Digital Humanities Pathways Forum Recap: Hobart, 4 September 2018

40 Items

Recap

The 2018 Hobart DH Pathways forum was opened by the Hon Michael Field AC, Chancellor of the University of Tasmania, setting up the day's proceedings with a call for a digital vision for the future of humanities and acknowledgement of the great potential for Tasmania to use digital technologies to tell its story.

eRSA's Alexis Tindall kicked off the session with an introduction to Tinker (the rebranded HASS DEVL) and future directions for platforms for research in this area. For a sneak preview of the Tinker workbench, click here.

Hobart Digital Humanities Pathways Forum 2018

School of Humanities - University of Tasmania, Australia

The keynote panel session, titled "A Digital Vision for Humanities Research in Tasmania", opened with speakers Dr Janet Carding, Director, Tasmania Museum and Art Gallery, Ross Latham, State Archivist, Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office and Professor Hamish Maxwell-Stewart, University of Tasmania. They each spoke of their achievements and challenges in the year since the first DH Pathways event in Hobart in 2017.

Dr Carding spoke of the tremendous potential of the archival collections held in Tasmania that have up until recently only been available to those who could travel to where the items are held. In 2018 Tasmania has been part of a pilot for the GLAM Peak goal of a common framework for digital collections around Australia. Being a small state, the streamlined nature of organisations and institutions has meant that is has been much easier to get together and work on a single concept as a collective. This pilot has just finished and the next step is to understand how this model could be scaled up to a national level.

Dr Carding finished with a rousing call to arms about digital preservation offering an afterlife to collections that are at risk of physical destruction, in light of the immense fire in the Brazilian National Museum the night before, and this continued to be a theme throughout the day as participants had woken to the terrible news that morning.

Brazil museum fire: what are the chances it could happen to an Australian museum?

AG Australian Geographic

BACK IN 1882, a fire broke out in the Garden Palace, located in the southwestern end of the Royal Botanic Gardens Sydney. It was a large exhibition hall that showcased the achievements of the new colony ove...

Ross Latham, State Archivist, Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office, spoke of the significant events of Tasmanian history that have not yet been fully examined, such as the Tasmanian environmental movement, the impact of transportation on future generations or the ongoing reconciliation with the Tasmanian aboriginal community. He explained that these must be part of the bigger history being told with material coming from smaller museums, history rooms and local collections. His hope is that a joint framework for digital collections would go some way to lifting these items to the surface so that they may enjoy equal value with those held by the bigger institutions. The goal in Tasmania now is to make it so that it needn't matter how small the player is, the collection becomes equal in the digital space.

Professor of History Hamish Maxwell-Stewart started his presentation with a warning:

We need decent funding to consolidate what we have done so far. If we don't, we'll lose what we have.

An example of loss was some work done on Tasmanian records from the 1800s that had to be retrieved from the University of Adelaide because at the University of Tasmania, where the work had been done, the database had become obsolete. It would have been very expensive to collate that data again but because it was retrieved, Tasmania is now the first state in Australia to have linked BDM data, and linked WWI data so researchers can now match service files to birth certificates.

Professor Maxwell-Stewart explained that Tasmania also has indexed street directories, and property records from 1847. There is now the possibility to link data about houses to data about households. This is unique in Australia. These datasets can now be geocoded and there is potential for more but to make further advances in aggregating datasets, much more needs to be done.

The keynote speakers then joined for a panel discussion about the importance of the humanities and social sciences in helping to resolve some of the world's 'wicked problems', the solutions to which reside in interdisciplinary research. The strength of the humanities and social sciences in collating rich datasets for the examination of scholars from different fields can lead to projects such as the study of cross-generational gene-environment interactions, These studies need archives, historians and historical demographers and can help us study the transmission of inequality to answers some big questions: Why do some remain poor? What's 'the gap' in first nations people? What is a child's future risk of prosecution? An examination of the past is vital to finding ways to resolve these issues in the future.

After morning tea, Dr Steve McEachern, Director and Manager of the Australian Data Archive at the Australian National University in Canberra opened the session 'Research and knowledge landscape, digital environments', noting that data exchange has been around for over 70 years. He explained that because there are policies and practices as well as agreed standards in place, data archiving is already a trusted system. He admitted however that there is tension in enabling use versus maintaining privacy and considering the rights of those involved.

Dr McEachern offered a lot of advice to researchers about the value of working with data and the challenges that accompany that work. One of the advantages is that now researchers who share data gain more citations than those who do not. In addition, funders of research are keen to know that their investment has continued validity into the future and are more likely to fund research that creates reusable datasets. He stated that funding bodies are now shifting from recommended to mandated data sharing and that often future funding relies on having stored previous data in an open location.

Dr McEachern underlined that funders paid for the data collection want it to be reused and if it is stored correctly, everyone can use it and no one misses out. He noted that often the value of data is not what was done on its initial collection, but what can be done with it next.
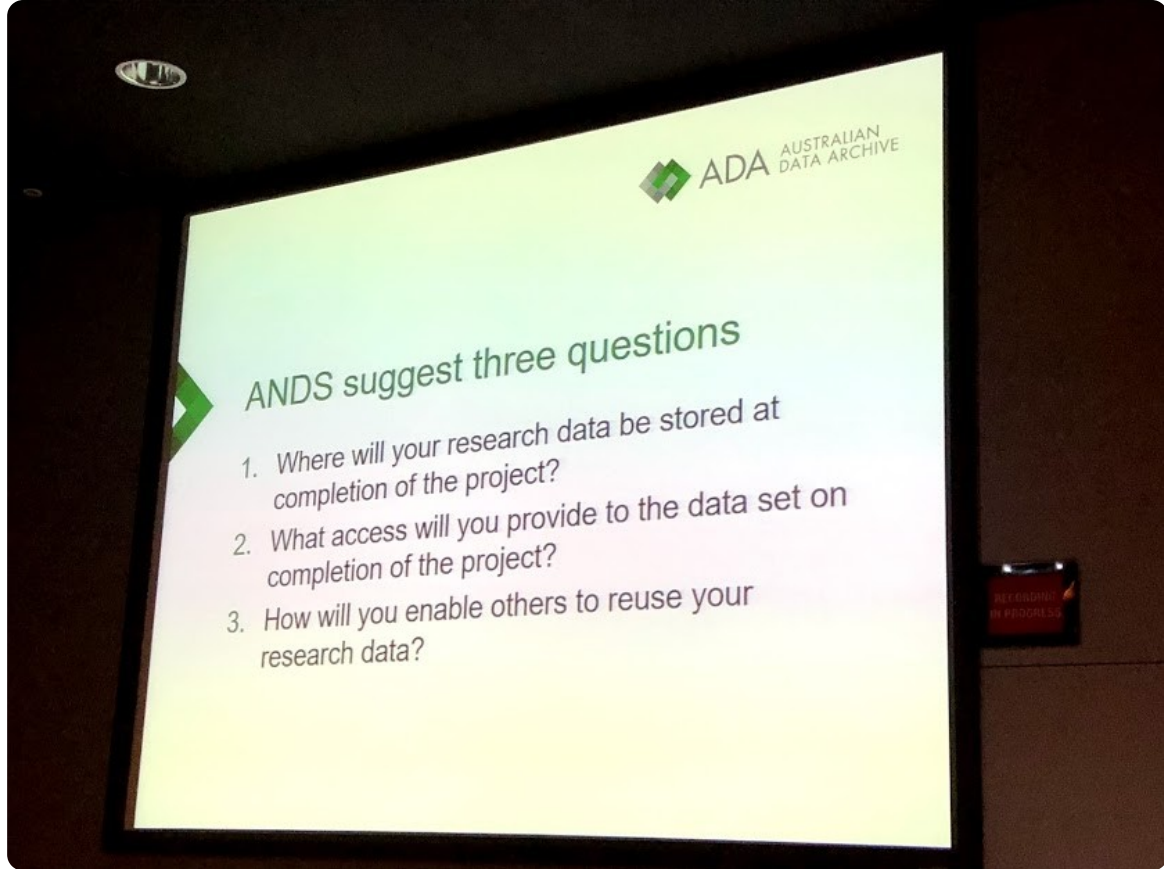
The next speakers were Dr Jonathan Wallis and Dr Robbie Moore, both lecturers at the University of Tasmania, who presented their digital and blended teaching practices.

In his 'Ancient Civilisation' classes Dr Wallis makes smartphone video introductions to lectures for both on- and off-campus students. These have proven to have improved face-to-face attendance, engagement and participation at basically no or low cost.

Dr Moore on the other hand uses data visualisation tools to present 8000 years of history in a first year topic. With 40% of his students online and disengagement and attrition a real problem, the use of these tools has the aim of optimising online teaching and learning.
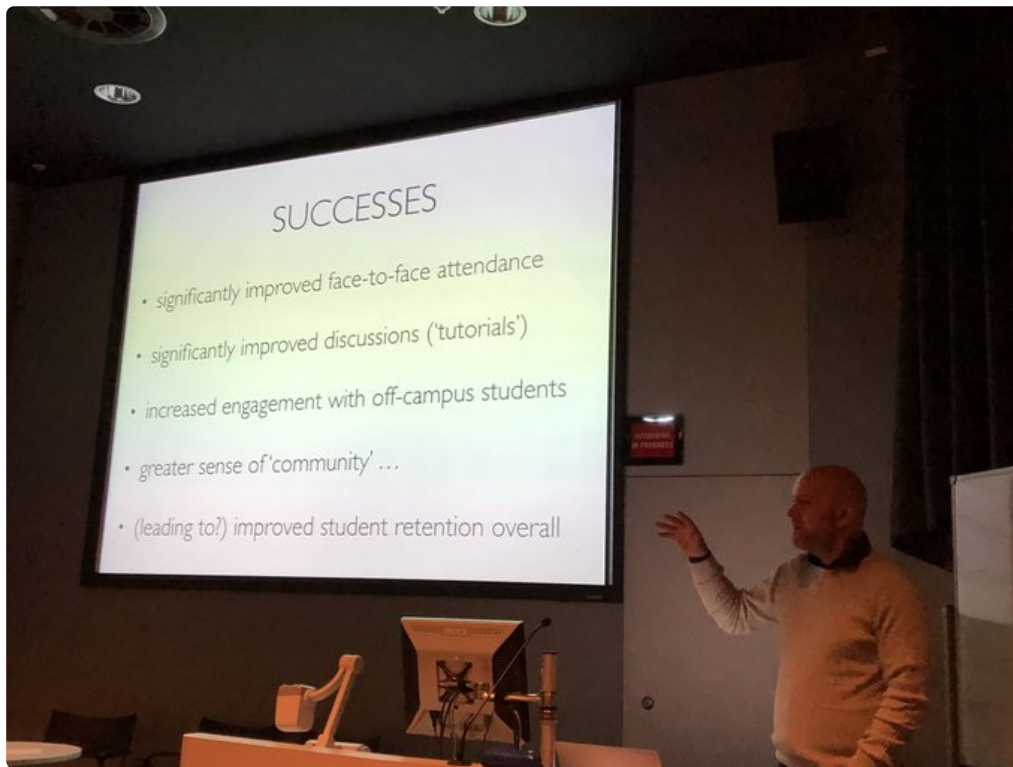
Following Dr Moore, Dr Taufiq Tanasaldy did an digital presentation on how he uses https://h5p.org/ to teach languages, reporting that students are finding it engaging and useful as a tool for learning.

The final panellist in this session, archivist Caroline Homer from the Tasmanian Archives and Heritage Office (TAHO), demonstrated the incredible success of DigiVol for their crowd-sourced transcription projects. Over the last year they have finished 23 projects, using different records to create new datasets. In just six months they indexed 6000 records and added an extra 5000 to the Tasmanian Names Index. In a nutshell, DigiVOl has transformed TAHO's work.

DIGIVOL | Libraries Tasmania

🠗 Ala

Libraries Tasmania is Tasmanias state-wide publicly-funded library and archives service. The Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office is the custodian of over three million heritage documents and historical items,...

After a buzzing lunch with attendees and a brisk walk in the Hobart sunshine the group regathered for an excellent session of lightning talks presented by a diverse range of Tasmanian researchers. Dr Gemma Lewis spoke about using the UTas-developed app Tourism Tracer to research wine tourism in Tasmania. She state that if this could be scaled-up to a national level it would be a great informer into two of Australia's most important industries – wine and tourism.

Using GPS combined with survey technology she is finding answers to the questions of what else tourists are doing when they are visiting a wine region, how long they stay, how they move between regions and more. The app already has a partner and is commercially viable, so could have broad impact globally once up and running.

Following Dr Lewis, Dr Narissa Bax spoke about the challenges and opportunities in indexing the Census of Antarctic Marine Life, and how these online databases are enriching all kinds of research globally through discoverability. Traditionally there may not have been this kind of exposure for research data, but through collaborative efforts rich datasets are now able to be explored to enhance longitudinal studies of remote ecosystems. Dr Bax also spoke about the Decadal Plan for Taxonomy and its aim to use new and emerging technologies to document the as yet undocumented, and the impact this will have on museum research.

Librarian and University of Tasmania history postgraduate Kim Shaw presented her work with librarian Libby Seymour from the university library using Omeka S with the aim of linking library collections across the world to the internet, rather than embedded in databases that are not trawled by search engines. By partnering with the university she has been able to produce a collections website, which is a reportable output for ERA. You can explore more of these projects here: https://exhibit.utas.edu.au/

Librarians from @UTAS_ talking about their use of @omeka S to publish their special and heritage digitised collections #dhpathways18

♡ 2   3:36 AM - Sep 4, 2018

@UTAS_ Library @omeka sites recently launched eg Pink collection exhibit.utas.edu.au/s/olive-pink/p... #dhpathways18 #lodlam #glamdata #lov #lod

3:42 AM - Sep 4, 2018

Ingrid Mason
@1n9r1d

Cracking digital toolkit shared by Kim Shaw @UTAS_ for her #digitalhumanities research into convict health #dhpathways18 #eresearch

♡ 3   3:57 AM - Sep 4, 2018   ⓘ

They also demonstrated how UTas librarians are using new technologies such as 3D modelling to examine collections and heritage data.

Computer science student Nicholas Forbes-Smith also wowed the audience with a powerful example of data visualisation. Using Stardust, Nicholas was able to render over 25,000 lines of convict voyage data with more than 50 variables into an interactive website for users to investigate to understand more about illness and mortality rates on convict ships from the 1800s.

Sara King
@sarasrking

Best line of the day from an undergraduate computer science student: "I'm a big fan of density waves." #DHPathways18 Just after blowing our minds with a visualisation demo of data from 25,000 convict voyages. Wow. #digitalhumanities

♡ 7   4:25 AM - Sep 4, 2018   ⓘ

See Sara King's other Tweets   ›

The session that followed afternoon tea, "Reclaiming the Past" included a broad-ranging group of presentations related to building ethical tools to explore the past and manage digital assets in the future.
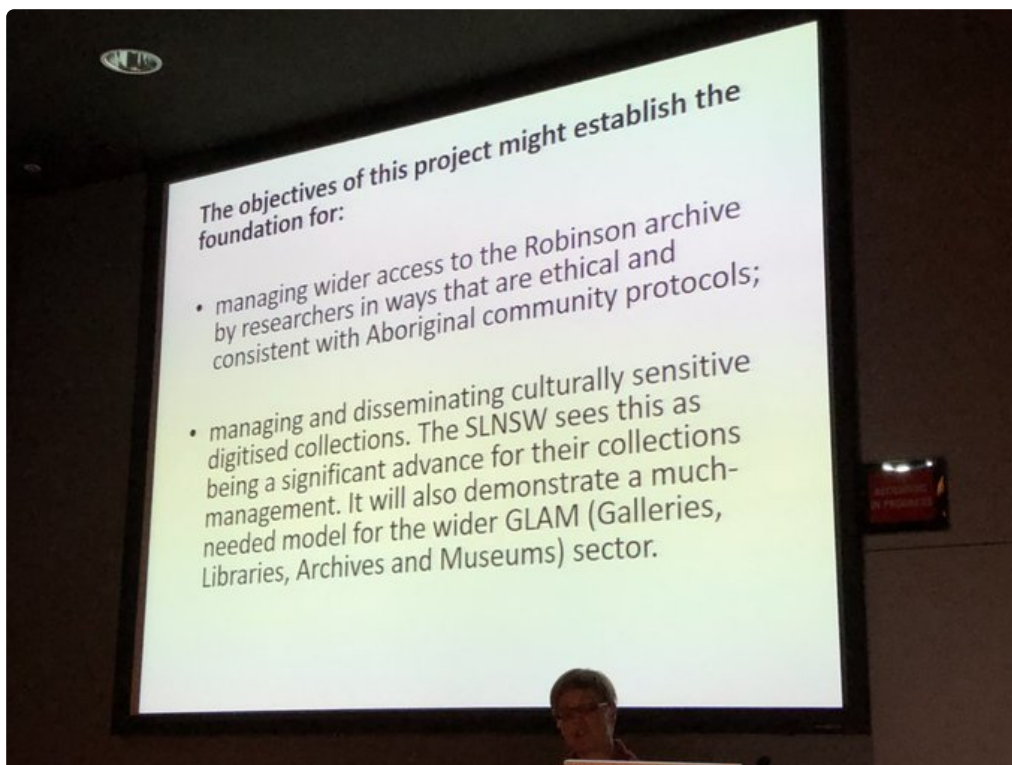
University of Tasmania's Dr Rebe Taylor presented a joint paper by her and Dr Greg Lehman from the University of Melbourne about their work with the State Library of New South Wales (SLNSW) in NSW in reassessing the 'Robinson Papers'. These highly significant papers were collated by George Augustus Robinson who was Chief Protector of Aborigines in Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) between 1829 and 1838. In Tasmania Robinson is a controversial figure, and in light of the sensitivities of these papers, their digitisation and public dissemination has been part of a joint consultation with the SLNSW and the Tasmanian aboriginal community. Dr Taylor emphasised the importance of face-to-face consultation during this project, and the significance of drawing up access protocols for sensitive collection items.

Archaeologist Dr Penelope Jones from the Menzies Centre for Medical Health then presented her work using an ecological technique to gain further understanding about where aboriginal people were likely to live in Tasmania prior to the arrival of Europeans. Using habitat suitability modelling, she explored the data in the Aboriginal Heritage Register, which provides a rich record of more than 12,000 Tasmanian Aboriginal cultural heritage sites, then used the records to model the relative intensity of Aboriginal land use across the island. The results of this study can now help predict the likelihood of finding as yet unexplored heritage sites, and because of the sensitivity of such finds she too emphasised the importance of appropriate access protocols accompanying this sort of data.
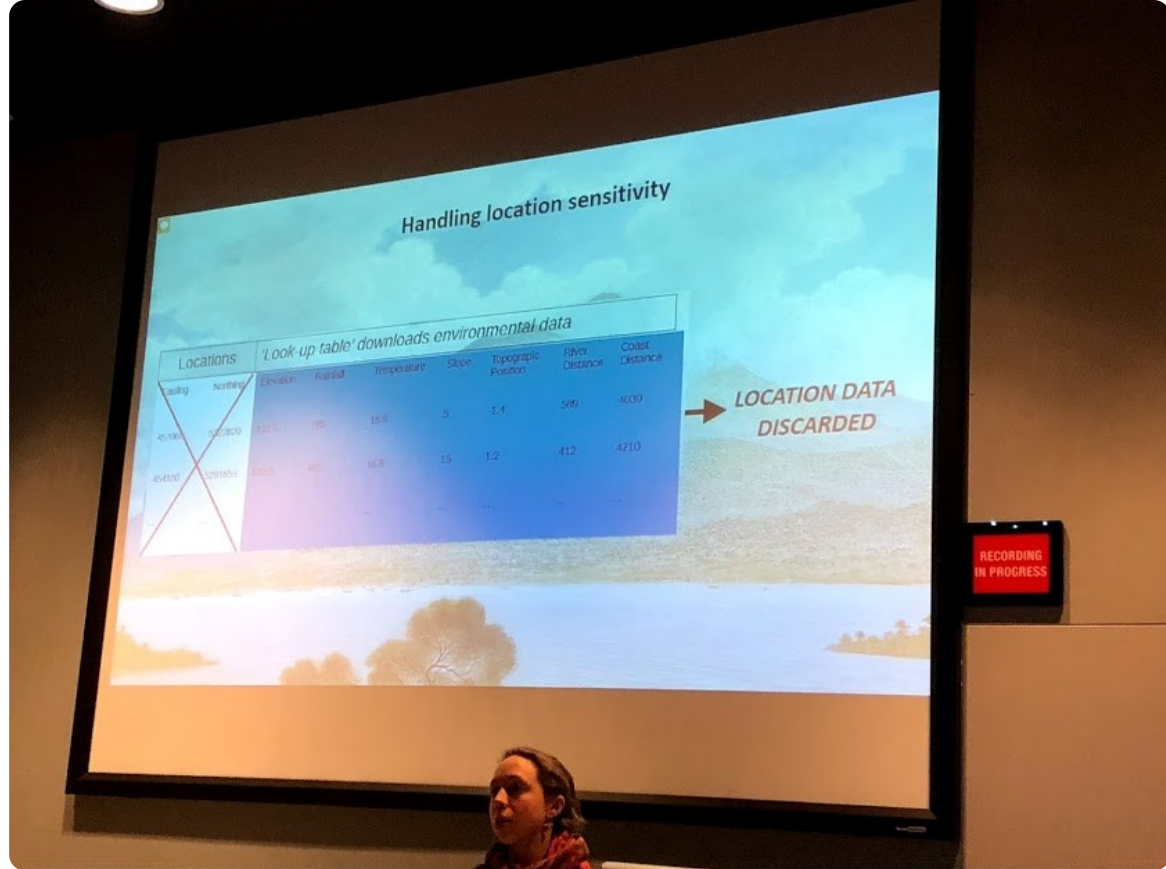
The final presentation of the day was an exhilarating one: John Stephenson from Heritage Tasmania demonstrated his work on a virtual reality learning environment recently trialled in Tasmanian schools. He has reproduced 1800s Hobart Town using maps, data from architectural plans, ship designs, museum objects and archival material. Again the audience was blown away by the attention to detail and John's enthusiasm that Tasmania's history need not just be read about, but experienced firsthand. It was a wonderful end to a fantastic day of presentations from the diverse spectrum of disciplines that make up the Digital Humanities.

Sara King
@sarasrking

Fantastic finish to today's event - using data to create new experiences for children to explore history using virtual reality. VR is not just for STEM! #DHPathways18 #digitalhumanities

♡ 2   6:05 AM - Sep 4, 2018

👤 See Sara King's other Tweets