

What a Mission! New Skills and Services that Support Humanities Research

Charlotte Brown, Vanessa Gibbs

University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand, charlotte.brown@otago.ac.nz

University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand, vanessa.gibbs@otago.ac.nz

Humanities research processes are converting from analogue-to-digital. To better understand, support, and enable research in an online environment, librarians need to adapt and engage more closely with academics at all stages of the research process. With the application of advanced computing to research, new skills and career paths are emerging in libraries and research institutions. At the University of Otago Library, we wanted to offer researchers an innovative way to explore history, which has prompted library staff to develop new skill sets and altered existing roles. These skills will be increasingly required by organisations wanting to compete on the world stage. This is an opportunity for anyone with an interest in developing their own eResearch infrastructure to come along, listen, and share relevant experiences.

In our presentation we will share what we have learned, insights into the Marsden Online Archive project, and initiate further discussion around the following issues:

- Workforce Development - Transitioning an existing workforce for future needs.
- Funding - Strengthening internal and external partnerships to secure funding in an ever-competitive environment.
- Impact - Increasing the profile of library resources and services that enable eResearch.
- Innovation - Exploring new ways to discover and contextualise the past that enable us to re-create and better understand the events that shape our world.
- Future Possibilities - Expanding, enhancing and developing platforms to better support innovative research both nationally and internationally, across a diverse range of disciplines.

A CASE STUDY: THE MARSDEN ONLINE ARCHIVE

In 2013, the University of Otago Library partnered with academics on the Digital Humanities project "Mining Marsden" to explore how digital tools and methods can be used to enhance humanities scholarship. This project has highlighted the highly collaborative nature of this industry, as the success of this project has ultimately depended on strong collaboration between academics, researchers, lecturers, students, programmers, librarians, external institutions, and representatives of cultural institutions. The Marsden Online Archive will enhance humanities researchers' ability to collaborate, collect, manage, share, process, analyse, store, find, understand and re-use information about Samuel Marsden, and his early NZ voyages.

The Reverend Samuel Marsden was a pivotal figure in early NZ, as one of New Zealand's earliest missionaries, he was instrumental in the introduction of Christianity to Maori, and one of the first to document the Maori language. His letters and journals are held in the Hocken Collection, and have been transcribed into machine readable form by Associate Professor Gordon Parsonson. The digitisation and transcription of primary source documents makes this material more accessible, enables humanities scholars to work with this material in new ways, and increases the potential for future research. As part of the celebrations surrounding the bicentenary of Marsden's first sermon in New Zealand, a research symposium will be held at the end of 2014, and the Marsden Online Archive will be made available to the public.

This project was carefully managed through all stages, from the arranging of archival material, to conservation, digitisation, automatic content extraction, systematic metadata generation, digital development, and project evaluation. Librarians involved in the project were chosen for their expertise and existing skills, but also "can-do" attitude and a willingness to develop new skill sets. However, at times, expertise could not be developed internally within the timeframes required, so people with required skills were actively recruited. Expertise in eResearch infrastructure, is not commonly found alongside humanities research skills. This project has fostered the development of expertise in both areas, ensuring our workforce will be prepared to contribute to local, national, and international initiatives in the future.

The Marsden Online Archive was introduced in its initial stages at the eResearch NZ Conference in July 2014. After engaging with NZ eResearchers and practitioners, we are ready to provide the Australasian eResearch community with a sneak preview of the platform before it is made available to the public at the end of October 2014.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Charlotte Brown is a Humanities Liaison Librarian for the University of Otago Library, and the key link between the Library and the History department. With over 12 years' experience in the Library Charlotte had formed strong relationships with academic staff, and excellent understanding of researchers needs in this discipline. Her liaison skills have proven useful in determining the researcher requirements for potential users of the Marsden Online Archive, and in communicating these needs to others involved in the project. Charlotte completed an Honours Degree in English Literature at the University of Otago in 2001, and began working at the University Library in 2002, while undertaking the Masters in Library and Information Studies (MLIS) as a distance student through Victoria University of Wellington. During her studies, she was involved with several projects and new library initiatives, including a joint project between the Library and the History Department about the History of the University. Since qualifying, she has worked as an Electronic Resources and Serials Access Librarian, and Subject/Liaison Librarian. She is also a registered member of the Library and Information Association of New Zealand (RLIANZA), and Tertiary Libraries Special Interest Group (TEL-SIG).

Vanessa Gibbs is a Business Analyst for the University of Otago Library and was tasked with Project Managing "Mining Marsden". Taking up this position in July 2013, Vanessa had previously been employed in the University's IT department. Specialising in Project Management, Vanessa was able to apply a range of skills to the Library environment and its digital humanities projects. Of particular use were her skills and experience in determining business requirements, coordinating staff and creating project documentation. Managing the creation of the Marsden Online Archive has been a career highlight for Vanessa because of its cultural significance and how it will enable researchers to create insightful outputs. Vanessa studied at the University of Otago and completed a Bachelor of Commerce in Account and Marketing and a Diploma for Graduates (DipGrad) endorsed in Accounting. She is also a member of the Project Management Institute (PMI) and is a registered PRINCE2 Practitioner.