

Up close and personal – Researchers and the UK Web Archive Project

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Introduction

- 12-month project between September 2010 – August 2011
- (Academic) researchers are the (targeted or perceived) main user group of the UK Web Archive
- Goal is to encourage active usage of the Archive and obtain essential feedback from the researchers
- Objectives
 - Engage researchers in use of the UK Web Archive as a resource for research
 - Develop the UK web archive in line with the requirements of its key user group
 - Develop special collections in collaboration with the researchers
 - Apply data analysis tools to support research
 - Disseminate findings of the project nationally and internationally

About the project

RESEARCHERS & UK WEB ARCHIVE BLOG

bl.uk Main About this blog UK Web Archive website Subscribe

UK WEB ARCHIVE
preserving uk websites

Scholars from different disciplines conduct individual investigations into the potential of the UK Web Archive for new research.

ARCHIVES

January 2011
December 2010
November 2010
October 2010

CATEGORIES

Web/Tech

RECENT POSTS

25 January 2011

'Invisible women' in sport as reflected by websites

Kath Woodward, Professor of Sociology at the Open University, is a member of the Researchers and UK web archive project. She is writing here about a specific issue for sports researchers in finding information - the invisibility of women. (For Kath Woodward's profile, see http://www.cresc.ac.uk/people/prof-kath-woodward_and http://www.open.ac.uk/socialsciences/staff/people-profile.php?name=Kath_Woodward)

Demonstrating the invisibility of women in the public arena of representation has a long history on feminist critiques. Women have been 'hidden from history' to quote the title of Sheila Rowbotham's famous 1975 book, or they have been an 'absent presence', as claimed in the work of French psychoanalytic feminists. History has been written as if only white men from the middle and upper classes were agents and protagonists who matter. We know the stories which feature men, because they are recorded, but women, if mentioned

- 8 selected researchers take part in the project, all from UK HEIs
- Agreed on individual research plans and contribution to the project
- 3 x 1-day workshops to report progress and discuss common issues
- 2-part written survey for detailed and specific feedback
- Project blog:
<http://britishlibrary.typepad.co.uk/webarchive/>



Researcher profile

Discipline / research interest	Level
Contemporary history	Post-doctoral
Digital Narrative	Post-doctoral
Authenticity in an archive and technological filters	Postgraduate
New Spiritualities	Postgraduate
History of Methodism	PhD
Politics, Parliamentary Government	Professor
Sport and ethnicity	Reader
Olympics, power and gender	Professor

New Collections

- *Faith, politics and the web in 21st century Britain*
- *Digital Narrative*
- *Independent Arts Organisations*
- *New Spiritualities*
- *Methodist Church of Great Britain*
- *'Race', Ethnicity and Sport*
- *Gender, power and the Olympics 2012*

Feedback on Use of Web Archives by Researchers - (1)

- Most use the live web for research, not yet the web archive (with the exception of 1 person uses the IA' Wayback extensively)
- Ephemeral content on the web (eg blogs, discussion groups) should be saved in the web archive; do not expect to find e-journals or e-newspapers, dissertations etc.
- Some think will be overwhelmed by domain archive; some welcome the “haystack” but require tools for smart search, aggregation, analysis etc.
- *“People approach the web archive in the same way that they approach the web today”*
- Special collections are useful because “it draws the attention in rather than aimless searching”
- Sites worth highlighting within a domain archive:
 - Sites disappeared from the live web
 - Research-value sites at risk

Feedback on Use of Web Archives by Researchers - (2)

- On search
 - *“you will get students of all abilities”*
 - *“They’d stop if did not find something rather than trying something else”*
 - *“I do not want to live in a dictator world of someone telling me what is useful without the ability to add it myself”*
- Data mining of haystack, eg. trace incidence of terms at certain time
- Selector’s description of the websites are useful
- Web Archive is not too different to a normal paper archive, cataloguing, tagging and descriptions should rest with BL or experienced researchers

The Politics of Religion in the UK since 7/7

Courtesy of Dr Peter Webster, IHR, University of London

- 7/7 a critical turning point in how religion is regarded
- More discussion of religion now than in the recent past
- Interested in sites as representations of the past, which:
 - attempt to represent previous ages (whether scholarly or not)
 - touch upon relationship between history and the media
 - illustrate developments in scholarly publishing
- Anticipating future needs, interested in sites which illustrate:
 - major events
 - new developments in national life
 - older movements that are ending
 - new developments in means of communication (eg. the blog)

Spin-off: BL/IHR Web Archiving Advisory Group

- Forum for issues of common concern between historians and web archiving
- Composed of historians of contemporary Britain, scholars interested in history and the media and in the state of digital history
- Interested to explore:
 - the representation of the historic past online ("history on the web")
 - the way in which the web is changing the nature of scholarly communication (the "history of the web")
 - current and forthcoming events and issues, web representations of which will be of importance to historians of the early twenty-first century

Thoughts so far

- The project promises to throw some light on the key criteria required by researchers from the UK Web Archive
- What researchers require of a web archive depends on the task at hand
 - Can we make everyone happy?
- Many commonalities among the researchers but also much difference in research methods, use of resource and content expected in a web archive
- Involving researchers is a good way of identifying and selecting sites relevant to specific research disciplines
- You cannot tell if something is useful if you do not know what is possible (eg. analytical access, visualisation of large scale domain archive)