + tasks 2-6

[First unmoderated study](#)

[First moderated study](#)

Titanic task + tasks 7-11

[Second unmoderated study](#)

[Second moderated study](#)

Tone of voice

[Evaluate content with adjectives provided](#)

[Compare content with The Irish Post and Wikipedia](#)

- Question 1 was Wikipedia
- Question 2 was *The Irish Post*
- Question 3 was The National Archives