Annual Report 2015-16

Founded in 2015, **the Digital History Research Centre** (DHRC) at the University of Hertfordshire is the UK's first centre devoted to digital history. We combine leading research in digital heritage with historical data mining and a **commitment to supporting students at all levels**.

We draw upon almost 15 years of digital history work at the University of Hertfordshire, when our esteemed former colleague Tim Hitchcock established the *Old Bailey Online* project.

Our newly established team has brought fresh energy to the field, bringing with them experiences of working in some of the premier digital humanities centres around the world.

Though it's been less than two years since our founding, we're proud of our achievements. This report shares some of those projects, as well as our commitment to learning and teaching.
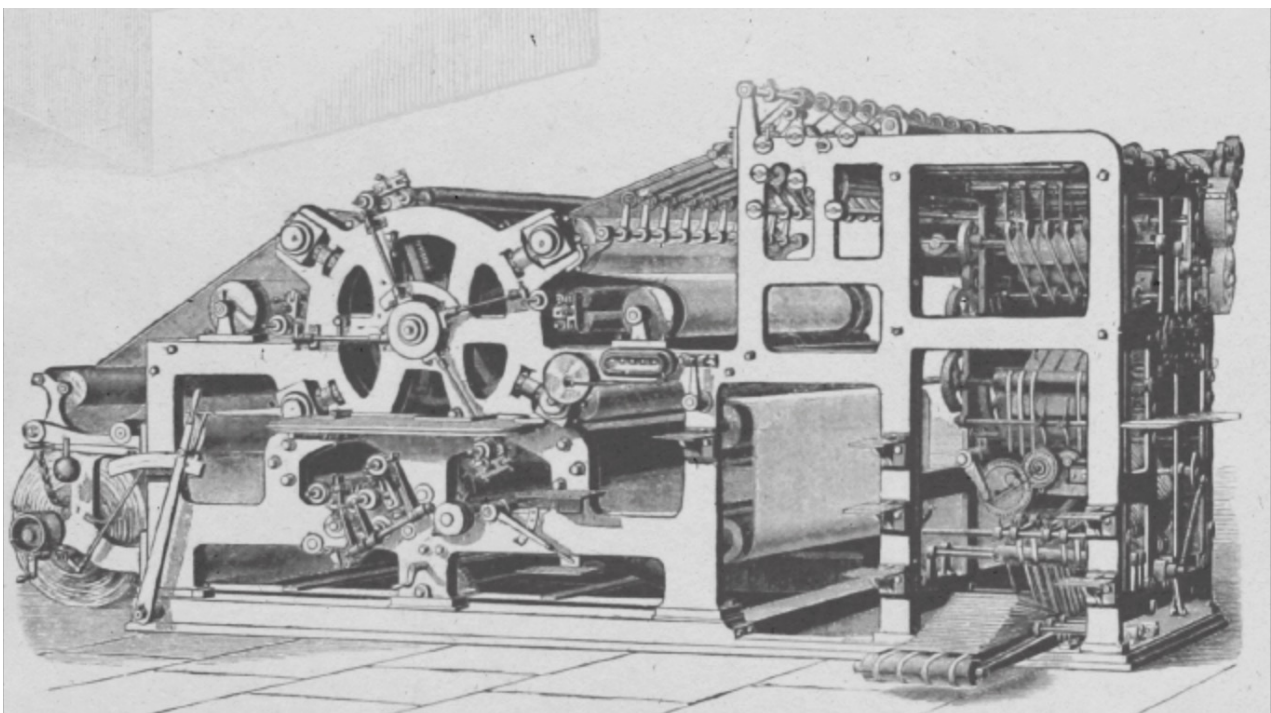
In 2015-16, we're pleased to report that Centre members Katrina Navickas and Adam Crymble won both of the British Library Labs awards for their digital history research. It was the first time that members of a single university took both prizes, and was a significant achievement (p. 2).

Meanwhile, Pieter Francois has established his Cliodynamics Lab, which takes a transdisciplinary approach to history, combining fields as diverse as macrosociology, economic history, and evolutionary anthropology. This work underpins our trans-, inter-, and multidisciplinary approach to research.

We have also begun recruiting research students, the first of whom is now busy at work. The DHRC offers expert supervision to students looking to build digital skills in a history-first environment (p. 4) ■

Some Project Highlights

Political Meetings Mapper

http://politicalmeetingsmapper.co.uk/maps/

Katrina Navickas presenting the 'Political Meetings Mapper' at the British Library, November 2015.
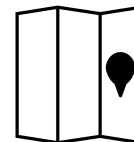
Chartism was the biggest movement for democracy in 19th century Britain. This project, one of the winners of the British Library Labs competition (2015), mapped over 5,000 weekly meetings and lecture tours published in the newspapers between 1841 and 1845.

The initiative not only improved our understanding of grass roots politics in the nineteenth century, it also helped the British Library improve its ability to work with messy transcriptions in digitised newspaper collections, drawing on skills developed by the *Programming Historian* ■

(British Library Labs; PI Katrina Navickas)

Just a taste of what we've been up to since launch.

Space Syntax and 3D modelling of historic streetscapes

How do we know how well connected a street was from a historic town plan? Could we model how busy it might have been? Did processions and marches choose well connected or more isolated areas of town for their routes?

Working with architects and GIS experts at the Bartlett School of Architecture, University College London, this project seeks to apply Space Syntax software to historic data in an innovative experiment to answer these questions. The initiative also innovates with 3D modelling historic town plans in new and exciting ways to expand the capabilities of Space Syntax analysis ■

(PI Katrina Navickas)

Crowdsource Arcade

How do you organise a collection of 1-million digital historical images? This project uses the power of video games to let people 'play' and curate cultural heritage at the same time.

Building upon the popularity of video games, and growing interest in participating in history, this project involved a collaboration between the DHRC, the British Library, and amateur video game makers. The initiative took on the challenge of making the games fun enough that people would want to play them, while at the same time bringing in useful information about the images for the library, changing the way we think about the relationship between fun and scholarship ■

(British Library Labs; PI Adam Crymble)

Icon credits: images by Yu Iuck (3d object), AFY Studio (map), Connor Shea (game controller)

Collaboration: Us & You

Dr Katrina
Navickas

Dr Ciara
Meehan

Dr Pieter
Francois

Dr Ceri
Houlbrook

Dr Adam
Crymble

Dr Dan
Mullins

Prof John
Styles

People are at the core of any digital humanities initiative. **Our UK-based team includes 14 scholars, research associates, and postgraduate students** working on digital history projects. That includes six permanent members of staff. We are also committed to building meaningful connections with communities, colleagues, and partners around the world.

Since launching in 2015, we've **collaborated on initiatives with** people in more than 30 universities, libraries and archives, in 11 countries on 4 continents.

Those colleagues include historians, geographers, linguists, librarians, archivists, video game makers, project managers, programmers, archaeologists, anthropologists, graphics designers, and more.

Our team plans to continue to expand our collaborative initiatives and we encourage you to get in touch if you'd like to work with us.

Our areas of research interest are broad, but focus on interdisciplinary approaches to history. Some of our key themes include:

• Digital Public History
• Digital Material Culture
• Early Modern British History
• 18th and 19th century British History
• 20th century Irish History

If you think there is an opportunity to make a connection, please drop us a line: digital.history@herts.ac.uk

Training and Teaching

Calling MA Research Students

We believe a strong understanding of digital skills and methodologies makes for a better researcher. We recognise that apart from our own students, very few scholars will ever get an opportunity to study digital methods formally, and will instead have to learn while on the job, as they juggle research and teaching. We believe the best time to learn these skills is at MA level: after you have a solid understanding of history, but before you embark on a PhD project.

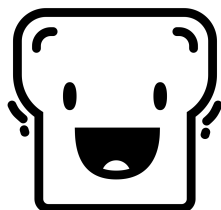The DHRC aims to provide that skills development opportunity for MA students.

We are particularly interested in hearing from students interested in an MA Research project in the following areas:

- Digital mapping and GIS
- Historical Text Mining
- Digital Heritage and Public History

Students are also invited to get in touch if they are interested in building upon the following ongoing projects:

- 18th century migrant experiences in Britain
  - (http://migrants.adamcrymble.org)
- Mapping Protest in the 19th century
  - (http://politicalmeetingsmapper.co.uk/maps/)

(Contact Katrina Navickas:
 digital.history@herts.ac.uk *)*

Masterclass Series

The DHRC hosted a 'Masterclass series' of intensive in-person workshops in the spring of 2016. These events were designed to help scholars develop their skills in particular areas of digital research (digital mapping, data analysis, etc), in a supportive and collaborative environment. Participants included established scholars and students from across the UK and Europe.

The events were hosted in London in collaboration with the Institute of Historical Research. The Masterclass was then followed by a scholarly paper that applied the skill that was the subject of the session, to a real historical problem. The model has proved both popular and sustainable, requiring participants only to cover the cost of travel, while making clear links between method and historical research ■

(PI Adam Crymble)

The Programming Historian Spanish Translation

Established in 2012, the Programming Historian (ISSN 2397-2068) offers a growing collection of 56 peer-reviewed tutorials aimed at helping scholars improve their technical research skills. In the past year 250,000 people have accessed the lessons, and a number of prominent digital humanities scholars have credited the project with helping them build new skills which subsequently has led to some of the field's most exciting research projects.

Our most recent efforts include an ongoing Spanish translation of the lessons, led by a team of researchers in Mexico, Colombia, and Spain. This is one of our attempts to build further bridges between digital scholars around the world ■

(UK-PI Adam Crymble)

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