

A Click to the Past

DIGITAL HISTORY IN NEW ZEALAND



2013 marks the twentieth anniversary of a working world wide web. In June 1993 there were 130 websites. Within four years there were over 100 million, and in 2013 the most reliable estimate is 634 million websites. On 10 July 2013 there were 3.84 billion pages indexed worldwide.¹ What are some of the implications and possibilities of this extraordinary media revolution for historians in New Zealand?

In 2001, less than halfway through that period, I first explored this question.² I decided then that there were three forms of history that worked well on the web and were likely to become significant. The first was reference works, such as dictionaries and encyclopedias, where accessibility and the possibilities of searching gave web publication major advantages over the traditional multi-volume, space-consuming book encyclopedias. The second was collections of primary sources, and I pointed particularly to mediated collections of sources, such as the path-breaking *Valley of the Shadow*, which explored two communities before and during the American Civil War and made available in different ‘rooms’ of the site a range of primary materials – newspapers, church records, census material, military records, photographs, maps and images of quilts.³ Such collections organized by historians offered an inviting future pathway. I assumed that mediation by historians was important because the sheer volume of primary material made choices necessary. It seemed foolhardy and unrealistic to leave archivists to digitize widely. Third, I suggested there were likely to be thematic online exhibitions. Historians would take a theme, prepare informative secondary texts and then ‘illustrate’ the content with the different types of material possible on the web – images, film clips, oral histories, maps, diagrams and databases. As an example I referred to the Chicago Historical Society’s site *The Great Chicago Fire*.⁴ At that stage the core of the site was a secondary account of the 1871 fire which the user could enrich by clicking through to images and contemporary documents. Such exhibitions were not unlike illustrated books, with the multimedia material supplementing the historian’s work. Interestingly (and we will return to this point) the 2011 version of the *Great Chicago Fire* site has become far more focused on presenting primary materials. In 2001 I was excited that such exhibitions would become

a major outlet for the work of historians. I was aware, however, that my own enthusiasm was not necessarily shared by other historians, who at the time viewed the internet as the home of the superficial and ephemeral.

What is the situation in 2013? Most professional historians in New Zealand now spend a lot of time on the web and regard it as a major asset in their work. Good evidence of this is found in a survey conducted in June 2013. All 86 staff in history programmes of the universities were invited to take part in the survey. Of these 48 (56%) completed the survey. In addition another 28 historians working as freelancers or government historians, and approached through PHANZA, answered. Of the total, 76 (47.3%) used the internet 'many times daily' for historical work; and another 40.5% used it once or twice a day. Even if those answering a web-based form are likely to be web enthusiasts, these are impressive figures. Among academics, over 85% were using the web for historical work at least once a day. Not surprisingly, usage declined with age, with the notable exception of those aged 55–64, almost 84% of whom used the web daily. Understandably, more frequent internet users were found among those whose area of historical research was outside New Zealand. Historians of the United Kingdom, the Pacific, North America and Europe (in that order) accessed the internet more often than historians of New Zealand and Australia. For non-New Zealand historians the web has provided access to sources and information that would previously have required expensive trips overseas. One survey participant noted, 'The amount of material being made available on the web makes it more and more easily possible to be an historian of French history working outside France.' Other comments reinforced the impression that we now have a generation of web historians. To the question 'What comments do you have about the value of material available on the internet for historians?', there was a torrent of enthusiastic answers – 'Invaluable! Of increasing importance'; 'Great value'; 'It's revolutionised research'; 'Having access to primary sources to cross-check, enhance previous research, and provide new information about a topic is invaluable'; 'In the last three years, we have reached take-off. There is now a very great deal of useful material.' Several respondents believed that the web might have radical implications for history – 'It's transforming the discipline of history in ways we are only beginning to appreciate'; 'The digital age will shape the historian's craft in ways that we don't yet fully understand Perhaps Schama was right – the survival of the discipline turns upon television and the internet.'

If the web is transforming the discipline, how is that happening and has it evolved along the paths I anticipated in 2001? There is no doubt that reference works on the internet have continued to flourish. Of non-New

Zealand sources our survey respondents mentioned particularly the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*,⁵ the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*⁶ and the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*.⁷ Apart from biographical dictionaries, encyclopedias of place are notable – from the *Encyclopedia of Chicago*⁸ to the *New Encyclopedia of Georgia*⁹ to the *Dictionary of Sydney*.¹⁰ Almost a third (31.1%) of respondents admitted using Wikipedia frequently and 67.6% did so occasionally. New Zealand reference works are widely used. Over 50% of the survey respondents reported using both *Te Ara – the Encyclopedia of New Zealand* and the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* frequently, and only about 13% never used these. Looking at wider usage, *Te Ara* received 4.87 million visitors in the year to June 2013, which is more than the population of the country and an average of 13,000 a day. This is about half the visitor numbers of the *New Zealand Herald* site, but more than twice the level of both the TVNZ News and TV3 News sites. *NZHistory*, which has some characteristics of a reference work, received 2.4 million visitors in 2012–2013.¹¹ Several other New Zealand reference sites have been successful – *New Zealand on Screen* has attracted over a million visitors to its comprehensive coverage of New Zealand film and television,¹² and *The Prow*, an encyclopedia of the northern part of the South Island, has created a solidly researched guide to people, places and events in Nelson and Marlborough.¹³ The success of these reference sites on the web is understandable. Their international accessibility (about 40% of 2012–2013 visitors to *Te Ara* were from outside New Zealand, led by the United States (12.1%), Australia (6.2%) and the United Kingdom (4.3%)); their searchability (80% of *Te Ara*'s visitors come via Google); the fact that they link seamlessly to wider sources; and their richness of content, with images, sounds, maps, diagrams, interactives, and above all, videos – all give them huge advantages over printed reference works. Web reference works can also be updated to take account of major new events, such as the Christchurch earthquake, or of new findings, such as discoveries about the number of moa species. If these factors make it likely that reference works will continue to expand and be widely used, their value for historians is less clear-cut. For professional historians such sites are apparently used to check up minor facts or dates; but there is a clear frustration from many users, besides historians, that their coverage is too thin. In a recent survey about the websites run by Manatū Taonga – the Ministry for Culture and Heritage (MCH), many respondents asked for greater depth in the essays. Further, the assumption we made in designing *Te Ara* and *NZHistory* that people would sit down and read whole entries on a subject was clearly unrealistic. The average time users spend on *Te Ara* is about three minutes; the average number of pages

they look at is just over three. But to read an average *Te Ara* entry from start to finish would take at least 15 minutes and there would be about 30 pages to look at, including all the images and other media. Probably some people are printing the entries out in full and reading from paper, but many are simply chasing up a small fact and moving on. The tendency of the web at this point is the quick fix – our ‘short story’, summarizing the entry in about 200 words, has proved very popular, and if I was designing *Te Ara* now I would break the main text up into even shorter discrete units than our regular 500-word page. Increasingly people want quick blurbs, smart facts that can be boiled down to the 140 or 160 characters of a tweet or a text message. This is not encouraging for those of us hoping that a reference work such as *Te Ara* would open up coverage of many subjects not yet explored. Over the last two years, for example, we have published a number of fascinating entries which made some contribution to filling out a few gaps in New Zealand historiography (examples are entries about body shape and dieting, men’s clubs, Māori and flags, Māori and clothing and adornment¹⁴). But there is little evidence that they have been read historiographically. Reference works will always provide a useful resource for historians and those wanting ‘site bites’ on history, but they will not transform the field.

The second area of history on the web which I examined in 2001 was collections of primary material. Here my predictions – that future collections would be selective, rather than comprehensive, and would be mediated by historians – have largely been proved wrong. Instead, librarians and archivists have embraced the digital revolution and put money and human resources into digitizing major documentary collections and creating new searchable databases – and largely without input from the history profession. Part of the motivation has been the preservation of the document, and at times this has compromised the usefulness for historical researchers.¹⁵ But there is no doubt the sheer availability of sources available to historians sitting at a computer screen is creating a major revolution. Among historians of non-New Zealand subjects, our survey revealed extensive use by professional historians of overseas newspapers, official papers such as UK cabinet and parliamentary papers, and material released by major museums like the British Museum or the Library of Congress’s American Memory collection. Several noted the extraordinarily rich historical material to be found on YouTube. Among New Zealand historians, one source stood out overwhelmingly – *Papers Past*, the collection of New Zealand newspapers, digitized, OCRed and therefore made largely searchable (they are not comprehensively searchable because the optical character recognition is still very rough).¹⁶ Over 50% of the professional historians in our survey reported using *Papers Past* frequently.

There were many other sites mentioned, but none come close to the popularity of *Papers Past*.¹⁷

It is worth thinking about the impact of this one source. Newspapers provide information about matters that are in the public eye, so *Papers Past* will provide excellent information about the public world of politics, events and institutions. In researching public memorials and monuments, I was able to uncover a rich history by simply putting ‘memorials’ and ‘monuments’ into the search engine. Similarly, when I wanted to find out changing public observation of, and attitudes towards, Guy Fawkes Day, a systematic search of 6 November was hugely informative. *Papers Past* will tell you about an individual’s public career, and is excellent in revealing mainstream attitudes (although the inclusion of newspapers such as *NZ Truth*, the *Maoriland Worker* and the *New Zealand Tablet* offers access to some minority opinion). What the site cannot do, except incidentally through something like a court trial, is to uncover the private and the personal. It would not be very helpful for a history of emotions or to uncover the private deals that lay behind public decisions. Further, there are obvious biases within the sources. Until very recently there was a notable lack of Auckland papers, and there is a clear time limitation. There are no digitized papers after 1945 – and indeed the coverage diminishes strikingly after 1920. For 8 January 1900 there are 26 newspapers; for the same day in 1920 there are 17; but for 1930 and 1940 there are only three. So this pre-eminent digital source is reinforcing a focus on the period up to and including the First World War – to the neglect of the history of New Zealand after the Second World War. The presentation of newspaper articles as discrete self-contained items also takes those stories away from their contexts in the newspaper (although, to be fair, this is available in Page View). For example, while researching coverage of the 1905 All Blacks tour from physical copies of New Zealand newspapers, I was struck by the fact that close to reports of the games was coverage of the trial of Lionel Terry for deliberately shooting Joe Kum Yung as a protest against non-European immigration to New Zealand. The advertisements in the same newspapers featured various electrical remedies for lack of manly vigour. I began to realize that insecurities about masculinity and race helped explain the public meaning of the All Blacks’ success – but *Papers Past* would have been less likely to reveal this.

Another issue is that historians largely use digital sources such as *Papers Past* purely as documents which they peruse and report back on in their writings. Their research practice has not really changed, except that they can do it from the computer screen in their office instead of after traipsing off to the archive, and they can search far more efficiently. But another way to

look upon a collection of digitized material as *Papers Past* is to regard it not as a set of documents from which you cherry-pick quotations, but as a database of 37 million articles, which could then be investigated like other databases. For example, it would be very possible to use the word search function of *Papers Past* to provide statistical information on changing use of words over time and place. Take as an example the phrase ‘social security’. There are 11,564 uses of the word in *Papers Past*. Before 1890 there are only 25, with a cluster in the 1890s on the back of news from San Francisco, and occasional mentions up to 1932, but fewer than 100 mentions up to 1935. Then references begin to escalate, especially in the Auckland and Wellington newspapers, often triggered by reports from the USA and Canada. All this could be graphed and mapped, and interesting conclusions drawn about the source of such ideas and changing opinions. The rise and fall of the phrase ‘yellow peril’ (used 3893 times, but only 103 times after 1933, and only once before 1897) would be no less revealing. Again, place and time of mention could be analyzed fruitfully. An excellent example of such techniques can be seen on Tim Sherratt’s brilliant site *Wragglelabs*. There he provides digital aids for historians, including a tool that graphs content over time for the Australian newspapers found on *Trove*.¹⁸

Similarly, the use of digital collections of photographs remains primarily a way for historians to ‘illustrate’ their historical argument after they have written it up. Searching for appropriate images is what historians usually do at the end of their project. But if the quantity of imagery continues to grow, photographs or cartoons become a primary source – a place to begin. You could analyze subject matter statistically, or categorize the approaches and locations and thus reveal attitudes.¹⁹

What is happening here is what Roy Rosenzweig describes as a problem of record abundance, not scarcity.²⁰ Some archivists and a few historians are now talking about a totally digitized past, where every newspaper, all papers (both official and private) in archives, all photographs, all films, radio and television programmes, all recorded oral histories, all census and directory information, not to mention born-digital content like emails and Twitter feeds, is available and searchable on the web. The anniversary of the Great War is helping to create that situation for that subject, with the Turnbull Library committed to digitizing all its First World War manuscripts and images. What this would make possible is not only extraordinarily ‘thick’ description of past events and lives, but a transformation in the role of the historian. Instead of the historian acting as an intrepid explorer going out into the wilderness of the past and reporting back on what he or she has found, the historian simply guides people along pathways which they can then

explore for themselves.²¹ The monopoly of primary sources, which has been central to the historian's role, is overturned. The source material is available to all; so instead, the focus of the history is on interpretations and pathways. Further, in building up interpretations the historian would need to develop scientific sampling techniques in place of anecdotal impression. There are huge, perhaps frightening, possibilities in the massive digitization of primary material which is now occurring.

The third type of digital history I envisaged in 2001 was thematic online exhibitions in which historians used the web as a medium of creation. I anticipated that this would be the most common form of digital history and would become a central mode of historical discourse. What fuelled that expectation was the sense that the accessibility of the web and the richness of primary material gave it huge advantages over other modes of historical exposition. I assumed that historians would welcome the possibility of allowing their readers to move easily between historical exposition and the primary evidence, whether images, documents, movie clips or database content. I also assumed that most historians would use the web as one outlet for their ongoing researches, not only to communicate widely but also to advertise and promote their projects. Here my judgement has proved to be naïve and misguided. The web pages of university history programmes within New Zealand reveal that half of the groups display no evidence of any involvement in web publication. And the majority of historians in universities are not digital producers.

There are some conspicuous and heartening exceptions. At Victoria University Steve Behrendt is heavily involved, along with colleagues overseas, in www.slavevoyages.org. This is an impressive database of over 35,000 transatlantic slave voyages. Users can begin with summary statistics and then interrogate the database through a set of interactive charts with up to 15 different variables. You can produce tables, graphs, timelines and maps. If, for example, you want to work out whether the length of a slave voyage had an effect on the number of slaves who died en route, you can instantly produce a graph. In addition, the site has educational materials and overview essays, one contributed by Steve Behrendt himself. It is a model form of digital history, which would be of as much value to researchers as to beginners in historical discovery. At the University of Canterbury, Chris Jones has prepared several beautifully designed miniature exhibitions – one concerns the *Canterbury Roll*, which, to quote the site 'is a genealogical roll of the kings of England from Noah to Edward IV, which has formed part of the holdings of the University of Canterbury Library since 1918'.²² There are neat, succinct essays, all beautifully illustrated, explaining the background

to the roll and examining whether it was myth and propaganda. The full roll is viewable and there are suggestions for further reading. It is a model exhibition on a visually rich subject. Jones has also worked in partnership with Canterbury Museum to highlight some of the European treasures in the museum's collection.²³ Another major site with huge potential is the Caversham Project. This combines the working database of two associated projects, one on Caversham borough from 1881 to 1940, and a second also including the neighbouring boroughs of St Kilda and South Dunedin. The site allows users to search the database entries for individuals, which are drawn from electoral rolls, trade directories and First World War lists.²⁴ But it does not provide the interactive manipulation of the data that the slave voyages database does. There is also an associated 2003 educational site which includes some nicely written, well-illustrated essays about such subjects as leisure, paid work, education and religion. There is huge potential in this material and it deserves investment to make the rich database more user-friendly.

There are several other historians who have used the web intelligently to gain support and publicity for their research. These include two Marsden projects – Judith Bennett and Angela Walhalla's 'Mothers' Darlings' project, which explores the Pacific children of US servicemen in the Second World War; and Angela McCarthy and Catharine Colebourne's project on migration, ethnicity and insanity.²⁵ Both are simple sites which do little more than describe the projects, request information and suggest further reading. But these are still worthwhile functions. Ali Clarke, who is writing a history of the University of Otago, has established a blog to assist her researches.²⁶ This is designed to awaken interest in her project, present interesting snippets and request assistance. These are all valuable uses of the web; but they are few. By far the most expansive production of thematic online exhibitions have been produced by public institutions – either by MCH, especially its *NZHistory* site which has an extraordinary range of authored features,²⁷ or by museums and libraries, especially Auckland Museum and Christchurch City Libraries. The Auckland Museum has prepared a nice site on 'The Bulldog and the Battle Cruiser', which covers the ten-month voyage of HMS *New Zealand*. There is a daily blog from the mascot Pelorus Jack, background articles and a timeline.²⁸ Canterbury City Libraries has a collection of informative in-depth studies of events significant to Canterbury – such as the 1947 Ballantyne's fire, the 1906–1907 exhibition and the Parker-Hulme case.²⁹ There is also good primary material on local passenger lists and memorials. Te Papa did produce an excellent exhibition about Māori show bands, but this has now disappeared into the ether.

The conclusion we draw is that apart from a few isolated and admirable examples, historians in New Zealand in the last decade have not taken to the web as a medium for communicating their historical researches. Where extensive work of such a nature has occurred it has been led by librarians or archivists, or by the public historians in MCH.

So why did my expectations fall so flat? And why has the potential for digital history not been realized? Despite the acceptance of the internet in providing access to primary material, deep suspicion remains of the medium as an outlet for the creative energies of historians. A number of respondents in our survey conceded their nervousness about citing web sources. One wrote 'I find internet sources invaluable ... But I also have a bias: in my footnotes I prefer to cite a hard copy than an electronic copy, so I'll go out of my way to find the hard copy for a footnote.' We have often noticed that historians prefer to cite the printed volumes of the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* rather than the online dictionary, even though the web version is more accessible to others and is the authorized version because it is up to date and incorporates corrections. In our survey, 40% of respondents claimed that they cited web sources frequently in their publications, but this is not really borne out by the *New Zealand Journal of History*. Using the digitized – and therefore searchable – versions of the articles in the journal for the years 2005–2010, I found that of 58 articles, only 22 cited a web source in their footnotes, and only four had five or more such citations (and one of those was exclusively to the online *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*). With the exception of this journal, we have also noticed that *Te Ara*'s print publications have been more widely reviewed than the website, even though they lack much of the imagery and all the film and sound clips on the site. It is as if content is only taken seriously when placed between covers. There are many reasons for the continued discomfort about the web. It is partly that no widely practised format for digital history has evolved in the way that the conventions of a journal article or book are firmly established. It is partly that there are no clear filtering mechanisms or gatekeepers in place for the web as there are for print publications. Gertrude Himmelfarb's complaint as early as 1996 remains valid: 'Like postmodernism the Internet does not distinguish between the true and the false, the important and the trivial, the enduring and the ephemeral.' Internet searches 'will produce a comic strip or advertising slogan as readily as a quotation from Shakespeare'.³⁰ There are many superficial sites and it is not always easy to apply criteria of accuracy and scholarship: often content is not attributed to an author, sometimes it is surrounded by advertising. In our survey a number of respondents complained about the fact that students could not discriminate between high- and low-quality content on the web and about

the danger of plagiarism. It is also recognized that reading on the screen is less conducive to concentrated attention than reading from paper. People who want to think through a piece of text usually print it out; onscreen reading tends to encourage grazing, flitting from headline to headline.³¹ So the web is not necessarily suited to the complex, fine-grained discussion which good history involves. Digital history also has a different sense of time, compared with print publication. An historian likes to concentrate on a research exercise, write it up in finished published form, and then move on. But web history is not so time-bound. When new evidence surfaces or new interpretations come along, the website will look very fossilized unless it is kept up to date. Indeed, William Thomas has argued that one of the great virtues of digital history is that it can provide a forum for reflecting changing interpretations over time.³² So web history imposes testing obligations on historians that closed and dated print publication does not. The transient nature of the web also raises anxiety about the permanence of web publications. A book, though a creature of a particular moment, will remain in libraries for all time; but will a history website survive changing technology?

Then there are issues which arise from the mode of production of websites. Historians can use off-the-shelf products such as Wordpress, which allow you to set up your own blog/website within half an hour. But this very ease means there is no exclusivity, no peer review, no credibility and most likely no promotion. On the other hand, a rich historical website, which involves interactive databases or a large collection of primary materials in the forms of images and film clips, is a major investment. It requires the skills of programmers, designers, resource researchers, editors and people to clear copyright, not to mention historians to prepare the content. This is expensive and requires the cooperation of many people. Revenue streams are elusive – either advertising is introduced, which challenges the scholarly credibility of the site, or it becomes a closed subscription-only site such as the collection of historical sites produced by Adam Matthew Digital in Britain. But if the site is only open on a subscription basis, one great advantage of the internet – its universal accessibility – is undermined. The result is that many digital history sites have been produced by institutions such as museums or have been backed by major foundation grants. A university history programme might seem exactly the kind of collective group that could sponsor such a large-scale enterprise. The problem is that as a collective effort, internet history challenges in fundamental ways the traditional craft of the historian. Unlike scientists, who have long worked in teams and who, as William Thomas points out, are very conscious of making discoveries first and are therefore attracted to quick publication on the web, historians have tended to labour on

sole-authored monographs and are happy to wait for publication.³³ But the challenge for the traditional historian is even greater. Historical monographs produce a finely worked linear and sequential argument, built up point by point. But web history cannot be linear. Users are free to shoot off in any direction. They learn for themselves. Further, the very abundance of primary material, along with the fact that most creative works of digital history are associated with a large body of primary sources, changes the whole power balance. Historians are used to working away solitarily in archives, finding the sources for themselves and drawing upon these sources, which only they have seen, to prove their position. But if there is an abundance of sources to be explored in any sequence, then the historian's role changes. He or she is forced to become a facilitator, and to begin engaging in conversations. Indeed, Thomas argues that the very accessibility of sources provides an even greater opportunity for historians to abandon their monopoly of facts and to focus instead on their creative role in suggesting different interpretations. A good example of this in practice is the experiment 'Imaging the French Revolution', where Jack Censer and Lynn Hunt put together a site with three sections. The first part was a bank of images depicting the crowd in the French Revolution. The second was a collection of six essays by prominent historians, each examining the meaning of those images. The third was an online discussion forum.³⁴

The democratic possibilities of digital history have been taken further in a way that I never imagined in 2001. Not only can web history open up historical sources to the interpretation and manipulation of a wide range of users, but increasingly the web permits 'the crowd' to contribute to historical sources themselves. This can take a number of forms. At a minimal level, some projects have invited users to contribute their labour by transcribing historical information. An excellent example is the transcription of the names handwritten into nineteenth-century British censuses, which now makes it possible to search them and track down almost any known individual in nineteenth-century Britain. Another example is the site *Old Weather*, a partnership of an impressive range of US and UK public agencies and museums, which is attempting to reconstruct the ocean's weather in the past by calling upon thousands of individuals to transcribe ship's logbooks.³⁵ In New Zealand, digital history has yet to draw upon the labour power of people in this way, but there have been exciting examples where the community has been encouraged to contribute their memories and reflections and so build up primary sources. MCH has several sites which exemplify this. The Vietnam War site has received about 800 contributions in the form of photos, written memories, videos and oral histories from veterans and others affected by the

war³⁶; the 28th Māori Battalion site has received 3021 photos and over 100 sound files, both about the general history of the battalion and also, attached to the separate page for each soldier, about individuals who served. Some of the memories are powerful indeed.³⁷ MCH also began a site, *Quake Stories*, to collect stories from the Christchurch earthquake. In July 2013 there were 404 stories, and the site has now become part of the more ambitious and highly impressive UC CEISMIC site.³⁸ More common on historical sites is the invitation to users to comment, add reflections, and dispute points of interpretation. Every day several people write to *Te Ara*, adding new perspectives to images, asking for more information or disputing facts. There is a constant engagement with the community.

Historians turn their back on this digital community at their peril. New Zealand historians have a long tradition of attempting to communicate to people beyond the academy. This is only logical in a small society where the community of specialist historians is tiny and the society is hungry for discovery of its past. The great New Zealand historians, from William Pember Reeves to Keith Sinclair to Judith Binney, have all had extensive followings 'out of doors'; and the profession has consistently put an emphasis upon fine writing and avoiding unnecessary jargon. It is important for their own sense of well-being and their public impact that New Zealand historians active in research continue to communicate their findings to a wider audience. But that audience is increasingly to be found occupying a digital space. Historians must learn to share that space. If they do not, they run the danger of social irrelevance. This is not to argue that all historical work should be on the web. There will always be an important role for the deeply researched, logically argued monograph that investigates a problem in a definitive way. Only a large book can do that task. But the scholar who has carried out that research should be encouraged to find ways of communicating the essence of the findings on the web. Let us take two examples from my own experience. In 1990 Chris Maclean and I published a book on New Zealand war memorials. In the course of preparing that book and to assist with the analysis, I prepared a database of the details and images of all the memorials we visited. At the time there were 453 Great War memorials on the database. Subsequently we placed that database on NZHistory. The book itself sold about 200 copies and we rescued the surplus from remaindering by sending a copy to every school in the country, but the online memorials register has become one of the most-visited features on the NZHistory website.³⁹ Many people have added new images and new memorials to the site, and every memorial has been geo-located. There are now about 870 First World War memorials on the register, which has an ongoing life. Eventually we hope to link the names on the memorials to Auckland

Museum's Cenotaph database of soldiers who have served in the military. The second example is the study I completed with Terry Hearn of British and Irish immigration to New Zealand, based on statistical analysis of death registers.⁴⁰ The book entered most libraries and has been used by other historians, but is not widely known in the community. Subsequently we incorporated the major findings into the *Te Ara* entries on the history of immigration, and on the English, Scots, Welsh and Irish immigrants to New Zealand. The book sold perhaps 1000 copies. From 1 July 2012 to 30 June 2013, however, those five entries received 225,000 page views (not including the images and graphs) or over 70,000 visitors. That is huge exposure. The ideal scenario would have been to make the database upon which the book was based also available as an interactive resource, so that people could investigate the correlations and develop their own graphs and maps.

If historians should be encouraged to develop web-based publication based on their research, what types of site should these be? At the simplest, the site could be simply the amplified text of a book. One of the earliest examples of this is *The Discovery of Global Warming* by Spencer R. Weart, which was originally published as a conventional book in 2003. The accompanying website includes the original text, downloadable in PDF form, but with additional content.⁴¹ There are extra essays in which the author explores issues in greater depth than in the book; there are hyperlinked references and more illustrations; and the text itself is constantly being updated as new findings become available and as readers send in comments and corrections. The text is searchable by word and of course it is instantly accessible. These are obvious advantages. The site receives over 1000 visitors a day.⁴² If historians look to the web for conventional book publication they must accept free, or low cost, access.

But the most valuable sites are likely to build on the collections of primary materials which have seen such an explosion over the last decade, and to combine these with the insights of the historian. In New Zealand the archivists and librarians have gone hell for leather digitizing content, but have not yet drawn on historians. How much more valuable would *Papers Past* be if it was accompanied by historical essays providing ideas about the history of newspapers and suggesting ways to approach the material? The insights and questions of historians may inspire new useful techniques of analysis. For example, the *Digital Lincoln* site uses word clouds to bring out the key phrases used by Lincoln in his campaign debates.⁴³ Imagine being able to apply such a technique to the texts of letters or newspapers.

These are largely text-based resources. Much the richest results will come from bringing together all the media that the web allows, and accompanying

them with the interpretive essays and questions of historians. Internationally there are some good examples. The *Atlantic Canada Virtual Archive* develops certain themes, such as loyalist women or Black loyalists in New Brunswick, and brings together collections of documents and images with interpretive essays and suggestions for educational activities.⁴⁴ The archive is a partnership of major Canadian repositories and the University of New Brunswick with funding from the federal government. Another good example is the *Mass Observation* online archive, which includes all the file reports and personal diaries collected by that extraordinary UK project during the late 1930s and early 1940s.⁴⁵ The raw material is provided in searchable form, but is also grouped into topics such as propaganda and morale, or sexual behaviour. Again, historians and sociologists provide the context and suggest interpretive approaches. Other places have pioneered geographic information systems (GIS) analysis, which allows users to relate textual and pictorial archives to particular place. Newspaper accounts or historic photographs that belong to precise locations can be displayed and explored. A pioneering example was the *Virtual Jamestown* site, which provided Flash maps with interactive layers displaying rivers, Indian towns, John Smith's place names, and so on.⁴⁶ There have been more recent exercises, such as the Hypercities project, which superimposes old maps and images of buildings over modern Google Earth views of cities; and Historypin, which now has over a quarter of a million old photographs and memories from around the world, sortable by time and place.⁴⁷ Here, too, modern Street View images sit alongside the historical photos. These sites provide excellent potential for tracing the ways the character and scale of cities and small towns change over time. Their New Zealand material is still very thin; but we can look forward to being able to explore New Zealand localities in great detail over time using old maps and photographs. Just being able to walk digitally through old Christchurch would be a revelation in a post-earthquake world.

So far we have seen little of such cooperation in New Zealand. But it is surely time for historians and archivists to get together, and for historians to start to experiment with web spin-offs of their research projects. Let us take an example. Assume, hypothetically, that I am writing a major monograph on the history of Pākehā attitudes towards Māori. I do the research and write up my findings in a long book. But how much more valuable would it be if I also pulled together all the relevant material – the newspaper reports, the private diary entries, the journal articles, the parliamentary rhetoric, the legislation, the official departmental reports, the relevant court cases, the cartoons, the painted and photographed portraits, the early films and the television clips? And then my fellow historians might contribute short essays

on the changing imagery of the Māori, and on the value of each source. As a teaching resource, and as a place to discover and explore, this would far outshine the simple monograph. For similar reasons my vision for the future of *Te Ara* is that rather than sitting as a discrete website where the text is illustrated by selected images and film clips, it should be integrally linked to the growing body of digitized material on any subject – so that in reading about a subject you can easily access all that primary material, and in turn, while people are exploring digitized texts or particular images on other sites they can seamlessly refer to *Te Ara* for the wider context and historiography.

No one is suggesting that professional historians stop researching and writing major comprehensive monographs or publishing challenging interpretations in academic journals where arguments are teased out. But we are arguing that having collected all the research, so much of which is now from digital sources, in order to prepare the monograph, then historians should make that research material available in mediated form on the web – so that their conclusions can be tested against the evidence and others encouraged to explore further. Nor are we saying that academic historians should spend less time teaching their students; but rather that they should use the internet for research exercises, and teach their students how to publish their work, and the evidence they have collected, in digital form. At the very least it is time that historians described and advertised their researches on the web and called for assistance and public input. The response may surprise.

Eight years ago I was bold enough to predict the likely future of digital history. I was proven very wrong. I do not dare predict the next decade; but I can hope. My hope is that archivists and historians start talking together and that historians not only use the internet for their research, but also see it as a creative outlet, as way to bring the past to life in a meaningful way and to inspire others with the passion to explore for themselves. Unless this happens, I fear that historians will end up talking only to themselves.

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Te Ara – the Encyclopedia of New Zealand

NOTES

1 Michael O'Malley and Roy Rosenzweig, 'Brave New World or Blind Alley? American History on the World Wide Web', *Journal of American History*, 84, 1 (June 1997), p.133; <http://royal.pingdom.com/2013/01/16/internet-2012-in-numbers/>; <http://worldwidewebsize.com/>

2 Jock Phillips, 'History and the New Media' in Bronwyn Dalley and Jock Phillips, eds, *Going Public: The Changing Face of New Zealand History*, Auckland, 2001, pp.141–57. In preparing this paper I acknowledge the input of my colleagues at Manatū Taonga / the Ministry for Culture and Heritage, especially Ben Schrader who spoke at the Stout Research Centre in May 2013 on 'History online'.

3 <http://valley.lib.virginia.edu/>

4 <http://www.greatchicagofire.org/>

5 <http://global.oup.com/oxforddnb/info/>

6 <http://adb.anu.edu.au/>

7 <http://www.biographi.ca/en/index.php>

8 <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/700000.html>

9 <http://newgaencyclo.prod.acquia-sites.com/>

10 <http://home.dictionaryofsydney.org/>

11 <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/>

12 <http://www.nzonscreen.com/>

13 <http://www.theprow.org.nz/>

14 <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/body-shape-and-dieting/>; <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/mens-clubs/>; <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/nga-haki-maori-and-flags/>; <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/maori-clothing-and-adornment-kakahu-maori>

15 See Alexander Maxwell, 'Digital Archives and History Research: Feedback from an End User', *Library Review*, 59, 1 (2010) pp.24–39.

16 <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast>

17 Other sites used by those answering the survey included, in order of popularity, the National Library photograph collection, the AtoJs Online (Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives), digitized books from the New Zealand Electronic Text Centre, New Zealand Acts online, Alexander Turnbull Library digitized materials such as the Donald McLean papers, Auckland University's Early New Zealand Books collection, the yearbooks and other historical material on the Statistics New Zealand site, digitized material from Archives New Zealand (especially the army personnel records), Hocken images online, Waitangi Tribunal reports, Auckland City Libraries Heritage Images Online, the Department of Internal Affairs births, death and marriages records and some community archives, especially Kete Horowhenua. Maori-speaking historians are strong users of Niupepa, the digitized collection of Maori newspapers.

18 <http://wraggelabs.com/emporium/trove-tools/newspaper-search-summariser/>

19 Brian Maidment, 'Writing history with the digital image', in Toni Weller, ed., *History in the Digital Age*, Abingdon, 2013, pp.111–26.

20 <http://chnm.gmu.edu/digitalhistory/links/pdf/introduction/0.6b.pdf>

21 William J. Turkel, Kevin Kee and Spencer Roberts, 'A method for navigating the infinite archive' in Weller, ed., *History in the Digital Age*, p.61.

22 <http://www.canterbury.ac.nz/canterburyroll/introduction.shtml>

23 <http://www.canterbury.ac.nz/canterburytales/>

24 <http://caversham.otago.ac.nz/dbaccess/>

25 <http://www.otago.ac.nz/usfathers/>; http://www.otago.ac.nz/scottish_studies/marsden/intro.html

26 <http://otago150years.wordpress.com/>

- 27 <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/>
- 28 <http://www.aucklandmuseum.com/Default.asp?t=1864>
- 29 <http://christchurchcitylibraries.com/DigitalCollection/>
- 30 Gertrude Himmelfarb, 'A Neo-Luddite reflects on the Internet', *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 1 November 1996, p.156
- 31 See Ferris Jabr, 'The Reading Brain in the Digital Age: The Science of Paper Versus screens', <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=reading-paper-screens>
- 32 'Interchange: the promise of digital history', *Journal of American History*, 95, 2 (September 2008) p.5.
- 33 *Ibid.*, p.17.
- 34 <http://chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/imaging/>
- 35 <http://www.oldweather.org/>
- 36 <http://www.vietnamwar.govt.nz/>
- 37 <http://www.28maoribattalion.org.nz/>
- 38 <http://www.quakestories.govt.nz/stories>; <http://www.ceismic.org.nz/>
- 39 <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/culture/nz-memorials-register>. The original book was Chris Maclean and Jock Phillips, *The Sorrow and the Pride: New Zealand War Memorials*, Wellington, 1990
- 40 Jock Phillips and Terry Hearn, *Settlers: New Zealand Immigrants from England, Ireland and Scotland, 1800-1945*, Auckland, 2008.
- 41 <http://www.aip.org/history/climate/index.htm>
- 42 Another similar experiment is the Gutenberg project (as distinct from Project Gutenberg), which involved the publication as electronic books of prize-winning history dissertations. This was conceived as a new way of publishing specialized monographs. The books have clickable endnotes, thumbnail images which expand to full size, good search functions and links to other sites. The problem with the experiment has been that the books are only accessible by subscription, and few institutions have taken up the subscription offer. See Patrick Manning, 'Electronic entry to the Historical Professoriate', *American Historical Review*, 109, 5 (December 2004), pp.1505-26.
- 43 <http://www.journalofamericanhistory.org/projects/lincoln/media/pinsker/>
- 44 <http://atlanticportal.hil.unb.ca/acva/en/>
- 45 <http://www.massobs.org.uk/index.htm>
- 46 <http://www.virtualjamestown.org/>
- 47 *On this aspect, see* <http://www.historypin.com/>; <http://hypercities.com/>. See on this prospect, David Bodenhamer, 'The Spatial Humanities', in Weller ed., *History in the Digital age*, p.33.