

The 1916 Easter Rising Web Archive Project

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The 1916 Easter Rising Web Archive was a collaborative project in 2015/2016 between the Library of Trinity College Dublin (University of Dublin), the Bodleian Libraries (University of Oxford), and the British Library. The project aimed to identify, collect, and preserve online resources that can contribute to an understanding of the causes, course, and consequences of the 1916 Easter Rising, and help to enable critical reflection on the Easter Rising and the diverse ways it was commemorated and engaged with in 2016.

The context for the project was the UK legal deposit environment in which the six Legal Deposit Libraries¹ (LDLs) work together to help preserve the UK's knowledge and memory. In 2013 the legal deposit remit was extended from printed material to include non-print, electronically published material, which means the LDLs may now capture and archive any freely available websites that are published or hosted in the UK. This happens in the Legal Deposit UK Web Archive, with the British Library providing the technical and curatorial infrastructure, and all LDLs contributing at both the strategic and planning level, and through curating themed collections.

Whilst in the first instance the project was designed to produce a web archive collection, resulting in a corpus of 300+ targets, it was also a test case for effective collaboration between two university libraries amongst the UK Legal Deposit Libraries to enable the curation of evolving types of collections, and helped to explore how themed, curated web archive collections can be used to promote the value and potential of web archives to a wider audience.

This paper will review the project, and outline the problems and opportunities that emerged as the project progressed. In particular, it will highlight the challenges that arose from working across multiple jurisdictions, as well as the implications of different legislative frameworks for archive curation, and ultimately, for the content and structure of web archive collections.

¹ The six UK Legal Deposit Libraries are: the British Library, the National Libraries of Scotland and Wales, Bodleian Library (University of Oxford), Cambridge University Library, and the Library of Trinity College Dublin (University of Dublin).

Collection Strategy, Scope and Content

As many of the 2016 reflections and debates about the legacy of the Easter Rising took place on the internet, commemorative websites, online news, blogs and social media content will be invaluable primary resources of the future for those attempting to analyse how people interpreted and engaged with the Easter Rising in its centenary year. We aimed reflect the variety of ways that the Irish and British states, cultural and educational institutions, as well as communities and individuals, approached the centenary events by including a wide range of material including official commemorative websites, the websites of museums, archives, heritage, cultural and education institutions, traditional and alternative news media websites, along with community websites, blogs, social media and even online shops.

The Bodleian Libraries primarily collected UK websites under the provisions of UK electronic Legal Deposit legislation, whilst The Library of Trinity College Dublin focussed on websites in the .ie domain. Since no legislation exists in the Republic of Ireland to ensure that the .ie domain is preserved, websites within the .ie domain were collected on a voluntary basis, that is, with the express permission of the website owners. In addition, websites from overseas, notably from the USA, were selected to reflect areas where the Irish diaspora has a strong presence; again, these websites were collected on a permission basis. The scope of the collection included both websites specifically concerned with the Easter Rising, as well as websites containing significant material on the topic. Also included were a number of individual online news items with the relevant comment section, as well as pages relating to lectures, concerts and other events.

Websites identified for inclusion in the collection were curated and annotated utilising the British Library's web archive annotation and curation tool, W3ACT. The tool allows curators to enter the URLs of websites to be included in a collection, add descriptive metadata (e.g. Title, Subject, Author(s)), provide information about the selection process (e.g. curator), and set a crawl policy and schedule (e.g. scope and depth of crawl, crawl frequency, start and end date) for each target. W3ACT also provides functions to initiate and administer the permission process, and to monitor crawl results for quality assurance purposes. The resulting web archive collection, which was started in July 2015 and ended in December 2016, contains 318 'targets', ie. websites or sub-sections of these.

Of these 318 websites, 112 (35%) were selected by the Library of Trinity College Dublin (Web Archiving Project Officer), 190 (60%) by the Bodleian Library (Project Archivist and Easter Rising Project summer interns), and 16 (5%) by curators at the British

Library. 118 (37.1%) of the websites were from the .ie domain, 172 (54.1%) were from the .uk domain, and 28 (8.8%) were associated with other areas – predominantly the USA.²

For all websites outside the UK (146), permission to archive was sought from the website owners, resulting in 61 licenses to archive, and make the archived copies publicly available. This means an overall permissions rate of 42% (with the rate for websites in the .ie domain being even higher, 51%³), exceeding the average response rates (18%-30%) usually experienced by both the National Library of Ireland and the British Library.

A description of a sample of websites selected and captured will provide an indication of the scope of the collection, the variety of material included, and the potential of web archive resources for learning, teaching, and research. Traditional newspapers have for some time shared news through multiple platforms, with printed newspaper articles being reproduced online. Web archiving not only collects the digital equivalents of traditional paper archive resources but preserves the added functions that online platforms provide such as the opportunity to directly comment and debate revealing information about how content is viewed and shared. Increasingly, news media is being created solely in a digital environment with news portals offering alternative sources for information and again, providing a forum for discussions and indicators of how this material is engaged with. These have moved from collecting and sharing to featuring interactive elements such as an online poll conducted by ‘TheJournal.ie’, an Irish online news website, asking readers if they would be attending an Easter Rising centenary event which garnered over 12,000 responses.

The range of websites included in the web archive also reflects the varied ways in which the Irish and British states, cultural and educational institutions, as well as communities and individuals, approached the centenary events. We have preserved some of the Irish states efforts to provide an inclusive programme of events and also reflections on the centenary events from key individuals such as the Irish Ambassador to Great Britain and the President of Ireland. A range of community sites were created for the centenary which reflected the diverse approaches that have been adopted to reflect on the Easter Rising. These new media platforms such as blogs reflect how people engage with historical events in a time of major transformations in communications.

2 Applying the UK legal deposit definition, a website is considered to be in the UK domain when it its URL has the .uk suffix (or any other top level domain attributed to the UK; e.g. .cymru), is hosted in the UK, OR a substantial part of the website creation and publishing process takes part in the UK.

3 For the 112 websites contributed by the Library of Trinity College Dublin: Permission cleared: 57, Permission not received, no response to permission request, or permission denied: 55.

Within Ireland community projects such as the ‘1916 Sackville Street Art Project’ focused on the deaths of civilians during the Rising highlight imaginative artistic approaches to the centenary. There are also a range of projects reflecting on the Easter Rising through theatre, film, and music and this web archive provides the opportunity for this diversity to be preserved and consequently provide a broader picture of the undertakings that can complement official commemorative programmes. There are also a range of reflections based on primary source material produced by cultural institutions as well as amateur enthusiasts which highlights how web archives are a new conception of what constitutes archival material which requires an awareness of the increasingly significant role that digital technologies are playing in historical research. The ‘Richmond Barracks’ website focuses on discrete aspects of the Easter Rising such as the imprisonment of those arrested but also aspects that had for a long time being neglected such as the role of women in the Rising. Similarly, websites have been created by family members of those involved in the Rising which incorporate personal accounts, but also digitised images of primary documents.

The Library of Trinity College Dublin was engaged in a number of initiatives as part of the programme of centenary events. Foremost amongst these was the ‘Changed Utterly: Ireland and the Easter Rising’ blog, a series of weekly blog posts in the year leading up to the centenary based on our archival holdings. This site forms part of the web archive and will ensure that the material created will be digitally preserved. The blog contains contextual information as well as digitised copies of both documents and images from our collection. What has been produced is primary research born in a digital environment and existing in no other format and it is material such as this that is amongst the most vulnerable from a preservation perspective. The eventual value of material such as this will of course relate to their content but also how the material is preserved and curated. The blog and the web archive allows Trinity to maximise the opportunities offered by new digital platforms to extend the accessibility of our collections and forms part of Trinity College Library’s wider strategy to accelerate access to digital content in order to catalyse new avenues of scholarship.⁴

4 <https://www.tcd.ie/library/about/strategy.php>

Providing Access

After full ingest of the crawl results, the websites archived in the Easter Rising collection will become available via two different access routes: whilst permission cleared material⁵ becomes available under licence by the website owner, in the publicly accessible - or open - UK Web Archive (<https://www.webarchive.org.uk/ukwa/>), .uk websites archived under UK legal deposit regulations can only to be accessed on the premises of one of the six UK Legal Deposit Libraries, and through a dedicated secure interface.

For the Easter Rising project, a bespoke website⁶ was created as a gateway for integrated access to the two access options. The website provides links to selected Easter Rising collection resources and also gives an overview of the wider Easter Rising web archive project, as well as a brief introduction to web archiving initiatives and resources in the UK. The website was set up in January 2016 – at a time when the web archive collection was under way. Whilst this timing meant we could only provide a ‘snapshot’ of the project at an early stage when the collection was still developing, it was crucial to link the web archive project with other Easter Rising commemoration initiatives and academic activities, and aided in publicising the web archive during the exhibitions and events taking place at Trinity College and at the Bodleian Libraries before and around the main centenary period. Between mid-January and 30 May 2016, the Easter Rising Web Archive project pages were viewed more than 2800 times.

The Wider Project

The web archive collection was part of a wider project at the Library of Trinity College Dublin and at the Bodleian Libraries to mark the centenary of the Easter Rising. At both locations, the web archive curators also played a central role in the ‘analogue’ activities, such as in the curation of physical displays of both libraries archival holdings, and in events and public outreach. One of the outputs of the project were two exhibitions, held at both the University of Oxford and Trinity College, Dublin, comprising both physical and digital material. ‘Changed Utterly: recording and reflecting on the Rising 1916–2016’ was displayed

5 Comprising 27% of the Easter Rising collection – 86 items for which licence has been cleared, either through the permission process for non-uk websites, or via existing licences for UK websites, e.g. government websites.

6 Available - in two identical versions – under http://www.webarchive.org.uk/easter_rising/bodleian.html and http://www.webarchive.org.uk/easter_rising/tcd.html

at Trinity College Dublin from the 1 March to 30 April 2016 and ‘Easter Rising: Responses and Reflections 1916-2016’ was displayed at the University of Oxford from the 1 February to 3 April 2016. Both exhibitions had a common approach: to trace methods of recording and reflecting on the Rising from the initial scramble to gather information and interpret the events as they happened in 1916, to the commemorative activity of 1966, through to our current project to capture and preserve the 1916 related websites produced in 2016. A central digital feature of both exhibitions was information about, and demonstrations of, the 1916 Easter Rising Web Archive.

The digital aspect was the first attempt by both institutions to display a web archive aimed at the general public. Both libraries liaised with a variety of stakeholders to temporarily install a digital display, but for legal and technical reasons we were not able to provide ‘live’ access to the web archive collection. Instead, we presented a pre-recorded ‘guided tour’ of the 1916 Easter Rising Web Archive page, with screenshots of sample websites in the collection. The presentation provided background information on the 1916 Easter Rising Web Archive project, and an introduction to the ‘why’ and ‘how’ of web archiving, along with an overview of web archive resources and initiatives in the UK and beyond. A postcard to pick up at the touch screen terminal not only provided a popular free souvenir of the exhibition visit, but also the web addresses of the project website and other web archive resources to take home and refer to – together with the participating Legal Deposit Libraries’ branding.⁷

The display and web archive was further promoted by two events at the Bodleian Library: The official opening of the 1916 Easter Rising display by the Irish Ambassador to Great Britain, His Excellency Dan Mulhall, at a public talk with more than 200 guests in February 2016, and an academic colloquium on Easter 1916 with nearly 100 participants, hosted at the Bodleian Library in collaboration with the Oxford University History Faculty in March 2016. Both events featured presentations on the Easter Rising project combined with a more general introduction to web archives. These presentations highlighted web archives as an information resource for the general public and their potential for teaching, learning, and research.

⁷ Ca. 400 postcards were picked up by exhibition visitors, around 300 were handed out at related events, and further 250 were distributed via the Embassy of Ireland.

Challenges and Opportunities

Themed web archive collections will invariably be limited in size, at least when compared to the vast amount of resources automated crawls can generate. These will also be affected by bias, introduced through the manual selection and description process or through external factors like the legislative environment for web archiving. Whereas the size and structure of curated collections may limit experienced web researchers aspiring to build their own corpora from large amounts of ‘neutral’ data, smaller selective collections like the Easter Rising Web Archive have the advantage of highlighting the potential of web archives to new audiences. Themed collections are more manageable and accessible for those coming from a traditional research perspective. The integration of web archive initiatives into other activities or events can also help in raising the profile of web archives amongst both academic researchers and the general public. In the case of the Easter Rising Project, hundreds of visitors came to see an exhibition of the Bodleian’s or Trinity College’s archives and manuscripts, or to hear the Irish Ambassador speak about ‘Easter 1916: what happened, why and how did it change Ireland?’ - and went away with increased awareness of web archives, and guides to more information.

From the inception of the project at the Legal Deposit Libraries’ Head Librarian’s annual conference in Dublin 2014, via collection planning and building through to exhibitions and events, it became evident that web archiving activities were aided by integration into the wider programme of public outreach activities and strategic development plans undertaken by academic libraries, and not least by the support of senior library management. Equally important was intra institutional collaboration such as coordinating physical and digital display content (curatorial and exhibitions staff), liaising about digital infrastructure (IT and digital library departments) and organising outreach activities and events (communications and events teams). Working with partners in the wider institutions (such as university History departments) and involving external partners (Irish Embassy) provided additional input and support. This collaborative approach within and across institutions was not only essential to delivering the Easter Rising project, but also provided valuable new contacts and laid the foundations for similar initiatives in the future.

The project also highlighted the challenges of managing a web archive project across multiple jurisdictions with differing legislative arrangements around non printed material. Web archiving is primarily carried out in Ireland on a permissions basis as a result of the lack of a legislative framework. The creation of a themed web archive collection requires multiple

levels of manual input from both the curatorial and technical aspects. Identifying and selecting websites and manually adding descriptive metadata, carrying out quality assurance of crawl results, ingesting the data, and finally making web archive resources publicly available is a resource intensive undertaking - and initiating and administering any permission or licensing process adds a very time consuming extra layer of complexity. This may include identifying individual website owners and their contact details to be able to send an initial permission request, answering questions by larger organisations who in principle agree with their website being archived but are themselves unsure who controls the copyright of their web content and can make decision to grant licences, or simply following up unanswered permission requests.

The initial responses to our requests were usually positive, but we have noted that, for some, the terms of the licence agreement were a deterring factor due to the complexities and restrictions imposed by the UK legislative framework in which we were operating. In the main, in the Republic of Ireland organisations and individuals were cognisant of the need for website preservation but are unsure about the mechanisms to achieve this and were heartened by our contact offering to provide an infrastructure in which this could take place. These included websites created by family members of those involved in the Rising which incorporated personal accounts and digitised images of primary documents to a group blog that focuses on the life and culture of Dublin city that includes entries on the 1916 Easter Rising. It also incorporates academic researchers working on digital projects such as The ‘Century Ireland’ project, an online historical newspaper that tells the story of the events of Irish life a century ago and a Irish Research Council funded project to record and analyse historical graffiti from Kilmainham Gaol in Dublin where many of the leaders of the 1916 Easter Rising were imprisoned.

The existing legal frame work in which the project operated presented challenges both in terms of the content and structure of the collection. A number of websites in the .ie domain were identified as valuable contributions to the project but if the permissions route had been exhausted the lack of a legislative mandate in the Republic of Ireland prevented these websites from being included in the collection. This adds an extra layer of bias as for example, there are less .ie domain websites in the overall collection than originally selected for archiving, whereas content from Northern Ireland is likely to be over-represented on the grounds that this material could be easily included under the UK legal deposit mandate. On the other hand, material for which permission has been cleared can be made accessible in the

open access web archive, whilst the current arrangements for access to legal deposit web archive material in the UK limit the way such resources can be viewed and used.

Ultimately, such legislative barriers hinder our ability to build collections purely based on curatorial decisions from collection scoping to content selection and access. This is an issue that researchers need to be aware of in any utilisation of the collection and demonstrates the influence that external factors have on the scope and structure of the collection. It also highlights one of the challenges in collating web archive resources that are compiled from across multiple legal jurisdictions with differing legislative arrangements which necessitates multiple access routes and limits the creation of a holistic collection.

Despite this, projects such as ours, or the National Library of Ireland who are independently undertaking a similar project, advance web archiving in the Republic of Ireland from an abstract concept to a digital collection that demonstrates what web archives can contribute to future research interests, as well as teaching and learning. Advocacy will play a major role in advancing any potential legislation and requires interested parties to become advocates among their peers, raising the profile of web archiving, and promoting its advancement.

At present, the Irish Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (DJEI) is in the process of preparing amendments to the Copyright Act. The existing copyright legislation makes no provision for digital content and is thus an impediment to a more comprehensive collection of online content than can be achieved by themed projects such as the 1916 Easter Rising collection. Earlier this year the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, acting on behalf of the National Library of Ireland, held a period of public consultation to ascertain views on digital legal deposit.

Conclusion

This collaborative project demonstrates how the fusion of digital methodologies and traditional historical research can create a space for the exploration of new avenues of scholarship. Themed collections contain manageable amounts of curated data and act as an example of how enterprising changes in archive curation and management can aid in enhancing the credibility of web resources as a source of primary material. Academics now reflect on the events organised on the fiftieth anniversary of the Easter Rising in 1966 and how these events were framed, the aspects that were championed and the critical viewpoints denied expression. In a similar way, the records that are now in the process of being created

will be an essential resource for future researchers in their attempts to analyse how the generations of 2016 engage with the legacy of the Easter Rising and the approaches that they champion and feel deserve expression.

The integration of the web archive project into a wider series of events such as those organised by both Trinity College Dublin and the University of Oxford also aided in promoting web archives amongst researchers and the wider public. The valuable partnership created between the three institutions on this project, utilised Oxford's inclusion in non-print UK legal deposit legislation, the technical infrastructure and expertise of the British Library, and merged these with the wealth of material available in the .ie domain which Trinity College are making available on a permissions basis. Collectively, these serve to deepen and strengthen the historic bonds between the UK Legal Deposit Libraries and reimagines these bonds for the digital age. This development of more diverse collaborative networks can facilitate mutually beneficial partnerships that are based on our collective commitment to devise innovative approaches to emerging digital opportunities.