
Assessing the Scholarly Use of Web Archives in Ireland

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Abstract

In this presentation we offer an overview of the landscape of web archives based across Ireland, and their availability, and accessibility as resources for Irish based research, and provide some insight into the awareness of, and engagement with web archives in Irish third-level academic institutions. In doing so, we offer some perspectives which may be useful when it comes to providing support and incentives to assist scholars and educators in the use of the archived web for Irish based research and teaching.

This is a collaborative study by Sharon Healy (Maynooth University) and Helena Byrne (British Library), and uses a qualitative exploratory approach, through desk research, a review of the literature, and informal dialogues with heritage colleagues. We focus on three main web archiving initiatives which capture websites as part of their efforts for the preservation of digital heritage for the island of Ireland: the National Library of Ireland (NLI) Web Archive, which is accessible online; the Public Records Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) Web Archive which is accessible online; and the UK Web Archive which is a mix of both online and onsite access. As a UK Web Archive partner, the Library of Trinity College Dublin (TCD) provides onsite access to the UK Web Archive's NPLD national web domain collections through their onsite library pc system. The study further uses an online survey to investigate awareness of web archives, and engagement or non-engagement with web archives in Irish academic institutions and discusses some of the challenges faced by Irish based researchers.

The main objectives for this presentation are to (i) raise awareness for the importance of collecting and preserving Irish digital heritage from the internet and the web for current and future generations; (ii) document the availability and accessibility of web archives based on the island of Ireland that can be used as resources for Irish based research with a focus on the NLI Web Archive, PRONI Web Archive, and the UK Web Archive; (iii) assess the levels of awareness of web archives as a resource for research in Irish academic institutions, and gain a better understanding of how and why archived web content is used or not used, and; (iv) explore the challenges and opportunities for using web archives and archived web content as a resource for Irish based research. This case study will be of benefit not only for web archive users but also the wider web archiving community as many of the challenges faced by the Irish web archiving community, and Irish based researchers will not be unique to Ireland.

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Biographies

Sharon Healy is a final year PhD Candidate and GOIPG Irish Research Council scholar in Digital Humanities, in the Department of Computer Science, at Maynooth University. Her research focuses on the future(s) of web archive research in Ireland. Sharon holds a BA (Hons) in Cultural Studies, an MA in Digital Humanities, and a PG Diploma in Historical Archives. Sharon worked on several DH projects including Letters 1916-23 (Maynooth University), the Air Corps Aerial Photographs collection (Military Archives), and as a digital curator with TechArchives, Ireland. (sharon.healy@mu.ie)

Helena Byrne is the Curator of Web Archives at the British Library. She was the Lead Curator on the IIPC Content Development Group 2022, 2018 and 2016 Olympic and Paralympic collections. Helena completed a Master's in Library and Information Studies at University College Dublin, Ireland in 2015. Previously she worked as an English language teacher in Turkey, South Korea, and Ireland. Helena is also an independent researcher that focuses on the history of women's football in Ireland. Her previous publications cover both web archives and sports history. (helena.byrne@bl.uk)

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