

# Interview with Jonathan Rhys-Lewis



Jonathan Rhys-Lewis

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

- ▶ [Jonathan Rhys-Lewis Biography](#)
- ▶ [Expert Group on Archives Buildings and Environments Chair activities](#)

## RECOMMENDED READINGS

- ▶ [Benchmarks in Collection Care for Museums, Archives and Libraries, Collections Trust](#)
- ▶ [Library and Archive Storage Furniture, Jonathan Rhys-Lewis](#)

**Jonathan Rhys-Lewis was awarded an ICA Fellowship during the ICA General Assembly in Yaounde on 26 November 2018. Emma Cummings, New Professional 2018-2019 interviewed him about his career and international involvement.**

**What led you to take the decision to become self-employed and how did you go about establishing yourself?**

It's a big decision to put yourself into a self-employed capacity because there aren't any career paths that enable you to become self-employed. I was working at the London Metropolitan Archives as Buildings Preservation Manager so I had a lot of responsibilities

and there came a point where I wanted to make a change. I was very lucky to have the support of my employer and family but I was unprepared as I had written so few reports and this job is totally about writing reports. I was really fortunate in my first job to work with another consultant who was really supportive and went through my report and corrected it. This whole approach to being self-employed became an obsession for me but then also became the ultimate challenge.

**Tell me about your professional history before becoming self-employed.**

There is a theme to my life - nothing is planned. The strength that I have is that I can see the opportunities. I worked in a record shop but didn't know where I wanted to go from there. There was a course at my local college in the conservation of archive and library material, which I started and really enjoyed. Once I'd got the diploma I started applying for jobs in the UK and eventually got one at Glasgow University, then I got a job at Reading Record Office which started me in a career in local government archives, which brought me into the network of the Society of Archivists. The Society provided the opportunity for conservators to study archive conservation in record offices, which enabled me to build a network that became my lifeline. An interesting thing about becoming self-employed is that initially there wasn't the support I thought there would be. However there were key people, like Dr Helen Forde, who were crucial in giving me support. My career has been defined by the support of colleagues. That very much features in the way I work now - I'm more than happy to help.

**How did you first get involved with the ICA?**

Helen Forde was chair of the Preservation Group. One year she had a meeting and invited me to speak. I met the people on the committee and extended my network, I kept in contact with a couple of them and when I started at LMA I was contacted to speak at the conference of the Municipal Archives Group, which was being held in Budapest. One of the members of the committee was Head of Preservation at the Hungarian National Archives and I arranged with her to do loads of visits. I'd circled around the ICA for some time and I did join while at LMA, and I was invited to various things and spoke at conferences and since then my connection with ICA has been consistent. Then I was very kindly asked to establish and run the Expert Group on Archive Buildings and Environments.

**Do you think being self-employed enables you to bring a different perspective and contribution to the organisation?**

I'm the first conservator and self-employed person to be a Fellow of the ICA and I'm proud of that. Generally you're thought of as associated with something, which you're not when you're self-employed, but I still wanted to work with professional organisations and why should that be a bar? I'm lucky because I can see all sides - I know what it's like to be a conservator at the bench, to be a manager. Self-employment gives you complete independence because you're not affiliated with anything, so I can bring a range of perspectives to discussions. I don't have any particular agenda to support as no-one is directly funding me. ● ● ●