UKSG webinar Q&A

'The importance and use of digital primary sources in teaching and research'

Chair: Peter Foster

Speakers: Sarah Evans | Hugh Murphy | Kate Simpson

Questions that came during the presentation:

"Q: Could you tell how the Wiley help for the digital archives?"

- **Peter:** We bring together the resources and skills to assess, conserve, image, index and load onto our platform which aides discovery and accessibility across the archives as well as tools to examine and use the material in many new ways. There will be a short session at the UKSG Conference & Exhibition 2021 that might be of interest. For more information, please see the [programme](). We hope you can join us.

"Q: Could you tell few examples of the digital Primary Sources for K-12 Settings?"

- **Sarah:** We are in the process of developing content for schools from the digitised content. We already have a substantial resources bank for teaching geography at schools level, available here: https://www.rgs.org/schools/teaching-resources/. Among these, we have materials that draw on earlier projects on the Collections like the Crossing Continents, Connecting Communities programme work; an example can be found here: https://www.rgs.org/schools/teaching-resources/india-pictures-of-the-past/.

"Q: Sarah - How did they decide on the date of 1945 as being safe/acceptable for copyright and DP issues?"

- **Sarah:** The 1945 date is used in relation to Society content access. Copyright is obviously a different matter in terms of text and image materials - for example there are several photographers whose work is not within project scope because the works are still in copyright. In post-1945 content personal details are redacted.

"Q: How useful are MaRC records and DOIs for digitalized Primary Sources material or collections?"

- **Peter:** The usefulness of MaRC records or DOI's vary based on the type of primary source material, for digitised published materials these tend to me more helpful than unpublished materials, however they do provide a method of linking to specific items or collections. There will be a short session at the UKSG Conference & Exhibition 2021 that might be of interest. For more information, please see the [programme](). We hope you can join us.

"Q: Further to Hugh's point. What is the editorial policy or selection policy? So, for example RGS what is included not included?"

- **Peter:** We use the expertise of the society librarians and archivists as well as an advisory board including senior researchers in the field and of course exclude material with copyright and privacy concerns and avoid duplication of other digitisation programme for printed books, although the vast majority of society collections are unique or rare and unavailable elsewhere.

"Q: Are there any models that allow for free access but also allow the commerical entity to realise a return?"

- **Peter:** We are working with JISC in the UK on the [the British Association for the Advancement of Science - Collections on the History of Science (1830s-1970s)]() where UK academic institutions can access for free. We also ran a [digitial fellowship programme]() with the Royal Geographical Society to support researcher access to the collections.

"Q: Sarah referred to the archive as deeply colonial. How do you go about de-colonising archive?"

- **Sarah:** For me, this is about a series of decolonial projects, an ongoing programme of work. It is also about working with relevant communities – diaspora communities, the wider research community, and so on – and being led by them as to priorities. It's about listening, about acknowledging the past, and about addressing contemporary resulting inequalities. It's about refocusing our gaze and reprioritising the voices we listen to. I've been finding the wider conversations about this in the sector immensely helpful; a good example of this is these webinars from the Museums Association: https://www.museumsassociation.org/campaigns/decolonising-museums/video-hub/

"Q: Are there any free/ open access Wiley digital archive resources available?"

- **Peter:** We are working with JISC in the UK on the [the British Association for the Advancement of Science - Collections on the History of Science (1830s-1970s)](#) where UK academic institutions can access for free. We also ran a [digitial fellowship programme](#) with the Royal Geographical Society to support researcher access to the collections.

"Q: Sarah, what do you think about your collections only being accessible for subscribers? Could you not find a model that made them OA?

- **Peter:** We are working with JISC in the UK on the [the British Association for the Advancement of Science - Collections on the History of Science (1830s-1970s)](#) where UK academic institutions can access for free. We also ran a [digitial fellowship programme](#) with the Royal Geographical Society to support researcher access to the collections.

- **Sarah:** The Collections are freely accessible to all via catalogue and physical access and supported remote access by Collections colleagues. We are not able to provide a free service to provide digital open access on this scale. It's also important to note that we (RGS-IBG) don't receive core government funding, and would not have had the resources to undertake such a substantial digitisation of our holdings without partnering with Wiley or a similar organisation. There are very significant investments of time and highly skilled labour in a project of this kind which then need to be recouped, hence the subscription model that Wiley and the Society have chosen for this project. The RGS-IBG will also be providing access to Wiley Digital Archives as a resource for researchers in our Foyle Reading Room when that reopens open later this year.

"Q: In your view, what interface and functionality features should the "dream digital archive" provide to the future researchers and students. Or, alternatively - What priorities do you see in the content and functionality improvements of the currently available digital archives?"

- **Kate:** I would argue that there are two main priorities in improving the interface of digital archives. Firstly, that it becomes standard across the board to be able to choose to not return specific results. An interface with which you can ensure specific keywords/results are not returned is surprisingly rare. Secondly, that an effective way is created to communicate to the user what is not included in their search, rarely is an entire collection digitised. Regarding content, I would hope we now look to digitise more disparate bits of archives or incomplete collections. Those which do not hold to themselves as a coherent collection but are useful, and cross-searchable because of detailed metadata, in conjunction with other

collections or archives. With functionality, like many, I hope for better and more consistent OCR.

"Q: Are you also digitizing ancient maps?"

- **Sarah:** The oldest maps we've included in the digitisation project are from the 15th century.

"Q: But presumably studies of the interpretations become a science in itself?"

- **Kate:** There are many critical skills at work in the use of digital archives. What is foundational to effective archival use is the application of interdisciplinary skills to understand and contextualise the data being gathered. Academically, there are an increasing number of studies which explore this practice, many of them, as the above question suggests, argue for the important of both the metadata and a quantitative understanding of the material before interpretations of said sources are made.

"Q: We heard a lot about using these documents in research; what thoughts do the speakers have on undergraduate (or even school) teaching using digitised archival sources? Especially when considering developing critical thinking and digital literacy?"

- **Kate:** It is important at U/G level that students have an awareness of, and an ability to find and cite, digitised archival sources. We are still dealing with a bias towards the primary physical document. We have to normalise their use across the board, not just something students stumble into at P/G level.

- **Hugh:** completely agree. A lot of academic staff still see the digitised source as a 'gateway' to physical primary sources. In reality they can teach similar skills OR different skills as needed. Certainly, digital literacy and dealing with metadata / full text / data at scale is possible with these resources in a way it isn't with an archive. Some studies have shown that engagement can be MORE beneficial with digitised primary sources (ref Press, Meiman 2021 in Libraries and the academy)

"Q: So much re: digitization of primary resources is dependent on funding. Working in a public institution, do you have any creative ways for finding funding?"

- **Hugh:** this is an important question because external funding is often the key enabler to digitising in a way that will suit local Open Access endeavours. There are funding options locally and nationally in Ireland, but rarely to the scale needed and they might provide (for example) funding to allow imaging and

metadata, but not for platform development. So, it may be that an institution has to develop their digital library locally but seek funding to get content ready for ingest. Alternatively hitch your wagon to a well-funded national initiative (e.g. DRI in Ireland). I think one of the reasons that many libraries and archives elect to use a licenced model is because all this is done for them, which is very attractive.

"Q: Hugh, you mentioned the importance of digital primary sources in research, teaching and learning in the same way as with journals and other content. It seems to me however that there isn't as strong a voice coming from the library and academic community to advocate this as there is for journals and e-textbooks, would you agree? What could be done to raise more awareness of this?"

- **Hugh:** I think there continues to be a perception that these resources are much more niche than (for example) JSTOR or Science Direct so there isn't the same swell of engagement and by extension the same degree of teeth grinding at prices and costs. This, to me reaffirms the point that, despite being digital, they are effectively special collections – in that the engagement and usage is often similar. If you can get a champion on campus who will help you make the case or if these resources are essential to something they are doing (teaching or research) it goes a long way. Beyond that it comes down to the age-old library practice of trying to show that our collections are key enablers of student success etc

"Q: Does the use of primary resources demand a different approach to critical thinking?"

- **Kate:** Yes, primary sources are unmediated and often it can be difficult to unpick the context or environment around the original item. One has to understand the network of the primary resource, or to think around the resource, before using it. A foundational extra stage in the critical process before a resource is used critically.

"Q: Hugh, what are the challenges to digitise your special collections?"

- **Hugh:**
  1) Infrastructure – you need to set up some form of platform. It's one thing imaging and throwing them up on flickr, it's a whole other thing having full, metadata rich digital objects on a platform with a content model etc. That takes money and staff and can never (imo) be fully outsourced.
  2) Imaging standards – are you going with TIFF, RAW or just jpegs? the better the image, the more storage, the greater the bandwidth etc.

3) Preservation – these objects are part of your collection and thus need to be preserved. Digital preservation is critical but often overlooked.
4) Rights – will you use creative comments, charge for reprographics, let anyone use anything?

"Q: What is your thought about the possible manipulation of digital archives to be hacked with deepfake materials?"

- **Kate:** I have no doubt that the digital material in archives will, at some point in the future, be manipulated to propose different histories or make up lies. There is little being done to prevent this at the moment but hopefully the answer lies in effective and user readable metadata and change logs to enable people to 'track' the digital document.

- **Hugh:** Agree, and there is a question about re-use even with licences. The many 'live portraits' using some heritage app at the moment are an interesting example of re use that represent a substantial change.

"Q: Other than using an excel sheet to track citations, are there other technical developments that allow you to connect meaningful components between materials? For example, is there a way to embed linked data across documents?"

- **Kate:** There are many great tools out there. At a basic level using TEI XML encoding facilitates the following of data across documents. But, to my knowledge, as yet there is nothing which can do so comprehensively without having been built into the system beforehand. The goal would be to follow data across archives and collections but, I would suggest, this is predicated on us reaching a better consistency with OCR and in sentiment analysis. In other words, the data in our digital archives need to be cleaner before we can look to apply better functionality.

"Q: What will it take to give people the skills to conduct a search across archives that is comparable to the Robots Reading Vogue research?"

- **Peter:** The Wiley Digital Archives platform offers some similar tools to the Yale project, for more advanced digital humanities work holding institutions can request the raw data. The LIBER Digital Humanities working group has done some great work on skills to support DH work: https://libereurope.eu/working-group/digital-humanities-digital-cultural-heritage/