

## **UCISA Award for Excellence**

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### **Application Form**

**Institution Name** University of Oxford

**Originating Department** Oxford University Computing Services

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#### **1. Objective of The Great War Archive**

**<http://www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit/gwa>**

The Great War Archive is part of a JISC funded project (the First World War Poetry Digital Archive) under their digitisation programme (phase 2). Oxford University leads the project and it is a joint initiative between the IT services (Oxford University Computing Services) and an academic department (the Faculty of English Language and Literature).

Launched on 11th November 2008 the First World War Poetry Digital Archive made available to the general public a wide array of archival resources relating to literature of the First World War. Building on the success of Oxford's 'Wilfred Owen Multimedia Digital Archive', and the 'Virtual Seminars for Teaching Literature' project (a previous winner of the UCISA award for excellence), this multimedia digital archive contains archival resources from other major British poets of the First World War plus images, text, audio and video of primary contextual materials. The multimedia online database of primary source material (manuscripts of poems, letters, diaries, etc) plus contextual information (images, audio and film material from the Imperial War Museum) is browsable and searchable, and freely available online. Fully aware of the educational significance of this archival collection, the project has also developed instructional tutorials for undergraduates to train them in editorial and research skills using primary source material, and resources to support the teaching of World War One literature and history at school level. Visitors to the archive can create their own annotated trails through the archive for others to use, and have been able to submit their own digital material through the community collection, known as The Great War Archive.

The Great War Archive was a second part to the overall projects, and presented an innovative approach to collection strategies, digitisation, cataloguing, and public involvement in major research projects. It harnessed the power of the Web along with the potential of 'mass' amateur digitisation to collect thousands of items from World War One that would otherwise have disappeared or remained hidden from researchers and scholars worldwide.

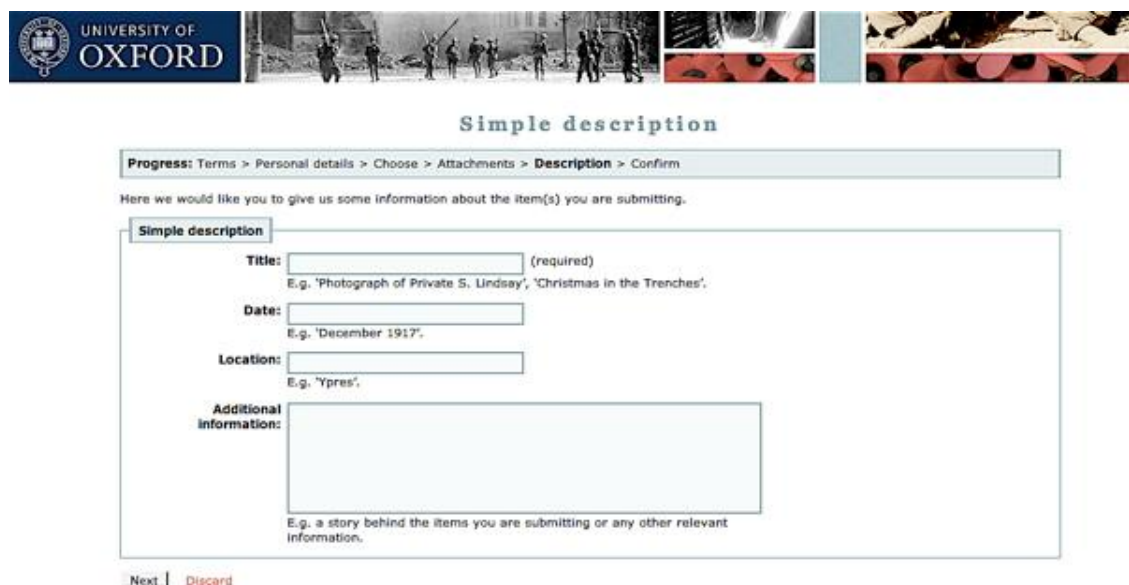
The initiative tackled the problem that it would be too expensive to locate all these items

and then to digitise and catalogue them using traditional digitisation process. Yet at the same time these items are being lost, thrown away, or accidentally damaged on a daily basis. Using the web as a collection medium and tapping into the public's enthusiasm for preserving the nation's heritage The Great War Archive met these issues head-on.

## 2. Description of The Great War Archive

Launched in March 2008 the initiative invited members of the general public to submit digital photographs, audio, film, documents, and stories that originated from the Great War (which they held the rights to) via a purpose built web-based system (soon to be released as open source). In a short period of 3 months, with only 6 people (part-time), the initiative collected over 6,500 individual digital objects to be made freely available for use in classrooms and research on the site's launch in November 2008. Both those who died and those who lived through the war left evidence of their experience. Items collected included diaries, photographs, official documents, and even audio interviews with veterans. However insignificant, each of these items has a part to play in helping today's generation to understand what war meant to ordinary people: the soldiers, their families, and the workers back in Britain who kept the country going.

The submission web site (see below) was built from scratch and allowed users to be able to easily submit single items and items with multiple objects (e.g. pages of a diary). The system guided them through basic copyright agreements, and also collected some essential metadata but in a way that would not be off-putting as it was recognized that many of the contributors would be elderly and not that familiar with online submissions. Additionally, it also had attached an administration system that allowed reviewers to check items for their validity, to correct or add to the metadata, and flag items of particular interest and historical value.



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Simple description

Progress: Terms > Personal details > Choose > Attachments > **Description** > Confirm

Here we would like you to give us some information about the item(s) you are submitting.

**Simple description**

**Title:**  (required)  
E.g. 'Photograph of Private S. Lindsay', 'Christmas in the Trenches'.

**Date:**   
E.g. 'December 1917'.

**Location:**   
E.g. 'Ypres'.

**Additional information:**   
E.g. a story behind the items you are submitting or any other relevant information.

[Next](#) | [Discard](#)

Fig. 1 Metadata Entry Screen for the Great War Archive

The initiative's innovative approach also extended its collection strategy to a series of six 'road shows' around the country where the team based itself in local libraries or archives and invited members of the public to bring items along for advice and on-the-spot digitization. We also designed guidelines and a publicity kit for libraries wishing to run their own (we know of two libraries that did this in the Orkneys and Blackburn). Thus the project involved the public directly in the collection of material, regardless of whether they had access to ICT or the ICT skills, and in doing so reached a wide audience. The submissions received from members of the general public were made because their family's history mattered to them. In response to submissions received via the website and at the submission day events the project team were able to explain further the history behind certain items, for example why the visitor's grandfather won a particular medal - how out of the ordinary the award was, and what he had been through, but never spoken of. The use of ICT has enabled The Great War Archive to engage with the public on a personal level.

Although the submission process ended in June, as an exit strategy, the project has used Flickr (<http://www.flickr.com/groups/greatwararchive>) to allow further items to be contributed (though without the formal submission and metadata process) and we are currently assessing the potential for user tagging and comments.

### **3. Value for Money**

We estimate that traditional digitisation using existing reprographic services can cost anywhere between £10-25 per item, plus cataloguing costs. The Great War Archive was yielding costs of around £1.50 per item plus minimal cataloguing (most of the metadata had been put in by the user at submission). Our approach, therefore, is generating considerable interest at bodies such as JISC and we have already been contacted by collections and archives around the world asking how they might replicate the model. We believe that the initiative demonstrated an excellent return for investment, and will show other research projects, especially digitisation projects, a possibly way forward to expanding their collections. It also shows how Universities can include the public in their projects.

Although we accept that the quality of the digitisation in many cases is not on par with a professional reprographic studio this must be balanced with the following benefits:

- creating digital surrogates of material that up to now has never been seen, and is in great danger of being lost;
- attaching metadata and personal stories to each of the items so that we can have further background information beyond just simple cataloguing;
- involving the public in University research;
- demonstrating value for money.

However, this is just the start. We have already received further funding from JISC to enrich the archive by adding 'curated paths' through the collection (using the project's

path creation tool), building resource packs with teachers, and creating mash-ups with tools like Google Maps, MIT's timelines, and Tuft University's VUE system. We are also exploring funding options with the National Lottery for a repeat on the project but on a larger scale.

#### **4. Supporting documentation**

The project's web site (<http://www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit/gwa>) and that of the overall digitisation project (<http://www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit/>) contains a full description of the project, how it proceeded, and full access to the collections.

#### **5. Name of Staff involved**

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