
POWKist



Alison Kay (Northumbria University), Gemma Webster, Hai Nguyen, David Beel (University of Aberdeen).

Introduction

- Pilot study with seed funding from Semantic Media
- How best to digitise community and family micro-collections and exhibit them online
- Create an accessible and sustainable online model
- Explore potential of linked data for connecting & sharing
- Interdisciplinary team: history, human geography & information science, human-computer interaction & computer science
- dot.rural (University of Aberdeen) & iSchool (Northumbria University)



Research questions

1. To investigate a methodology to systematically visualise cultural heritage data to citizen-historians including both the content and navigation of content.
 2. To implement an open-source software to demonstrate and evaluate the methodology.
 3. To develop a use case in form of a visualisation system for the diaries of the prisoners of WWII, which can deliver to end-users (a) user-attractive contents, (b) enriched contents based on data links, and (c) effective navigation among contents.
 4. To comprehend the decisions and ethics around sharing and not sharing historical data.
 5. To understand the role of the citizen-historians in the production of historical data
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Background to collection case study

- Private 'shoebox' collection
- Trooper Alan Houston of the 3rd British Tank Regiment
- P.O.W. diary & associated letters, photographs & official papers
- Camp 53 (Sforzacosta, Macerata, Italy), Nov. 1942 - Sep. 1943



'British Prisoners of War, Italy'
(1946)

by Paul Bullard (1918-1996)

Oil on canvas.

Copyright: The artist's estate

<http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/3819>

Trooper Alan Houston

IN ITALIAN HANDS

Mr. and Mrs. F. Houston, of 29 Cambridge Street, Oldham, received official notification recently that their son, Trooper Allan Houston, of the Royal Tank Regiment, is a prisoner of war in Italian hands. They have now received a letter from him saying that he is quite well and a prisoner in Italy. Trooper Houston, who is 22 years of age, has been in the Middle East since January, 1941, and also served in Greece and Crete. Prior to his enlistment he was a bus conductor in the employ of the Oldham Corporation Passenger Transport Department.



SHE TOLDS SHE WAITS, SHE PRAYS
TILL SIDES BY SIDE
YOU STAND TOGETHER WHEN
THE BATTLES DONE
O! KEEP FOR HER DEAR SAKE,
A STAINLESS NAME,
BRING BACK TO HER A MANHOLD
FREE FROM SHAME.

Community digital collections

- Fragile and degrading ‘shoebox archives’
 - Digital versions have had a short shelf life
 - Lack of connection between personal stories and to the broader historical narrative
 - TNA’s First World War British army diary project:
<http://www.operationwardiary.org>
 - BBC’s People’s War collection:
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/categories/c1204/>
 - Citizen historians / community archivists need accessible sustainable software to preserve and share at grassroots level
 - Explore promise of linked data but considering data characteristics of cultural heritage domain
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CURIOS

Wider CURIOS project explores:

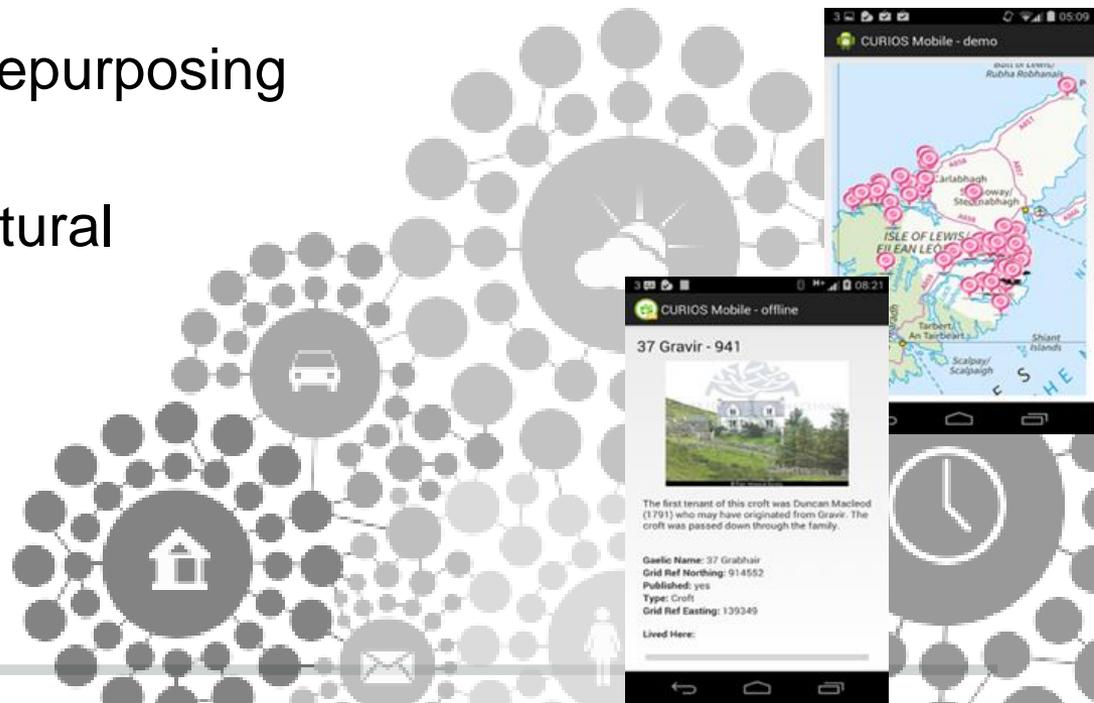
- how digital archives for rural community heritage groups can be made more sustainable
- how volunteer members can maintain a lasting digital presence
- how to collaboratively maintain and present information about cultural heritage
- to promote open data standards and open-sourced software for producing and consuming cultural heritage data



Linked data

Linked data is still a moving target. However can be pinned down as a set of the *best practices* to publish structured data on the web.

- recommended by Tim-Berners Lee since 2006
- promotes reusability & repurposing
- meta data issues for cultural heritage archives



Progress to date

- Digitised the collection
- Created the CURIOS Archive
- Workshop with users



Workshop

To understand how family historians and archivists currently approach archival objects and how they build stories around them

- Family Historians
(Manchester and Lancashire Family History Society)
- Archivists
(Aberdeen city archives and libraries services)
- Activities designed to investigate
 - narrating,
 - contextualising &
 - exploring
- Open Discussion



Workshop findings

Family Historians:

- *“I treat transcriptions with a pinch of salt.”*
- *“I wrote it up for my own website. I like to share. I don’t want it just in a box.”*
- *“education for all”*

Archivists:

- *“Construct a framework quite quickly...next step is adding stories”*
 - *“adds flesh on the bones”*
 - *“archives tell the whole story rather than sanitise it”*
 - *“enable the story to be told in an authentic way”*
 - *“misrepresentation”*
 - *“It depends on who you’re telling.”*
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Demonstration



[Home](#)

[Home](#)

Type keywords

Record Type

Camp

Search

Record Types

- [Camp](#)
- [Correspondence](#)
- [Diary](#)
- [Diary Entry](#)
- [Historical Event](#)
- [Image File](#)
- [Location](#)
- [Media File](#)
- [Object Or Artefact](#)
- [Organisation](#)
- [Person](#)
- [Resource](#)
- [Subject](#)

User login

Username *

Welcome to POWKist Demo (CURIOS Project)

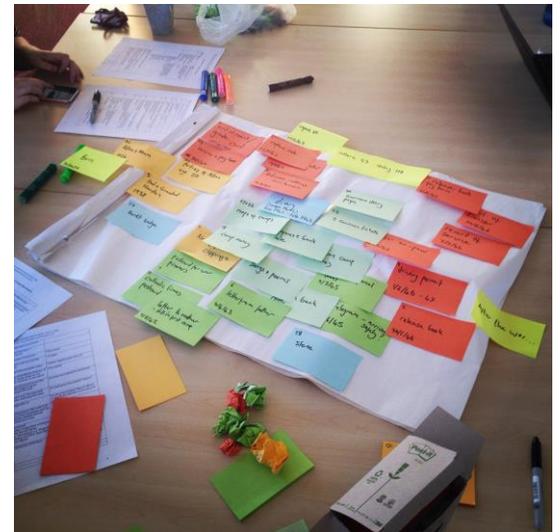
POWKist is a collaboration between the dot.rural Digital Economy Hub in Aberdeen University and iSchool at Northumbria University with the following disciplines: Artificial Intelligence; Human-Computer Interaction; Information Science; Social Sciences; History.

The POWKist project aims to use semantic technologies to support visualisation of combined linked datasets in the cultural heritage domain. This is to provide systematic and attractive visualisation of cultural heritage linked dataset and bring raw data closer to citizen-historians for more efficient exploitation. POWKist will cover the whole life-cycle of content from data collection to data consumption by citizen-historians and the general public.

This case study investigates how best to capture, curate, connect and present the contents of citizen-historians' shoebox archives in accessible and sustainable online collections. Focussing on a selection of physical (to be digitised) and already digitised shoebox archives relating to family members who were prisoners of war during WWII (1939-1945), this case study would seek to place these within a collection, connecting them with the broader web by significant events using a semantic technology model. Many privately-held family collections of diaries, letters, photographs etc. remain vulnerable unless a sustainable, affordable and accessible model of digital preservation can be offered. Some citizen-historians have used the web as a platform to preserve cultural heritage in the form of blogs and websites however with no accessible or sustainable model these digital footprints have been ad hoc and rarely connected to broader historical research.

Conclusions / on-going work

- Very much a work in progress
- The importance of 'everyday' war accounts
- The need to preserve the integrity of the archive and its materials
- The desire to give context to those materials
- Completion of full data entry
- Visualisation of data
- Perhaps add a second 'shoebox'



Contact details

Alison Kay alison.kay@northumbria.ac.uk @historicaljunky

Gemma Webster gwebster@abdn.ac.uk

Hai Nguyen hai.nguyen@abdn.ac.uk

David Beel d.e.beel@abdn.ac.uk @DrDBeel



Semantic Media Network
a new paradigm for navigable content for the 21st Century
