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Tracing your ancestors in the digital age: the digitisation of collections at the State Library of New South Wales

The Digital Age

Digital technology is transforming libraries and archives, opening up collections to researchers as never before.

The State Library of NSW (SLNSW) is engaging in this *digital revolution* having launched a 10-year *digitisation program*. Funded by the NSW Government, the *Digital Excellence Program* (DEP) will create and preserve digital material on a scale never before seen in Australia, providing unprecedented worldwide access to the collections of one of the nation's leading libraries (State Library of New South Wales | Digital Excellence: 2014).

Digitisation makes digital images of collection items accessible through the [Library's website](#), and discoverable via Internet search engines and discovery tools such as the National Library of Australia's [Trove](#). As well as increasing online access so that anyone, anywhere can access the Library's collections, digitisation preserves collections by reducing handling of valuable and fragile documents (State Library of New South Wales | Digitisation: 2014). At the SLNSW collection experts identify the most in-demand, fragile and valuable collections to be digitised across a range of formats many of which are of great interest to family history researchers.

The DEP is the most extensive of the Library's digitisation initiatives so far. Collections being digitised include:

- Newspapers (6 million pages from NSW newspapers)
- Manuscripts (1000 World War I diaries)
- Photographic collections (500,000 images from major collections)
- Pictures/artworks (100,000 portraits, landscapes)
- Books, posters and ephemera (40,000 items from David Scott Mitchell collection)
- Maps (40,000 subdivision plans)
- Oral History (10,000 hours of sound recordings)

(State Library of New South Wales | Digitising our collections: 2014).

Digitisation and Genealogy

Digitisation of genealogical data such as birth, death, marriage and census records, in recent years, has transformed family history research. Collaboration between commercial organisations and government and private archives has opened up a wealth of information, enabling archival institutions, genealogical societies and libraries to provide a level of access to their collections that otherwise would not be possible (Yeats 2012, p. 219).

Driving the demand for digitisation is the level of access users expect in an online environment. Monthly statistics at the National Archives in the UK (TNA) reveal the ratio of online compared to onsite document delivery at 283:1 (12 million TNA documents downloaded from the Internet compared to 42,800 physical documents delivered to the reading rooms). The vast majority of documents downloaded relate to genealogy and 90 per cent of on-site visitors are genealogists (Griffiths & Maron 2009, p.4).

The experience of NSW State Records (SRNSW) is remarkably similar. Referring to the expectations of researchers in the digital age former Manager, Public Access, Christine Yeats says:

“Today genealogists expect and demand the digital experience. They are not content with indexes and microfilms at an archive, library, reading room or regional repository. They want access to the records when it suits them, not when the reading room is open – a common scenario that was being experienced across the world...” (Yeats 2012, p. 219).

SRNSW has made the state’s most popular records available with over 1,000 microfilm reels now digitised including the Archives Resources Kit (ARK). The ARK represents the State’s key colonial and genealogical records including parish registers, land grants, convict and shipping records. Family historians everywhere now have instant online access to the digital images of these documents. As Yeats observes 35 million hits for SRNSW material on Ancestry’s website are figures the archives could only dream of achieving on its own (Yeats 2012, p. 222).

The experience of TNA and SRNSW is that content rich in names attracts a large audience interested in researching family history. Considering the needs of its users,

much of this material has been digitised with the help of its partners. However, these institutions recognise that family historians are also interested in records that enrich basic genealogical data (Griffiths & Maron 2008, p.4).

The digitisation of collections at the SLNSW is providing both the “name rich” content that genealogists so desire as well as documents rich in social context that enable family historians to put “flesh on the bones” of their ancestors.

Digitisation and the State Library of NSW

The significance of the State Library of New South Wales

The SLNSW is the premier library for the people of NSW. The Library’s collections document the heritage of Australia and are one of the State’s most valuable assets. As the principal reference and research library in NSW, the Library collects new print and electronic information selectively across all subject areas and as a developing centre of digital excellence its collections are increasingly delivered digitally (State Library of New South Wales | World-leading library 2014).

The significance of the Library lies both in its role as a deposit library for the State of NSW, whereby a copy of every newly published book in NSW must be deposited with the Library, as well as its unique history and its heritage collections. These collections house the world’s most significant collections of Australian and Pacific material (State Library of New South Wales | Our buildings: The Mitchell Library 2014).

The Mitchell Library

The State Library of NSW is the oldest library in Australia tracing its origins to 1826 as the Australian Subscription Library. Perhaps the most significant phase in the Library’s evolution came in 1910 with the opening of the Mitchell Library Wing, the first library in the country to focus entirely on Australian content. (State Library of New South Wales | History of the Library 2014). The stimulus for the building of this new ‘national library’ was the offer from Australia’s greatest book collector and cultural benefactor, David Scott Mitchell, of his immense and unrivalled collection of books, manuscripts, maps and pictures relating to Australia and the Pacific. A condition of the bequest that a new building known as the Mitchell Library be erected

to house his collection (Fletcher 2007, p. ix). Mitchell's collection, the largest of its kind in the world, has been built from the interest earned from his endowment of 70,000 pounds (in perpetuity) along with the collections of other great benefactors, donations, purchases and legal deposit. (Fletcher 2007, pp. ix-xvi).

These collections are a priority of the Digital Excellence Program (DEP).

Digitisation of State Library of NSW Collections

Digitisation at the Library has evolved since the late 1980s when it acquired hundreds of thousands of photographic images from the Government Printing Office collection. Detailing aspects of colonial life between 1870-1980, the images were made available to the general public first on videodisc before being released digitally via the Library's website (Ruehle 1989). The Library began digitising manuscript collections with two significant projects in the 1990's the digitisation of the *Papers of Sir Joseph Banks* (Anemaat 1997) followed by the *Matthew Flinders Electronic Archive* (Hirst & Scifleet 2000).

The DEP is the latest in a number of digitisation initiatives. However, the DEP is the first mass digitisation project.

This paper will focus on three of the most significant digitisation initiatives: *The Digital Excellence Program* (DEP); *eRecords Project*; and *Discover Collections*, identifying digital collections of most interest to family historians and genealogists.

Digitisation Projects

Digital Excellence Program (DEP)

Through the *Digital Excellence Program*, the collections of particular interest to family historians that are now being digitised include the following:

Newspapers

Newspapers contain some of the most valuable primary source material for historical research. The “name rich” value of newspapers makes them very popular with family historians who can search for ancestors, in birth, death and marriage notices, obituaries, probate notices, inquests, court reports, shipping columns, classifieds, local community events and much more. Newspapers also provide historical and social context to an ancestor’s life.

The Library holds a comprehensive collection of NSW newspapers, 2,067 titles in all, and aims to digitise the entire collection (within copyright restrictions, prior to 1955). A total of 59 NSW newspapers had been digitised and were available on Trove at the end of 2011-2012 when the DEP funding became available (Brown 2014). There are now 294 NSW newspapers on Trove and the number is growing rapidly.

The SLNSW works collaboratively with the National Library of Australia (NLA) to digitise NSW newspapers. The SLNSW provides the newspapers (usually the microfilm master copy) and funding to the NLA to digitise the titles for online access on the Trove website. The process involves scanning the microfilm, performing content analysis and applying Optical Character Recognition (OCR) to the scanned content (National Library of Australia, 2014).

Family historians may be less aware that it is not just local or regional newspapers that are being digitised and appearing on Trove. For the DEP a priority has been to digitise titles that support WWI Commemoration activities. Newspapers published during the war years 1914-1918 have been digitised opening a new avenue of research for those seeking ancestors who fought in the Great War. These may be local newspaper titles that can be mined for military content or military titles such as *The Globe and Sunday Times War Pictorial (1914-1917)*. Newspapers selected for digitisation on the basis of themed content are also opening up other possibilities for family historians. You will find NSW newspaper titles that focus on agriculture and rural Australia, migrant communities, political parties & trade unions, religious groups, shipping, sports and entertainment.

The Library is soon to digitise a sequence of shipping newspapers: *The Shipping Gazette* and *Sydney General Trade List* ranging in date from 1828-1860. This will be a great supplement to existing shipping columns and contain additional reports of

immigrant voyages. The list of forthcoming DEP newspaper titles includes *Sydney Sportsman* (1918-1954); and community language newspapers *Guang yi hua bao* (The Chinese Australian Herald, 1894-1923) and *Le Courrier Australien* (French Language Newspaper, 1892-1954). The latter is a collaborative pilot with the NLA, an issue being the cost of OCR processes for non-Roman scripts. Two newspapers in languages other than English (LOTE) that have been digitised for the Italian and Estonian migrant communities: *Il Gionale Italiano* (1932-1940), and *Meie Kodu* (1949-1954). The *Hebrew Standard of Australasia 1895-1953*, an English language newspaper, has also been digitised and is a wonderful resource for Australia's Israeli community.

Manuscripts (World War I Diaries)

The centenary of World War I has enabled the Library to prioritise and fast-track the large-scale digitisation of material relating to WWI including its leading collection of WWI diaries completely digitised, transcribed and accessible online.

The diaries form part of a leading but lesser known repository documenting the involvement of Australians in World War I. The Library's collections are an essential supplement to official war service records of the National Archives of Australia and the Australian War Memorial.

The collection of diaries and letters was initiated by Principal Librarian, William Ifould in 1918 in what was known as the European War Collecting Project. While the Australian War Memorial focused on war relics and unit histories, Ifould's great idea was to acquire the original journals and diaries of servicemen and women written during the war. Recognising their significance for future researchers he advertised in newspapers in Australia, New Zealand and in the United Kingdom for servicemen and their families to deposit material with the Library.

Throughout 1919 and into the 1920s material such as diaries, letters, photographs, maps, artwork and printed material was acquired by the Library. These collections tell of the experiences of soldiers, sailors, airmen, stretcher-bearers and nurses who served as well as material produced in Australia during the war depicting the war effort and the home front. (State Library of New South Wales | World War I The Library's World War I Collections 2014).

The collection of over 1000 diaries and letter books can be accessed via the Library's commemorative website: "World War I": <http://ww1.sl.nsw.gov.au/>. An alphabetical "List of diarists" can be found under the "Explore" tab. Hundreds of diaries with transcripts are already available with the rest to follow. Selecting a diarist will retrieve a biographical entry for the soldier that includes a summary of his war service, portrait photograph (if available), oral history (if available) and links to the digitised diary with transcript in the library catalogue.

Serviceman Archibald Barwick has both a portrait photograph and oral history. The latter features an interview with Archie's daughter Judy Hassall. She remembers her father's experience of the war and recounts her father bringing her to the Mitchell Library in the late 1940s to see his war diaries.

Archie's war diary describes his recruitment and training in Sydney and departure to Egypt in October 1914, his later embarkation for the Dardanelles, landing at Gallipoli and return to Lemnos. Importantly the digitised diary has a typed transcript that is keyword searchable. This wonderful facility is due to the dedicated work of the Library's volunteers without whom such access to handwritten manuscript documents would not be possible.

The World War I website also serves as a portal to the Library's digitised WWI collections which through DEP funding now include maps, photographs, artworks, posters and ephemera.

Maps (Subdivision Plans)

The SLNSW holds one of the most significant collections of maps and charts in Australia. The estimated size of the collection is over 250,000 maps which include over 40,000 subdivision plans, and thousands of Australian county, parish and town maps, all of great interest to family historians. (State Library of New South Wales | Maps Research Guide 2014).

The DEP has prioritised the Library's collection of 40,000 Subdivision Plans. The Library's in-house digitisation team has completed pilot projects for 12 Sydney suburbs in what is planned to be the Library's first mass digitisation project for maps.

Subdivision plans were produced by real estate agents to advertise land for sale and range in date from the 1830s to the 1960s. They are of great interest to local and

family historians as they help document the development of a locality with large estates being transformed into suburbs and towns. Researchers can identify parcels of land bought by ancestors and the history of their house. Subdivision plans can be accessed via a keyword search from the library's computer catalogue - type in the name of the locality followed by "Subdivision Plans" for example, "Balgowlah Subdivision Plans".

This search retrieves 162 subdivision plans for Balgowlah ranging in date from 1886-1960. The plans often appear as colourful posters and are a wonderful way of documenting and illustrating your family history.

eRecords Project

The eRecords Project which ran from 2008-2014 was the forerunner of the Digital Excellence Program (DEP). Funded by the NSW Government to the tune of \$23 million over its five years, the eRecords Project laid the platform for the DEP by creating online catalogue records for the Library's unrivalled cultural and historical collections for both print and original materials.

Previously much of the Library's heritage collections were accessible via card catalogues and indexes. Now another 1.3 million items are discoverable via the Internet 24/7 as a result of online catalogue records which include detailed contents lists for pictorial and manuscript collections (State Library of New South Wales | eRecords Project 2014). The digital records have opened up new and exciting avenues for family history research. Here are a few examples.

Contents Lists (Manuscripts and Pictures)

Contents Lists are Library finding aids associated with original materials (manuscript and pictorial collections). These printed guides describe the contents of a collection, sometimes in great detail such as listing references to people, places, and objects. The eRecords Project has converted these finding aids to online lists and linked them to the corresponding catalogue record.

Ships Pictures Contents Lists

An example of how contents lists have revolutionised access to original materials is the Library's collection of ships pictures. This has become an increasingly popular

pursuit for family historians seeking to illustrate the arrival of their immigrant ancestors. The Mitchell Library has one of the most significant collections of ships pictures in Australia housed in hundreds of albums with pictures numbering in the tens of thousands. The *Dickson Gregory collection of drawings and photographs of ships 1853-1973* is perhaps the largest collection comprising upwards of 10,000 pictures in 46 albums.

The Contents List can be accessed from the catalogue record and the name of every ship keyword searched. Searching for the *SS Great Britain* (built 1843, tonnage 3500) retrieves 64 references to pictures of this ship. The *SS Great Britain* made 32 round voyages between Britain and Australia carrying an estimated 15,000 emigrants between 1852-1876 (Ball 1988, p.4). An advantage of the Dickson Gregory collection is that the contents list includes “additional information” from notations on particular photographs. This may include the all-important date of arrival enabling researchers to illustrate the actual voyage and arrival of their ancestors.

Importantly the eRecords Project ensured that digital records were discoverable on the Internet not just via the SLNSW computer catalogue but the NLA’s discovery tool Trove and third party search engines such as Google (Blackbourn 2013). A Google search on “Dickson Gregory Collection SS Great Britain” retrieves the contents list (as a searchable pdf). It should be noted that online records and digital contents lists provide the metadata necessary for later digitisation. Metadata is descriptive information about an object or resource that in an online environment facilitates its discovery and retrieval (Kennedy: 2007, p.128). In the case of the *Ernest G. Best Postcard Collection of merchant vessels, naval vessels and sailing vessels 1900-1940* (approximately 5000 photographs) the online catalogue record and contents list facilitated digitisation of the entire collection.

Maps eRecords

Parish, County and Town Maps

Online catalogue records are not only available for subdivision plans but for the Library’s entire collection of NSW Parish, County and Town maps.

Produced by the NSW Lands Department these maps are of most interest to family historians as they contain details of land ownership. The maps have been used since

the 1820s to record Crown land dealings when NSW was divided into 141 counties and 7,459 parishes.

Showing land holdings at a smaller scale than Parish maps, County Maps are a great tool for researching rural properties going back to the 1850s. At a much larger scale, Town maps detail land ownership in town centres. Parish maps are the largest collection numbering 14,000 of which some 500 have been digitised.

Recognising the importance of locating such maps in the collection the Library has produced a Maps Research Guide. [The Guide](#) includes a section on “Finding our maps” with tips for family historians on searching the library catalogue. This will enable researchers identify maps of interest and refine their search to include all digitised maps (State Library of New South Wales | Maps Research Guide 2014).

Discover Collections

[Discover Collections](#) is an online portal to digital content providing free access to 35 curated stories about the Library’s collections and Australian history. Funded by the State Library of NSW Foundation through innovative public- private partnerships to the value of \$10 million dollars, *Discover Collections*, has since 2004 delivered digital access to the library’s most prized collections (Hunt 2014, p.41). Many of these collections are of great interest to family historians.

Specialist Librarians identify material of interest to researchers and suitable for digitisation. Their authored online stories connect clients to the Library’s collections through such portals as “History of our Nation”. This themed approach to digitisation has advantages for the family historian who can select the period of Australian history relating to their ancestors: Indigenous Australians, First Fleeters, Convicts, Pioneers Settlers or Gold Seekers. Alternatively researchers can access stories of ethnic groups such as Jewish, French, and Immigrant Ancestors via the portal “Society, Art and Culture”. Examples of stories from both portals follow:

Shipboard the nineteenth century emigrant experience

http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/discover_collections/society_art/shipboard/index.html

With over one million immigrants (assisted and unassisted) arriving in Australia from the United Kingdom in the 1800s passenger and shipping records are an essential source for the family historian.

Shipboard brings to life the emigrant experience whilst leading the researcher to personal shipboard journals, diaries and letters, published ships newspapers and ephemera drawn from the vast collections of the SLNSW. The various forms of voyage narrative are a rich and unique source of information unavailable elsewhere.

The best examples of these documents are digitised with links to the library catalogue enabling the researcher to search for the voyage of their ancestors. Shipboard newspapers are a good example. Links are provided to several digitised titles including: *The Petrel Papers: a weekly magazine issued on board the ship Parramatta from London to Sydney, 1882-1883*. The catalogue record provides a description of the newspaper with links to the digitised document, a full transcript, and the subject heading "Ship – newspapers". The transcript can be keyword searched for names of passengers etc. Searching for "D'Arcy Goddard" retrieves references to his involvement in shipboard activities including performances as a dramatic actor and his coming to grief in a wheelbarrow race! The researcher wanting to pursue other voyages can then click on "Ship newspapers" for other titles.

Shipboard newspapers were designed to entertain the shipboard community. As well as containing passenger lists and records of births and deaths at sea content included poetry, short stories, illustrations, letters to the editor, advertisements and reviews of shipboard entertainments and activities. Having obtained basic details from official passenger lists researchers will here be able to put "flesh on the bones" of their ancestors.

From Terra Australia to Australia

http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/discover_collections/history_nation/terra_australis/index.html

For those with First Fleet Ancestry "*From Terra Australis to Australia*" is an essential resource providing access to the Library's incomparable collection of First Fleet Journals. The SLNSW has the world's largest collection of original First Fleet Journals, letters and drawings all digitised, transcribed and keyword searchable.

These personal accounts of the voyage to NSW were made by naval officers, surgeons, soldiers and crew. Researchers can search for references to their ancestors in the journals that record passenger lists, shipboard life and treatment of the sick as well as impressions of the new land on arrival.

The journal of Arthur Bowes Smyth, Surgeon on board the *Lady Penryhn*, for example, records the full crew list and the women convicts, their name, age, trade, crime and term of transportation. The journal is notable for its interest in natural history and art, containing 25 drawings throughout the voyage in watercolour and ink including the earliest known illustration of an emu. The journal entries for 18-26 January are a fascinating record of first impressions on arrival including interactions with aboriginal communities and this journal forms one of the most detailed eyewitness accounts of the first weeks of the European settlement of Australia.

Digitised Collections and Social Media

Libraries and archives are using social media channels to increase the visibility of digitised collections and successfully engage a new generation of users (Szajewski 2013). Studies indicate that few researchers begin their quest for information with library websites, prompting librarians to look for new ways to reach their target audience (Lally and Dunford 2007). Digital libraries and archives are creating pathways to their digital collections through “high traffic information-flow paths” such as Wikipedia and by hosting social media accounts such as Facebook and Twitter (Crymble 2010).

In 2011 the SLNSW launched the *Innovation Project* with the aim of expanding the Library’s social media based services. The Innovation Project ran for two years from May 2012-April 2014, establishing an official library social media presence on Historypin, Pinterest, Wikipedia, Instagram and Tumblr. In the process exposing the collection to social media channels popular with the Australian community (Joseph 2013 ; Barwick & Joseph 2014).

Tumblr

Staff from the Library’s *Family History Team* were selected with other subject experts to explore *Tumblr* as this was deemed to have potential for engaging particular groups in the community such as family historians. *Tumblr* is a blogging platform with

an emphasis on multimedia content. With over 211.1 million blogs in total and approximately 4.6 million Australian users Tumblr was ranked the 4th most popular social media channel in Australia in October 2014 according to social media statistics (Cowling 2014) and Tumblr (2014).

Five official Tumblr blogs were established between February – April 2014: *Family History*; *Indigenous Services*; *Find Legal Answers*; *Maps*; *State Library of NSW* (the latter a general Library Tumblr to showcase the variety of services and collections available). A sixth blog was established in July, *Library Act 75th Anniversary*.

“Family History at the Library” Tumblr blog

The “Family history at the Library” Tumblr blog, posts content that will assist family history researchers document the lives of their ancestors. It highlights new resources, books and research guides, stories from researchers using the Library’s collections, the Library’s incomparable collection of original materials and the latest digitisation initiatives.

Tumblr is well suited to promoting the Library’s digitised collections as it allows the posting of both visual content and text commentary. Not limited by character length or file format it is more versatile than Twitter and Facebook utilising different post options with image and text (including “quotations” and “chat” posts for author interviews), audio, and video. All have been used to engage the Tumblr audience with the Library’s digitised collections. Examples include the WWI Collections (WWI diaries, soldier photographs, and oral histories); artworks especially portraits of well known Australians such as Caroline Chisholm; maps such as the visually appealing subdivision plans; author interviews with Huguenot and convict researchers using library databases to access digital collections (digitised church registers, newspapers and eighteenth century collections online); and Library events such as the ever popular *Family History Month* that this year promoted the use of digitised newspapers in family history research.

Tumblr can be accessed in one of two ways: as a social media tool for registered users within the Tumblr community (referred to as the internal ‘dashboard view’); and as a weblog for the general public (external ‘web view’). The Tumblr community is a younger demographic predominantly less than 35 years of age (US National Archives 2014). Whilst this represents an opportunity to engage with a new

audience, the preference of family history researchers as an older demographic is not social networking but access to Tumblr as a website. As usage of Tumblr is based on 'internal' views, figures significantly underestimate the level of web-based activity for this audience.

Level of Engagement

Google analytics

Available metrics from Google analytics, however, indicates a high level of engagement between the SLNSW and the Tumblr community. There have been in excess of 3,424 referrals to the SLNSW website from Tumblr since February when the blogs were first established (Source: Google Analytics, SLNSW Public Site profile, 1 February – 31 October 2014). This figure represents the number of referrals or 'click throughs' from Tumblr users to the Library's website. Tumblr blogs are created to promote discovery of the Library and its collections and each post contains links back to the Library, its catalogues and digitised collections.

Tumblr metrics

The level of engagement within the Tumblr community is measured in the number of interactions or notes generated by individual posts. Tumblr users can 'like', 'reblog', or 'reply' to another's blog post. Tumblr users can also choose to 'follow' another's blog or may be 'followed' (number of followers). Between February 2014 and October 2014 there were 6,255 sessions for Tumblr users accessing SLNSW Tumblr blogs. The number of interactions (likes and reblogs) with Library posts across all blogs numbered 5,272, once again indicating a high level of engagement with the Tumblr community.

An example of a popular and effective post was that relating to Caroline Chisholm which generated 167 'notes' (interactions), including 101 'likes' and 61 'reblogs'. This "image" post used a digitised oil painting of Chisholm from the Library's collection to celebrate the life of this famous Australian. Text commentary explained her role in establishing a scheme for assisted free migration of families to Australia. Among the 'likes' and 'reblogs' was popular Tumblr site "Cool Chicks in History". 53 of the 61 reblogs on the Library's post came from followers of Coolchicksinhistory who saw the post reblogged there first. According to the US National Archives (2014) 60% of all

reblogs on Tumblr come from “followers of followers”. The Caroline Chisholm post is a perfect example of how Tumblr facilitates discovery through sharing or reblogging content.

For each of the six SLNSW Tumblr accounts there is a different target audience, however when there is an overlap in content it can allow reblogging from other accounts to promote discovery. The Caroline Chisholm blog was actually posted by the general *State Library of NSW* Tumblr account. It was later reblogged by the *Family History at the Library* Tumblr account. Realising its potential for their target audience the family history team reblogged the post, adding a note that the Library held the passenger lists of the immigration scheme established by Caroline Chisholm and that digitised lists can also be accessed in the Library’s family history centre. The Library’s Indigenous Services Branch established an account in April and has a keen interest in family history which features regularly in their Tumblr *Indigenous Services at the Library*. For Family History Month the Indigenous team presented “Mission records for Indigenous family history” and this was promoted in both the Family History and Indigenous Services Tumblrs. There are many examples of SLNSW collections being promoted through such collaboration.

Tumblr has successfully transitioned to “business as usual” at the SLNSW and is now an official presence on the Library’s website alongside the other social media channels. Tumblr is still in its infancy as far as cultural institutions are concerned and the SLNSW is one of the first libraries or archives in Australia to engage with the Tumblr community and pioneer its use. The SLNSW has found Tumblr an ideal platform for increasing the visibility of its digitised collections and showcasing these to the world. Community engagement and reach is encouraging with some posts generating extraordinary reblogging activity. Cultural institutions in the United States such as the Library of Congress and US National Archives are actively engaging the Tumblr community. The Library is actively engaging with these institutions via their Tumblr blogs and interacting with their content. Whilst the Tumblr community is a younger demographic, there is potential for family historians to more fully engage with all the features of Tumblr as cultural institutions in Australia expose their collections to social media channels popular with the Australian community. For the SLNSW (2013a ; 2014a) it remains a strategic priority to engage with clients in their online spaces to promote discovery and engagement with digitised collections.

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