

Digital Preservation at Oxford and Cambridge

A collaborative research project to evaluate and provide sustainable recommendations for our digital preservation programmes

PASIG 2017: honest reflections from a trainee digital archivist

Posted on [25 September, 2017](#) by [kellyburchmore](#)

A guest blog post by Kelly, one of the Bodleian Libraries' graduate digital archivist trainees, on what she learned as a volunteer and attendee of PASIG 2017 Oxford.

Amongst the digital preservation professionals from almost every continent and 130 institutions, myself and my 5 traineeship colleagues were amongst the lecture theatre seats, annexe demos and the awesome artefacts at the Museum of Natural History for PASIG 2017, Oxford. It was a brilliant opportunity at just 6 months into our traineeship to not only apply some of our new knowledge to work at Special Collections, Bodleian Libraries, but we were also able to gain a really current and relevant insight to theories we have been studying as part of our long distance MSc in Digital Curation at Aberystwyth University. The first 'Bootcamp' day was exactly what I needed to throw myself in, and it really consolidated my confidence in my understanding of some aspects of the shared language that is used amongst the profession (fixity checks, maturity models...as well as getting to grips with submission information packages, dissemination information packages and everything that occurs in between!).

My pen didn't stop scribbling all three days, except maybe for tea breaks. Saying that, the demo presentations were also a great time for myself and other trainees to ask questions specifically about workflows and benefits of certain software such as LibNova, Preservica and ResourceSpace.

For want of a better word (and because it really is the truth) PASIG 2017 was genuinely inspiring and there were messages delivered so powerfully I hope that I stay grounded in these for my entire career. Here is what I was taught:

The Community is invaluable. Many of the speakers were quick to assert that sharing practice amongst the digital preservation community is key. This is a value I was familiar with, yet witnessing it happening throughout the conference in such a sincere manner. I can assure you the gratitude and affirmation that followed Eduardo del Valle, University of the Balearic Islands and his presentation: *"Sharing my loss to protect your data: A story of unexpected data loss and how to do real preservation"* was as encouraging to witness as someone new to the profession as it was to all of the other experienced delegates present. As well as sharing practice, it was clear that the community need to be advocating on behalf of each other. It is time and resource consuming but oh-so important.

Digital archives are preserving historical truths. Yes, the majority of the workflow is technological but the objectives and functions are *so much more* than technology; to just reduce digital preservation down to this is an oversimplification. It was so clear that the range of use cases presented at PASIG were all driven towards documenting social, political, historical information (and preserving that documentation) that will be of absolute necessity for society and infrastructure in future. Right now, for example, Angeline Takewara and her colleagues at UN MICT are working on a digital preservation programme to ensure absolute accountability and usability of the records of the International Criminal Tribunals of both Rwanda and Yugoslavia. I have written a more specific post on Angeline's presentation [here](#).

Due to the nature of technology and the digital world, the goalposts will always be moving. For example, Somaya Langley's talk on the future of digital preservation and the mysteries of extracting data from smart devices will soon become (and maybe already is) a reality for those working with accessions of archives or information management. We should, then, embrace change and embrace the unsure and ultimately 'get over the need for tidiness'

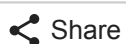
as pointed out by John Sheridan from The National Archives during his presentation “*Creating and sustaining a disruptive digital archive*”. This is usually counter-intuitive, but as the saying goes, one of the most dangerous phrases to use is ‘we’ve always done it that way’.

The value of digital material outlives the software, so the enabling of prolonged use of software is a real and current issue. Admittedly, this was a factor I had genuinely not even considered before. In my brain I linked obsolescence with hardware and hardware only. Therefore, Dr. Natasa Milic-Frayling's presentation on “*Aging of Digital: Managed Services for digital continuity*” shed much light on the changing computing ecosystem and the gradual aging of software. What I found especially interesting about the proposed software-continuity plan was the transparency of it; the fact that the client can ask to see the software at any time whilst it is being stabilised and maintained.

Thank you so much PASIG 2017 and everybody involved!

One last thing...in closing, Cliff Lynch, CNI, brought up that there was comparably less Web Archiving content this year. If anybody fancies taking a trainee to Mexico next year to do a (lightning) talk on [Bodleian Libraries' Web Archive](#) I am keen...

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