

Digital Preservation at Oxford and Cambridge

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

Towards a common understanding?

Posted on [15 December, 2017](#) by [ljp](#)

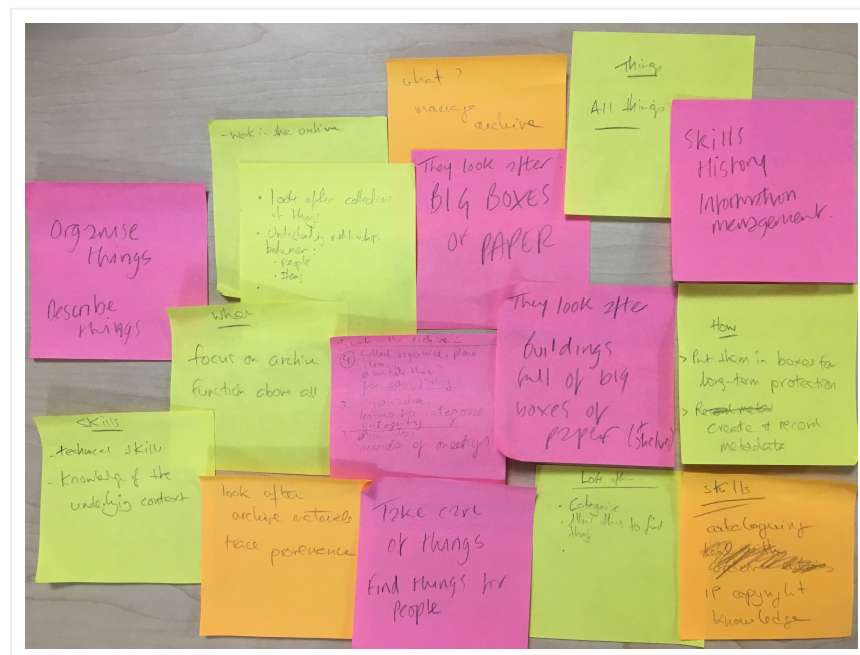
Cambridge Outreach and Training Fellow, Lee, describes the rationale behind trialling a recent workshop on archival science for developers, as well as reflecting on the workshop itself. Its aim was to get those all those working in digital preservation within the organisation to have a better understanding of each other's work to improve co-operation for a sustainable digital preservation effort.

Quite often, there is a perceived language barrier due to the wide range of practitioners that work in digital preservation. We may be using the same words, but there's not always a shared common understanding of what they mean. This became clear when I was sitting next to my colleague, a systems integration manager, at an Archivemata workshop in September. Whilst not a member of the core Cambridge DPOC team, our colleague is a key member of our extended digital preservation network at Cambridge University Library and is a key member for development for understanding and retaining digital preservation knowledge in the institution.

For those from a recordkeeping background, the design principles behind the front end of Archivemata should be obvious, as it incorporates both traditional principles of archival practice and features of the OAIS model. However, coming from a systems integration point of view, there was a need to have to translate for

my colleague words such as 'accession', 'appraisal' and 'arrangement', which many of us with archival education take their meanings for granted.

I asked my colleague if an introductory workshop on archival science would be useful, and she said, "yes, please!" Thus, the workshop was born. Last week, a two and a half hour workshop was trialled for members of our developer and systems integration colleagues. The aim of the workshop was to enable them to understand what archivists are taught on postgraduate courses and how this teaching informs their practice. After understanding the attendees' impressions of an archivist and the things that they do (see image) the workshop then practically explored how an archivist would acquire and describe a collection. The workshop was based on an imaginary company, complete with a history and description of the business units and examples of potential records they would deposit. There were practical exercises on making an accession record, appraising a collection, artificial arrangement and subsequent description through ISAD(G).



— Sticky notes about archivists from a developer point of view.

Having then seen how an archivist would approach a collection, the workshop moved into explaining physical storage and preservation before moving onto digital preservation, specifically looking at OAIS and then examples of digital preservation software systems. One exercise was to get the attendees to use what they had learned in the workshop to see where archival ideas mapped onto the systems.

The workshop tried to demonstrate how archivists have approached digital preservation armed with the professional skills and knowledge that they have. The idea was to inform to teams working with archivists and the digital preservation of how archivists think and how and why some of the tools and products are design in the way that they are. My hope was for 'IT' to understand the depth of knowledge that archivists have in order to help everyone work together on a collaborative digital preservation solution.

Feedback was positive and it will be run again in the New Year. Similarly, I'm hoping to devise a course from a developer perspective that will help archivists communicate more effectively with developers. Ultimately, both will be working from a better level of understanding each other's professional skill sets. Co-operation and collaboration on digital preservation projects will become much easier across disciplines and we'll have a better informed (and relaxed) environment to share practices and thoughts.

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