

**Conversations or evidence -
an analysis of responses from members of
the public to an invitation to submit
their comments about State Library of Victoria
images available over the Web**

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Abstract

In late 2005, the State Library of Victoria made a small change to the page on which its images were displayed over the Web. It added a link to a form which allowed the public to send comments on an image to the State Library of Victoria. The size and variety of the response was totally unexpected. As a result of this and because of a growing awareness of the discussion about Library 2.0, the development of 'communities', and a need to devise a way to manage the responses in line with library values in regard to privacy, authenticity of information and engagement - a project was devised to analyse the responses. Results of this analysis are presented, with example comments, followed by a brief discussion on future plans for the project.

Introduction

Increasingly library and museum websites around the world are allowing contributions from users to sit alongside information provided by the institution. These contributions may be tags, ratings, reviews and/or comments. There have been relatively few formal studies of these initiatives and it was thought that a report such as this would be useful to others contemplating such an exercise.

State Library of Victoria initiative

In late 2005, the State Library of Victoria made a simple change to the page on which its images were displayed over the Web. It added a link to a 'feedback' form, which allowed the public to send information about the image back to the Library. The inspiration for this initiative came from the increasingly widespread discussion about Web 2.0 and Library 2.0 including catch-phrases such as 'good enough may really be good enough', 'continuous beta', and examples such as a site showing images of 'Red Gates' in Central Park New York which allowed such comments. The original site has been removed, but information is still available at Christo, the Gates, Central Park New York' website at http://www.wirednetwork.com/parks/central_park/chisto_gates. (Sudentas, 2005)

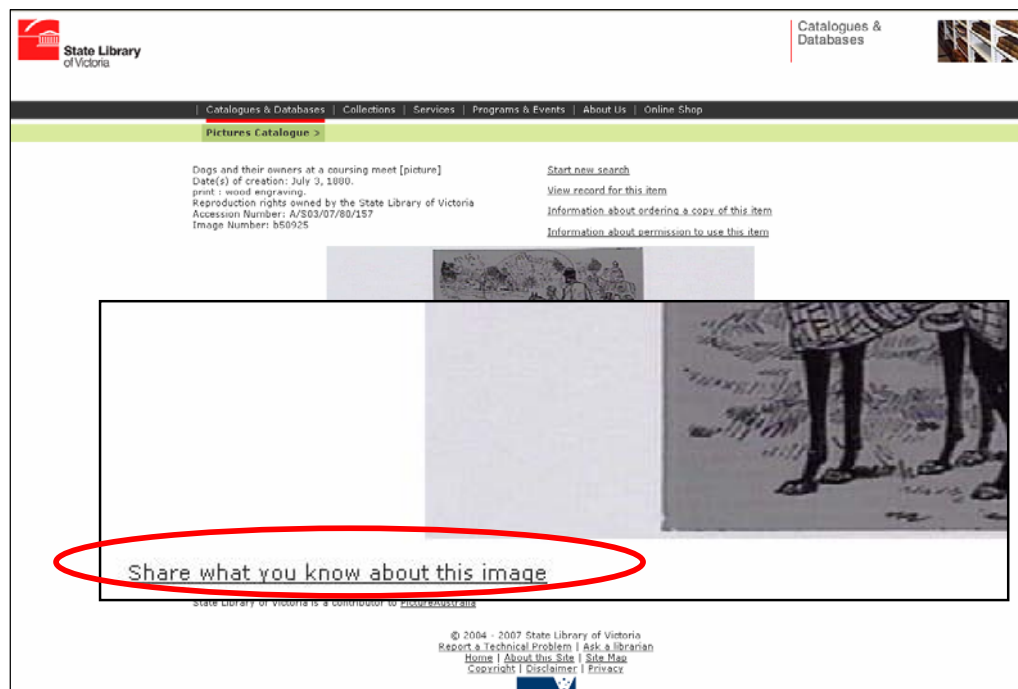


Figure 1 Text link to form for comments

The size and variety of the responses to the link were totally unexpected and caused some difficulties for Pictures Collection staff. Subsequently small changes were made to the text on the submission page to indicate that there would not necessarily be a response to every comment and in addition, internal processes were established to deal with the comments. The comments were routed into the email (Lotus Notes) database used for handling reference inquiries. The option for the

public to *make* comments remained, although the comments stayed hidden from public view. Whether or not the comments would be made public was never explicitly stated anywhere on the site, but judging from the tone of some comments, it may have been assumed by commenters that they would be. The Library plans to change this situation so that comments will be visible but there are still some internal discussions needed before this can be implemented and the results of the analysis reported in this paper will inform this discussion.

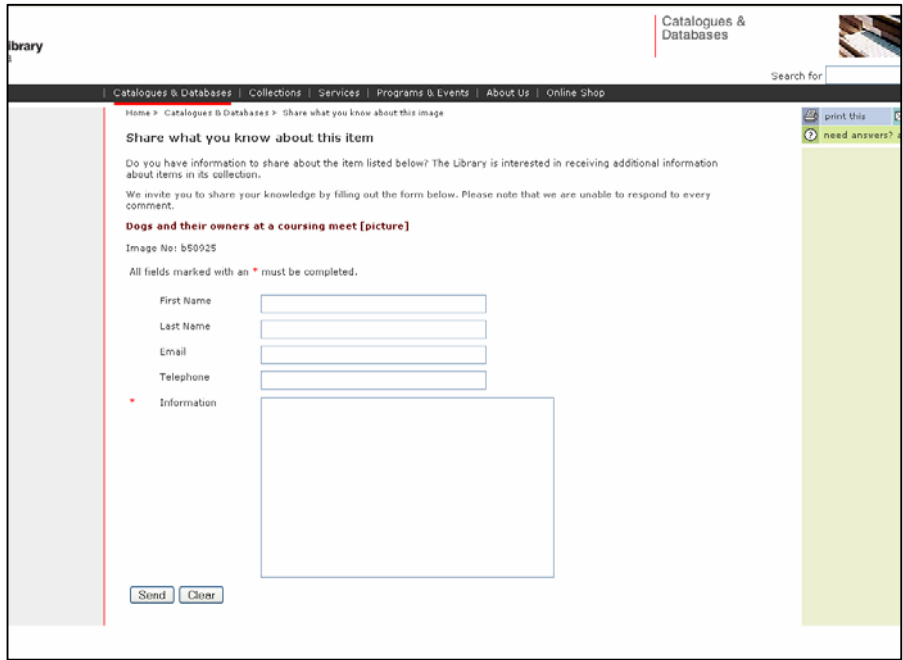


Figure 2. Screen shot of web form to submit comments



Figure 3 Detail of text

A point to note is the size of the 'Information' box shown in Figure 2. It was noted in a presentation at the NLA Innovative Ideas Forum 2007 on *steve.museum* (Chun, 2007) that the size of the information box influences the amount of text entered and certainly a significant proportion of the comments received as a result of this exercise have been quite long.

State Library of Victoria digitisation program

The State Library of Victoria began digitising images from its Picture Collection in 1990 using grant funding. MARC records were created and included in the Library's catalogue. Catalogue records were limited and were not included in the Australian National Bibliographic Database (ANBD) on the grounds that the ANBD was then

primarily a source of shared cataloguing records and as these items were largely unique they would add little value. As the focus of the ANBD changed from access to bibliographic records to a mechanism for finding and gaining access to actual items, this decision was revised.

Initially the aim of the Library's digitisation project was to produce a Videodisc, but as technology improved it became possible to provide access to digital images (stored on an internal server) to onsite members of the public using proprietary software. When the vendor of the Library's management software - which was then Dynix - provided upgraded functionality, so that there was a Web interface allowing online public access to the catalogue (OPAC), work was done in-house to provide a link to the images via their MARC records.

The original digitisation process and the functionality of the Library Management System (LMS) in use at the time influenced the way the Library's collections were promoted and made accessible to the public. Unlike many other organisations, the digitisation program did not feature 'Collections' as such, where material was digitised and displayed as a collection and where in some cases it is only now becoming possible to search across different collections. The State Library Victoria always indicated if an item belonged to a named collection, by using the appropriate MARC tag for series (830), so that items could be grouped in this way if desired, but this facility was not used in any public interface. Access was always via the catalogue record. The implications of this are now becoming apparent and are discussed in the 'Future planning' section of the paper.

File organisation and statistics

After the initial digitisation for the videodisc project known as 'Pictoria', the organisation created an ongoing process to digitise material from the collection, based on selected collections. The files on the server(s) were divided into a series of directories by collection, with file naming conventions reflecting this. This has made it possible to keep some statistical information about public access to the images.

Index of /pcards/0/0/0		Name	Last modified	Size	Descriptio
jcollins/	08-Sep-2005 11:46	-			
jetkins/	23-May-2007 11:46	-			
latrobe statue/	19-Jun-2007 14:01	-			
lcumming/	02-Oct-2006 15:48	-			
ledawn/	20-Feb-2006 23:41	-			
manuscript/	08-Sep-2005 11:46	-			
maps/	02-Aug-2007 18:41	-			
mirrorofworld/	21-Dec-2006 09:03	-			
miscpics/	05-Apr-2006 10:03	-			
nmbwplans/	31-Aug-2007 14:01	-			
ncentury/	29-Aug-2007 12:03	-			
panvic/	21-Sep-2007 17:03	-			
pcards/	10-Nov-2005 14:03	-			
pdoak/	08-Jun-2007 23:41	-			
pictoria/	20-Sep-2007 03:03	-			
		Parent Directory		-	
		doc/	19-Jan-2006 15:48	-	
		im/	02-Jan-2000 19:03	-	
		ptif/	03-Jul-2007 18:50	-	
		rtif/	02-Jan-2007 18:41	-	
		tn/	02-Jan-2000 19:03	-	

Figure 4

This arrangement by de facto collection has become increasingly important over time, as more and more access to these images has been not from the catalogue record, but from sources such as PictureAustralia initially, then OAIster, Yahoo! and Google and now Wikipedia, blogs and social networking sites such as MySpace.

To quote Lorcan Dempsey (Dempsey, 2005) – ‘the library needs to be in the user environment and not expect the user to find their way to the library environment [and] - integration of library resources should not be seen as an end in itself but as a means to better integration with the user environment, with workflow’.

Thus, rather than expecting the potential user to know about the holdings of the State Library of Victoria, the provision of access to the collection via sites integrated into the regular search patterns of users has played an important part in the diverse range of contributors posting comments.

This change began in 1998 with the development of PictureAustralia by the National Library of Australia and the subsequent implementation of OAI-PMH (Open Archives Initiative – Protocol for Metadata Harvesting) to add records from the large contributor sites. The State Library of Victoria implemented an OAI server and subsequently made its records available to OAIster. When OAIster reached an agreement with Yahoo! to allow its records to be harvested by that search engine, the impact on traffic to the Library’s image pages was immediately obvious. Subsequent work to deliver the same information to Google has had a similar effect on traffic, and thus on the community of users who are likely to make use of the commenting facility.

For some years, the Library has monitored use of its website using various statistical packages including WebTrends and NetRatings, and reports were extended to the pages displaying the images, even though they were not directly accessible from the website. The use of the report - ‘top referring sites’ - has provided information about the relative frequency of access to the groups of images in each directory. Statistical reports also provide information on both the total number of ‘hits’ or ‘visits’ to the directory and the originating sites from which most visitors were referred.

The table below combines information about the collections/directories - the number of individual images in each directory, the traffic over the time period of the project and the number of comments. There is a considerable amount of variation between the numbers of images in each directory, so the absolute numbers have been converted to percentages to provide a more effective measure of the relative interest in different areas. It is interesting, but not too surprising, to note that both the total traffic and the proportion of comments on any directory correlate, that is, if a directory has a higher proportion of traffic than might be expected, it is also likely to have a higher proportion of comments, and where traffic is lower, so are the numbers of comments.

Table 1 Directory/Collection: number of files, traffic and comments

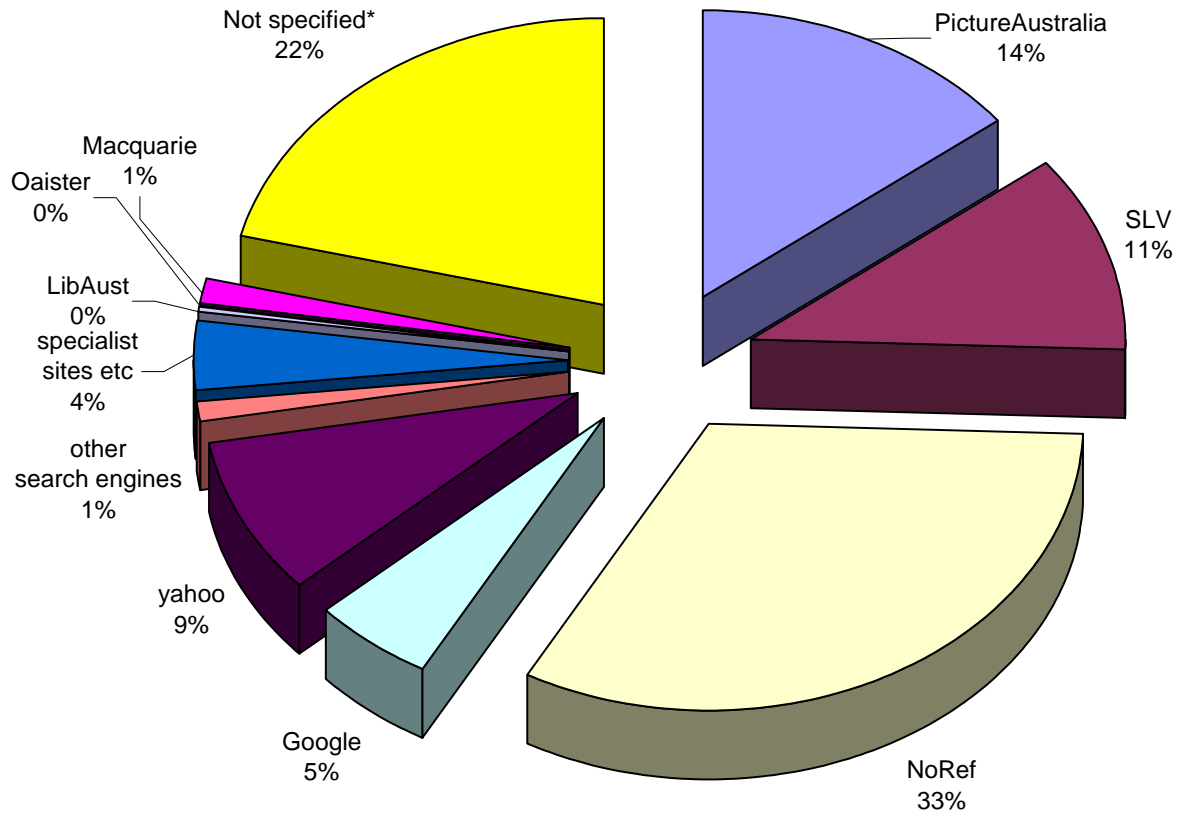
Directory	Files currently in colln	% of all files	Traffic Sept 05 - May 07	% of traffic	# of comments	% of all comments
Total	183946		4293243		3972	
Alma – individual Magician, includes posters for his shows and other magicians)	949	1%	30207	1%	0	0%
Argus - mainly War photographs, more recently general newspaper photographs	17896	10%	391246	9%	220	6%
Ballet Russe images	56	0%	1539	0%	10	0%
Brodie images of Ships	3875	2%	117073	3%	331	8%
Collins mainly places	19312	10%	202348	5%	448	11%
HWT Ports - Portraits	4278	2%	210157	5%	316	8%
Holloway – Photographs taken by a young Australian drafted overseas in World War I. Includes non-Australian locations	777	0%	0	0%	6	0%
Immigvic – some of the collections documenting the immigrant experience	878	0%	0	0%	7	0%
Le Dawn – archive of a country photographer	3750	2%	0	0%	64	2%
Miscpics - Miscellaneous	9052	5%	628856	15%	425	11%
Pcards - Postcards	3191	2%	129568	3%	97	2%
Pictoria (Original project, very mixed, includes ships, immigrant communities, industrial photography, buildings)	105019	57%	2122188	49%	1849	47%
Pictures - Recent acquisitions. Very mixed subjects	2622	1%	215303	5%	100	3%
Platebks – Platebooks – each plate digitised individually	741	0%	55368	1%	19	0%
Red Planet posters – contemporary left-wing graphics	299	0%	10400	0%	4	0%
Rural Water (State Rivers & Water Commission - Irrigation, dams)	8567	5%	120695	3%	49	1%
Sibyl Craig - painter	11	0%	316	0%	1	0%
Shirley Jones postcard collection	2138	1%	57979	1%	23	1%
Victorian Patent Office Copyright Collection -	535	0%	0	0%	3	0%
Polar Bears (for comparison)	12000		19430		62	

Table 2
Other information
on source of
comments

Country	
au	1896
uk	159
nz	59
ca	51
de	12
fr	39
hr	1
nl	25
ba	1
dk	2
za	5
.co/com	2338
.net	787
.gov	100
.edu	116
.org	51
hotmail	400
gmail	80
yahoo	285
bigpond	621

Chart 1

2005 - 2006 Indicative source of referrals to SLV image pages



Comparison with a similar project

A well documented comparison with this initiative is the 'Polar Bear Expedition Digital Collection' of the Bentley Historical Library at the University of Michigan. (Yakel, Shaw & Reynolds, 2007) (Yakel, Reynolds & Shaw, 2007) This project was part of a larger research project investigating the ways archival finding aids can be designed in a Web context to increase access to primary sources and incorporated a formal research component from the beginning. The reports focus primarily on documenting visitor usage such as navigation through the site and the use of the 'search' versus 'browse' facilities – neither of which is available on the State Library Victoria collections. The project also provides some interesting comparative information on the main sources of referrals and the types of comments.

For both projects, the main source of referrals is not their own domain(s), but external search engines. In the case of Polar Bears, this is predominantly Google, while for the State of Library Victoria referrals come from a variety of sources, including the well known search engines, aggregator sites such as PictureAustralia and LibrariesAustralia, and in addition sites described in the chart as 'Specialist Sites'. Specialist sites include discussion forums where references to the image(s) on the State Library Victoria site are linked, either as a URL or as an actual image. This was happening well before the widespread discussion of 'Web2.0' and references to 'end-users' as 'end-makers'. In the case of the State Library Victoria, sites such as 'Walking Melbourne' and 'Skyscraper' have been posting links since early 2004. More recently, sites such as Wikipedia, MySpace and various Blogs have also posted links to images.

A second area of similarity between the sites is in the high visitation of people from other countries. This is obviously more likely to happen if it is findable via a search engine such as Google or Yahoo! and if the subject matter is of interest to people outside the local region. This was the case with the Polar Bears Expedition, which was formerly known as "American Intervention in Northern Russia, 1918-1919". According to the Yakel D-Lib paper, "the Polar Bear Expedition collections have an established audience. Researchers approach these materials with a broad range of historical and genealogical questions." (Yakel, Shaw & Reynolds, 2007) The figures in Table 2, derived from information taken from the email addresses of the commenters, show not only Australia, the UK and New Zealand, but also a number of other European countries. In addition, a significant group of addresses derive from hotmail, gmail and yahoo accounts whose country of origin cannot easily be determined.

The other similarity between the projects is in the type of comments. This is hinted at in the previous quote, which refers to historical and genealogical information. This clearly played a significant role in the comments made on the State Library of Victoria images, but there are also a number of what are possibly professional and or hobby interests represented. Examples of these are those related to the built environment (skyscrapercity, walkingmelbourne), locomotives and other heavy equipment (antiquecaterpillar). ships (Seaworks), and aircraft. Possibly, the fact that the State Library of Victoria has not to this point made comments visible may mean that the organisation has missed an opportunity to build a community of interest around the site. Nevertheless, the linking from the specialist sites has to some

extent achieved that for the Library. A recent 'Pew' publication (Griffith & Fox, 2007) draws attention to the use of the Internet to pursue hobbies., and there has been anecdotal evidence, for example the posting of multiple image links by different list members of a discussion group, that the Library site has become familiar to a number of diverse communities of interest related to hobbies such as car restoration.

Analysis of comments

According to Yakel, Shaw & Reynolds (2007), in reporting on the Polar Bears project, 'Comments can be grouped into 3 categories, information sharing, question asking and donation inquiries'.

Analysis of the comments on the State Library of Victoria images is broadly similar, although initially an attempt was made to further divide the information sharing group. A preliminary analysis was carried out in April/May 2006 of about 300 comments, and at that time a detailed categorisation was attempted (Listed below):

- Spelling mistake correction
- Correction of description of image, eg, not this location but that, not this type of animal but that.
- Additional information about content of image with indication of authority which could be checked, e.g. family member, apparent knowledge of subject matter etc.
- Information about content, but no clear basis for authority
- Request for library to provide more information about subject or image
- Offer to provide more information or associated artifact(s)
- Comment about submitter's personal relationship to subject which may not add to total information about the subject
- Non-useful comment, e.g. Kool!
- Other

When the latest analysis of a much larger group of comments was undertaken it became clear that the initial categorisation was unnecessarily detailed and also it was often difficult to distinguish between categories. A much simpler categorisation was developed, similar to that used for the Polar Bears project:

- Information which amends the existing visible metadata by either correcting a perceived mistake, or provides additional data
- Description of the commenter's emotional response to the image, or associations evoked by it
- Request for library to provide more information about subject or image
- Offer to provide more information or associated artifact(s)
- Comment which does not fit any of the above e.g. "Kool", or I have some artifact associated with the subject of the image, or another copy of the image.

Even with the new categories, there were comments which could be assigned to more than one category, so proportions represented in each category are indicative only.

It is interesting to note that over 90% of those commenting gave what appeared to be valid contact details. These have been removed from the examples for privacy reasons.

Category 1.

Information which amends the existing visible metadata by either correcting a perceived mistake or provides additional data

ImageNo: a00315
Title: A Mt. Macedon Country Home Setton. Altitude 2400 feet. picture
AccessionNo: H90.140/586
firstname: given
lastname: given
email: given
Information: Typo, 'Sefton'.
submit: Send

This is a simple typing error which can be verified by checking the original image, where the title is clearly marked 'Sefton'

ImageNo: a00116
Title: Lady Bay, Frankston. picture
AccessionNo: H90.140/112
firstname: given
lastname: given
email: given
Telephone: given
Information: The photographer was my great grandfather, marcus brody, he was born in new york, usa, about 1850 - came to Australia with his mother and sister, rose. \he lived in Tasmania, came to Victoria and \married Ann Tidey and went to \hay where they had twins that died. \he moved back to Frankston and lived with his wife. \i dont know much about him but there were many photos of Frankston taken by him. \i have only started researching family history and found out a bit about him.
submit: Send

In this case, the publisher is given as Mark Brody, but no creator/photographer is listed in the Library's record.

ImageNo: a08802
Title: Summer St. Orange looking East. picture
AccessionNo: H22717
firstname: given
lastname: given
email: given
Telephone: (02) given
Information: Date of photo has to be between 1870 -1876. The pair of tall buildings on right are Dalton's Stores erected in 1870. Adjoining the Dalton Buildings to the east were the Victorian Free Classical Style, Post Office designed by James Barnet and erected in 1879 & the Australian Joint Stock Bank erected in 1876. Neither appear in the photo. Gutters and footpaths were constructed in early 1870's and road remained dirt until circa 1900.

Sometimes, as in this case, the additional information can be remarkably detailed and would be of particular interest to local historians.

Category 2

Description of the commenter's emotional response to the image, or associations evoked by it

ImageNo: a02680
Title: Sea Bathing at Clifton Springs. picture
AccessionNo: H90.160/1085
firstname: given
lastname: given
email: given
Telephone: given
Information: As a lad I spent many happy hours swimming and playing at this then deserted beach.(1948-52).
During this time my Father (name given) bought the outer half of the pier for the decking timber, which he quickly removed for building a truck loading bay. I believe the pier still stands, but I have not visited for many years. There was also a smaller pier about 1 km to the West of this pier

ImageNo: a04247
Title: Nelson Place, Williamstown looking West. picture
AccessionNo: H40395/44
firstname: given
lastname: given
email: given
Telephone: given
Information: not so much information but nostalgic memories of the time I spent there in 1947 as a 16 year old m/n lad, there was a sailors hostel in the street, and the lady who served me she was 72years old, & asked me where i was from, I replied N/ wales uk, she was only from the same town as myself, her name was mrs Griffiths, I could do no wrong then what lovely memories, I also met a girl & went on a few dates with her I often wonder is she still around the area. thanks for the memory

Category 3

Request for library to provide more information about subject or image

ImageNo: a12566
Title: R.M.S. Bathurst picture
AccessionNo: H27570/152
firstname: given
lastname: given
email: given (co.uk)
Information: I have been searching for information on R.M.S Bathurst and have just come accross this picture on your site.
Would you have any historical information on this ship or know of any contacts to find such information?
We have found a passenger list from 1901, which we beleive a relative of my wife was on, sailing to Ghana from Liverpool,UK. We have been unable to trace this relative after 1901 and so feel he may have emigrated.
We would be grateful for any help you could give us.
Best wishes (given)

ImageNo: a02642
Title: The Public Park, Preston picture
AccessionNo: H90.160/1046

firstname: given
lastname: given
email: given
Telephone: given
questions: Need to find out if this park was the same one that we are living on. Apparently the stable in our backyard was part of a public reserve that people would ride to and 'park' their horses in this stable. Is there an address that this park is linked to?

Category 4

Offer to provide more information or associated artifact(s)

ImageNo: a01599
Title: MOUNTAIN HOUSE, AIREY'S INLET, VICTORIA picture
AccessionNo: H90.160/24
firstname: given
email: given
Telephone: given
Information: My father (name given) owned this property from 1954 until the Ash Wednesday fires burnt it out. Please call for any additional information
submit: Send

ImageNo: a18035
Title: Padua Theatre, Brunswick, operated by Hoyts Theatres. [picture]
AccessionNo: H92.20/139-151
firstname: given
lastname: given
email: given
Telephone: 03 given
Information: I have a print of the interior of the Padua theatre with the audience taken from the stage/screen, how can I email it to you?

Category 5

Comment which does not fit any of the above, e.g. Kool!, or I have some artifact associated with the subject of the image, or another copy of the image.

ImageNo: a37285
Title: Moomba floats [picture]
AccessionNo: H92.20/1222
firstname: given
lastname: given
Information: its a cake and its cool

ImageNo: a04883
Title: M.V. DUNTROON picture
AccessionNo: H83.288/20
firstname: given
lastname: given
email: given
Telephone: given
Information: I have a wooden coat hanger off this ship, probably from 99 year old great grandma's relics. It is thin D shaped stained wood hanger with a nickel plated hook. It has Melbourne Steamship Line then a leaf motif and then M.V Duntroon embossed with ink on the curved top piece. Cheers.

In fact, 'ships' seem to have provided a variety of associated artifacts which might be of interest to those interested in the history of a particular vessel. See two comments related to S. S. Orama of the Orient Line, one of which is directly below and the other of which is included with those whose comments covered multiple categories.

ImageNo: a04903
Title: ORIENT LINE S.S. ORAMA picture
AccessionNo: H82.4/13
firstname: given
lastname: given
email: given
Telephone: given (UK)
Information: My father was a steward on the SS Orama until May 1940 but due to wartime rail problems missed the sailing time of the ship on its last voyage (? from Liverpool, or Glasgow). He subsequently transferred to the SS Oronsay which was sunk off Africa in October 1942, and spent 8 days in a lifeboat as a result.
I have in my possession a copy of the image of the Orama you show here as an embossed Orient Line Christmas card sent 'at sea' to my mother in 1939, and a Mailing Card from its Voyage 46 in June 1939. I also have a small brass ash tray with the ship's name and company logo which, I presume, my father had in his possession. Last year I bought a small silver trinket box with the same ship's name and logo in an Antique shop in York

ImageNo: a48436
Title: Communication Systems Aust. ITR clock [picture]
AccessionNo: H92.20/11612
firstname: given
lastname: given
email: given (country suffix = nl)
questions: I have also this clock

However, some comments were difficult to categorise, particularly if they related to a family history association with the image. This would probably be of interest to others from the same family or location.

ImageNo: a01245
Title: Ouyen West picture
AccessionNo: H90.140/1118
firstname: given
lastname: given
email: given
Telephone: given
Information: Ben oke is my direct distant relative.
Ben married Bill Ingwerson's sister. Bill ingwerson and Elizabeth marie Shultze owned the Fairy Dell Cafe in Ouyen also.
I have the entire family history recorded if anyone is interested on the oke's / ingwersons / kennedys / Byrne / Smith sides
regards
name repeated
email address repeated

The actual image shows a store with 'Ben Oke' painted over the front of a store but this is not mentioned in the title of the image or in the description.

Or because the comment fitted into more than one category –

ImageNo: a04493
Title: H.M.A.T. NESTOR 2-10-16. picture
AccessionNo: H89.196/64
firstname: given
lastname: given
email: given
Telephone: given
Information: Hello

my mother was born of 2 October 1916. Her father was a member of the Broadmeadows AIF band. My mother had always been told that when she was born her father was not present as he was playing off the troops on the Nestor. We always thought that this could have just been family folklore, however after finding this picture at the SLV, I believe the story is true. I have also found a large framed copy of this photo hanging in the foyer at the Caulfield RSL. I would love to know if there is any further information available about the HMAT Nestor sailing on the 2 Oct 1916 and if there was anyone of importance sailing on this day.

regards
name repeated

This comment not only refers to the commenter's reaction and seeing another copy of the same image, but also asks for more information about an associated event.

ImageNo: a04903
Title: ORIENT LINE S.S. ORAMA picture
AccessionNo: H82.4/13
firstname: given
lastname: given
email: given

Information: I have a photo of this boat as well as a passenger ticket for travel from London, England to Sydney, Australia on 5 July 1912. The passenger contract describes what the ship provides in terms of provisions, etc. and how much luggage they can take as well as the cost of the fare.

I am trying to find out how long the journey would have been in 1912 for inclusion in a family history book. Would you know?

This time, possession of an artifact, and a question not about the image directly, but prompted by it.

ImageNo: a17435
Title: Sam Clapham picture
AccessionNo: H81.45/2
firstname: given
lastname: given
email: given

Information: I have a record relating to Sam going from Chicago to Sydney in 1927. It's a passenger record. I can send a copy if you so wish. Perhaps this image dates from 1927. I also have a picture of him sitting with my great grandfather. I am unsure how I am related to him.

Please contact me if you require further information.

He was born in 1891 in Bradford, and he spoke Yiddish. His family were originally from Russia. I have all the documentation to prove it. Do you hold any information on him?

This is interesting because it both provides information and asks for more.

ImageNo: a17402
Title: Machinery manufactured by Thompson
AccessionNo: H41610
firstname: given
lastname: given
email: given
Telephone: 03-given
Information: Dear Sir /Madam,
I am the chairman of the Sunraysia Group of Engineers Australia. We are at present restoring a Thompson Steam driven pump with a very similar engine to the one show in this picture. I would be interested in any information you may have on this original photo. I have photo's of our engine if you are interested.

Another comment which provides information and asks for more.

ImageNo: a23431
Title: The Barrel Restaurant. Main Rd. Eltham. Vic. John F. Tipping. 1968. picture
AccessionNo: H91.244/4736
firstname: given
lastname: given
email: given
Telephone: 03 given
Information: hi Gav, Is the Eltham Barrel near you?
Janet

This is interesting because it looks as if the commenter is using the image as part of a communication with a third party – possibly on one of the social networking sites?

And this is a sequence of emails which tell their own story –

ImageNo: a27721
Title: Rotation by Paul Heikkila Instructor, Mt. Buffalo. picture
AccessionNo: H91.330/2444
firstname: given
lastname: given
email: given
Telephone: given (USA)
Information: This is picture of my best friends dad. He was quite the ski maniac in his time. He lives in Sudbury ontario canada with his wife Marion. He has a son Paul and a daughter Christine who skied with the National team...(name repeated)

ImageNo: a27721
Title: Rotation by Paul Heikkila Instructor, Mt. Buffalo. picture
AccessionNo: H91.330/2444
firstname: given
lastname: given
email: given
Telephone: given (USA)

Information: This picture is of my father Paul when he was an instructor at Mt. Buffalo. My father Paul is living now in Sudbury, Ontario, Canada.

ImageNo: a27721

Title: Rotation by Paul Heikkila Instructor, Mt. Buffalo. picture

AccessionNo: H91.330/2444

firstname: given

lastname: given

email: hmh23@sympatico.ca

Telephone: 1-705-8792

Information: This picture is of Paul Heikkila, my partner instructor. I have sent info on my picture and recieved an answer from you, giving permission to use as you see fit. Also a little note with the original email.

Best wishes & regards given

Sometimes comments on the same image come from two completely different sources and provide very different information.

ImageNo: b14750

Title: Richmond, showing J. Kennon and Sons, tanners and hide merchants, River Street. Hawthorn bridge u.l. [picture]

AccessionNo: H91.160/1628

firstname: given

lastname: given

email: given

Telephone: given

Information: This is a picture of James Kennon's (my Great-Great-Great Grandfather's) business. Being his great great great granddaughte; My family and I have photos, leather items, newsflashes and various other item's in our family home displaying great ammounts of history. My deceased Grandfather handed them down to my father. I am sure my Great-Uncle would be very interested in getting in contact with you, he will have ammounts of various other information regarding the buliding and business that will help you find out more. Thank-You for a wonderful picture. - (name and address given)

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firstname: given

lastname: given

email: given

Telephone: given

Information: J Kennon and Sons had a cricket side in the Mercantile Cricket Association in Melbourne. Won a premiership in 1931-32.

Overall assessment of the project

If the project were to commence now, a number of the elements which caused difficulties initially could be avoided, as the Library has since implemented a standardised project methodology. For this project, starting afresh would entail consultation with ALL stakeholders, including the Picture Collection staff, those involved in the process of routing and answering general information requests, as

well as the Library's Web unit and staff involved with creating the catalogue records for the images.

Unfortunately, this process was not in place, and difficulties were caused by the sheer unanticipated size of the response. This was further exacerbated by a design oversight which meant that initially a large amount of rather unpleasant spam was sent to the 'Comments' email address. This was subsequently rectified and the wording on the Web page changed to indicate that there might not be a response to every comment.

The comments were routed into the same email database that is used to handle all Library email inquiries.. Unfortunately, this database was not designed for easy reporting and extraction of groups of records, such as those containing comments on images. All of the details of the comments were in a single 'body' field, so it was necessary to use a reporting tool called 'Crystal Reports' to generate individual records, which could be further developed to determine the information used to provide the data shown in the first section of the paper. For example:

- the directory associated with the comments;
- the country of origin; and
- the number of responses received.

As the response was not expected to be large, no provision was made to publish the comments. A further complication is that, due to the email database format, it will be quite difficult to work out how best to deal with existing comments when we are in a position to publish them. While we have contact details for a very significant proportion, and it would be possible to go back to them for permission to make their comments visible, extracting the actual comments will be very time-consuming. It is important to go back to the original commenters to give them a choice of whether to allow their names to be published or to remain anonymous, and to allow them to request that the comments not be made public.

The number and variety of comments, and the fact that most people were willing to provide not only full name and email address, but their telephone number as well, indicates that there is probably no need to require registration in the future. However, there definitely needs to be a mechanism in place to avoid spam, and some procedures need to be established to monitor the comments, to ensure that where the comments require either an answer to a reference question or amendments to metadata, they are dealt with by the appropriate section of the Library.

It is also extremely important to publish the comments in such a way that the comments are clearly distinguishable from the original library-produced descriptive record. The need for this and the title of this paper was suggested by another of Lorcan Dempsey's blog posts (Dempsey, 2006) "We need to support conversations and evidential integrity: and not either – or." Whilst it may seem relatively easy to verify whether there are 'Shetland ponies' or 'goats' pulling a small cart by visually inspecting the image, other comments, which seek to correct the original descriptive metadata, may not be so easily verified. When the early work to catalogue the Picture Collection was done, the cataloguing staff were physically located in the same work space as the Picture Collection staff. Since then, due to the acceleration

and diversification of the Library's digitisation program and a library-wide building renovation program, the cataloguers have now moved to a work space located a considerable distance from the Picture Collection staff. This means that the verifying of any comment that seeks to change the existing metadata needs to follow a much more complicated workflow than was the case when cataloguing staff could simply talk to Picture Collection staff working alongside them. This is not clear to members of the public who make comments.

Because of the way the State Library of Victoria digitisation program has developed, with access to the records primarily via the catalogue and outreach initiatives such as OAlster and the search engines, some of the context for the images has been lost. This might have been more apparent had the collections been more clearly identified at that level, or if in the past the Web team had the time to develop gateways based on groups of collections likely to appeal to similar communities. For example, the comment below is one of a number related to ships. Whilst many examples of images of ships have been collected together in the 'Brodie directory' (prefix bs), there are also a number in the 'Pictoria group', prefixes a and b, which come from the Alan Green collection. This means that if we assume that only Brodie has images of ships then we seriously underestimate the interest in images of this type – from family historians, ship historians, and those who served aboard the vessels.

ImageNo: an005002
Title: H.M.S. Formidable arriving at Sydney with Australian military personnel, Royal Australian Navy personnel and civilian ex-internees [picture]
AccessionNo: H98.103/3717
firstname: given
lastname: given
email: given
Telephone: given
Information: RECIPROCAL LINK REQUEST from HMS FORMIDABLE ORG

Dear Sirs,

I am writing to ask if you would consider a reciprocal link to and from our websites as Cyberads UK is attempting to keep interest going among shipmates and association members long after the association ceases meeting. www.hmsformidable.org intends providing a base, jump off point for future association communication among friends/shipmates/members, after the last reunion

It is our intention, if The Donington Thistle agrees, to perhaps arrange unofficial gatherings of association members, using a travel company, perhaps, or Donington Thistle staff, after the "Last" reunion this year

We are given

We have already made a "reciprocal link" to your website/page and would be interested in any "affiliation"

I hope to hear from you soon, with favourable news/acceptance.
Thankyou

PS. Please use this banner, if you use banners

Future Planning

The State Library of Victoria would like to allow members of the public to make comments not only on images, but also on other material that it holds. Several projects are under way to facilitate this and other user-generated content, to add to those already available on existing SLV websites such as 'Inside a Dog' (on which young readers post book reviews) and 'Your Treasures' (on which collectors post and tag photos and comment on other members' "treasures").

Over the next year, SLV will introduce a Federated search and Clustering solution, and will develop a new range of Web services to allow comments, ratings, tagging and reviewing items in the collections; including the rapidly expanding number of digitised items.

Work is under way to gradually re-design the State Library of Victoria's Web presence, to encourage greater user engagement with the digital collections, and with staff and each other, and also to facilitate targeted use by groups such as genealogists, researchers and teachers.

To this end the, Library will be releasing a range of new interfaces to dynamically present its digital collections, and the Library expects that the interaction with, and information contributed by, the community will continue to increase as more people are able to discover, enjoy and engage with the digitised heritage of Victoria.

To finish with a quote from the Digitization 101 blog, written by Jill Hurst-Wahl

"I was at a lecture several weeks ago where the phrase "memories made visible" was used. A person there spoke of how memories are private, yet by sharing them, we make them public. Private memories (kept to ourselves) need no explanations, but a memory shared may need to be explained in order to be understood.

When we digitize items such as journals, diaries and photographs, we are making memories visible and sharable. Hopefully we are building context so that the memory is not standing alone, but has the supporting material its needs so that it is fully understood. For example, a socialite's diary containing her written memories of her daily activities may be meaningless without information on the events of the time or materials from other people. Her views may seem skewed until we "connect the dots" even with other text in the same diary." (Hurst-Wahl, 2005)

By publishing these comments from members of the public, which are often memories made visible, the Library hopes to provide additional context to its very significant collection of images documenting the history of Victoria.

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