The Aesthetics of the Digital

Ifor ap Dafydd reports on the *Welsh Literature Archive* project at the National Library of Wales

The *Welsh Literature Archive* project at the National Library of Wales developed from a realisation that the literary archives of the future are likely to contain computer documents, e-mail messages, web pages, images, audio and video files as well as papers and books; and that there was a grave danger that a valuable part of our literary memory could be disappearing - in fact, some parts were already lost.

Amongst the project's main aims are: research with authors about their writing and computing practices, planning to receive and preserve digital literary archives, and raising awareness about digital preservation. The project is serving as a case study for what no doubt will become a mainstream part of the Library's activities in the near future, as more materials in many of our lives are born-digital.

A sample of prominent Welsh writers - both English and Welsh language, practitioners of prose as well as poetry, and ranging in age from thirty to eighty - participated in the first part of the project which sought to build a profile of authors as computer users and owners. Research was conducted through a questionnaire which asked what kind, and how many computers were used over the years; what types of programmes, formats and files are being used and created; how authors go about saving and storing their work; how authors use email, the internet and Web 2.0 technologies; as well as exploring their attitudes to

archiving in general. This part of the project was indebted to the excellent work of both the British Library's ongoing Digital Lives Project (www.bl.uk/digital-lives/) and the Paradigm project run by the Universities of Oxford and Manchester (www.paradigm.co.uk).

The *Welsh Literature Archive* project, however, also aimed to gain greater insight into the authors' creative processes. This would not only shape our understanding of what might arrive in the Library in future, but also inform debate on preservation advice and practice for the present, as one key message of digital preservation is a call for early intervention and collaboration with creators. Initial findings show that although some writers have been using computers for over 25 years, and that almost all prepare the final version of a work on the screen, the vast majority still use pen and paper for initial ideas, notes and research. As one writer commented: 'the rhythms of reading are different between screen and page – and, I'd say, that'll be true for quite a while to come'. Literary archives, and perhaps archives in general, are likely to be hybrid for quite a while yet although the picture is shifting rapidly.

Correspondence is often a highly regarded, and keenly sought after, part of a literary archive by scholars and public alike. It was found that both personal and business correspondence now overwhelmingly take place by e-mail. A few letters are still sent, and are

kept in a variety of books, shoeboxes and lever-arch files, but how to locate, gain access to, and - more importantly - preserve email is going to be a major challenge. Emails are highly valued by their recipients and writers, but very little is done to ensure their longevity. Collaboration and partnership – other keywords in digital preservation – are likely to be necessary if emails are to endure, preserved in the 'cloud' to be shared, or kept safely by various providers or institutions.

The second part of the project involved raising awareness about digital preservation issues amongst the literary community (and more generally) in Wales - very much a necessity if future generations are to enjoy literary archives. Ideas about the challenges of technological obsolescence, migration and other solution strategies, as well as the

The technology of yesterday

Examples of current and obsolete technology

need for defining 'the archive' in a changing digital context have been discussed with the popular press and media in Wales, as well as within the sector through the Society of Archivists' Digital Preservation Roadshows and at other conferences. We also conducted and filmed follow-up in-depth interviews with writers. These interviews developed ideas of how they would prefer to transfer digital materials to the Library, and discussed issues concerning security authenticity and rights. These are key questions, not only for future depositors of archives, but also as we look at the delivery of digital material to users.

The third part of the project, which is ongoing, includes workflow planning for accepting personal digital archives, forming internal guidelines for the Library; all of which is taking place within the orbit of the OAIS model. The project is one of several initiatives at the Library that, in co-operation with other institutions and organisations, looks towards the long-term maintenance and preservation of digital knowledge. We are currently testing RODA (http://roda.di.uminho.pt), a package developed in Portugal to allow the online submission of digital materials to a repository.

Further information about the project can be found at our website which is still developing: www.llgc.org.uk/memory. We welcome any enquiries, comments or contact from interested individuals or institutions. Dialogues about personal digital archives, literary or more generally, must go on if their future is to be safeguarded - even if their content is still being imagined and rhythms formed.

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What Twitter was made for…

Using social media to build an audience for the British Library's Peggy Ramsay Archive

Following its successful literary archives cataloguing blogs, the British Library has gone a step further in its use of social media by creating a Twitter feed. Since September, I have been cataloguing the archive of theatre agent Peggy Ramsay and tweeting about what I have found.

Peggy Ramsay was remarkably influential in shaping post-war British theatre and her 200-strong client list includes the likes of David Hare, Joe Orton and Alan Ayckbourn. She is, however, undoubtedly less well-known than figures such as Harold Pinter and Ted Hughes, whose archives the British Library has recently acquired and catalogued. The blogs that accompanied the cataloguing of these two archives were very successful, but we decided to take a different approach with Peggy's archive. We thought that the real-time nature of a Twitter feed might encourage more conversation and comment than a blog (although I have been accompanying the Twitter feed with more detailed articles on the Literary Manuscripts' Modern Theatre Blog). Twitter is a more pro-active way of engaging people and seemed a more appropriate tool in the case of this particular collection.

I had never used Twitter before and at first glance it looked baffling. The best advice I can give is to sign up and get stuck in. The initial registration is very easy and involves choosing a username, which in my case is Peggy Ramsay. Twitter also encourages you to give your real name and write a short biography explaining who you are and what your Twitter feed is about.

The next step was to grow my following – I currently have 580 people following @peggyramsay. This does take a bit of work and you can't assume that people will find you by chance. I had in mind that I wanted to attract an audience of academics, writers and theatre practitioners, so I began by following all the performing arts organisations, journalists and academics I could find, as well as archives and libraries. There are now subject-related lists of people on Twitter that you can use to get you started (just go to "Find People" and then "Browsing Suggestions"). The biggest surge of new followers came when I identified two of the most popular theatre and literature related feeds - @shentonstage and @writersguild – and decided to 'follow' everyone who was already reading these two feeds. Targeting users in this way really paid off, and it probably helps that writers in particular spend so much time in front of their computers looking for displacement activities!