DISCONTENTS

UNREMEMBERING THE FORGOTTEN

Keynote presented at DH2015, 3 July 2015. Full slides <u>available</u> on SlideShare.

This, you might be surprised to learn, is not the first time that Australia has welcomed some of the world's leading thinkers to its shores. Just over a hundred years ago, the British Association for the Advancement of Science held its annual meeting in Australia. In earlier years the Association had journeyed to Canada and South Africa, but this was it's first tour of Australia. One senior Australian scientist heralded the Association's arrival as 'a great event in the history of Imperial unity'.

> Observer, 15 August 1914, p. 50

More than 300 scientists made the trip, including such notables as Ernest Rutherford and William Bateson. I'm a little embarrassed to admit that *their* travel was heavily subsidised by the Federal government. But then, it did take them more than a month to get here. Think about that on your flight home.

The eminent Australian geologist Edgeworth David described the Association's visit as 'an epoch making event'. He expected Australian researchers to be 'strengthened and confirmed' in their work, reaffirmed through the 'inspiration which comes alone from personal contact with master minds'.

It was also an occasion to celebrate the ideals of science. War had been declared while the scientists were at sea, but events proceeded nonetheless with delegates barnstorming across the country from Adelaide to Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane. The spirit of proceedings was summed up in Melbourne where the presentation of an honorary degree to the German geologist Johannes Walter was greeted with a 'perfect storm of applause'. 'Truly science knows not distinction between belligerent and belligerent', noted one newspaper. Australia's Governor General, Sir Ronald Munro Ferguson, welcomed the scientists with the observation that the looming dangers of war had at least 'enabled them to realise that all men of science were brothers'.

And of course, they *were* mostly men.

If you'd like a bit of data around that, you can grab a <u>digitised copy of the report</u> of the meeting from the Internet Archive and <u>run a script</u> over the list of members, grouping them by title – Miss, Mrs and Lady. Here's what you get.
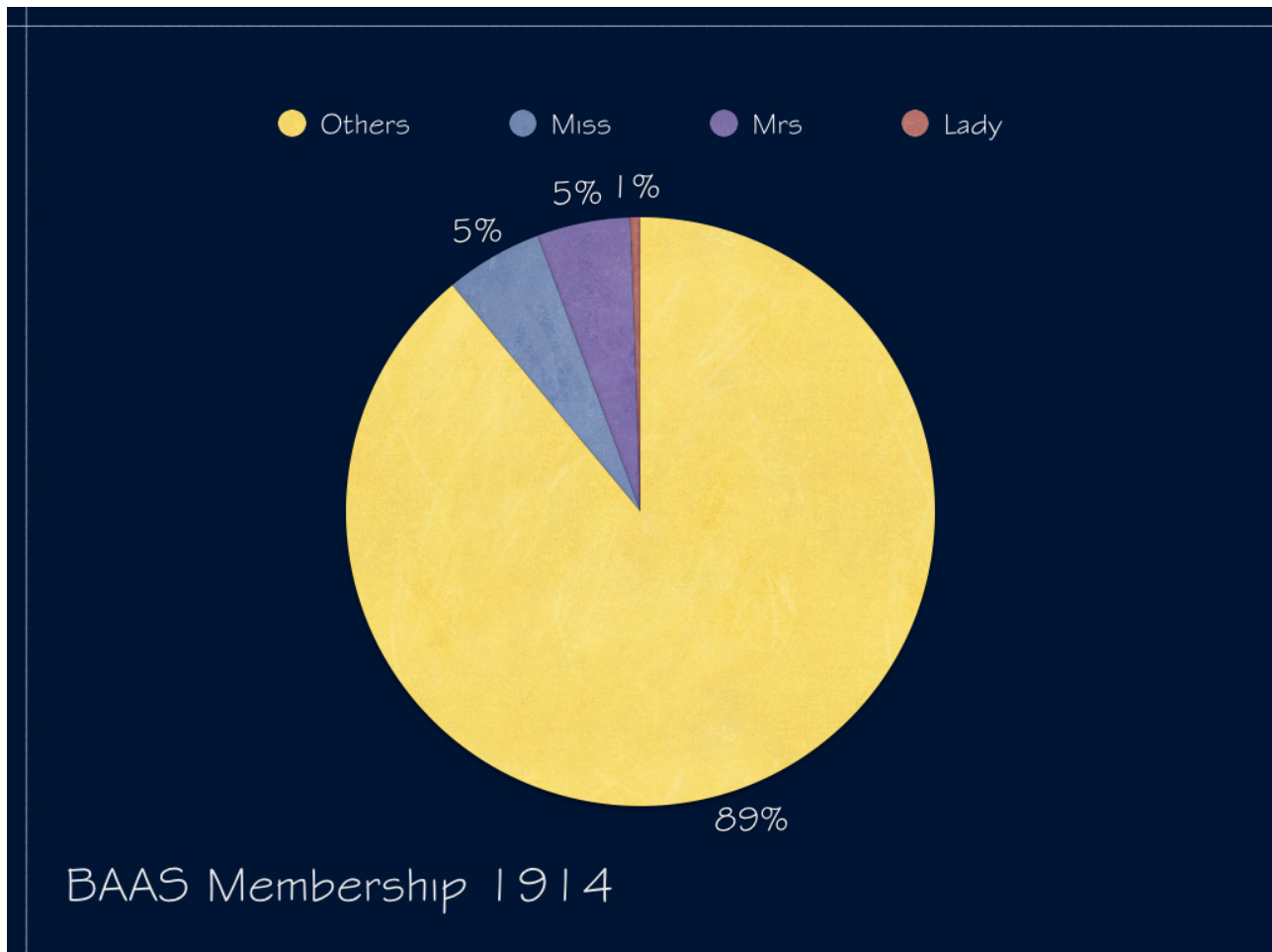

You can do the same for the people who joined the Association at one of the Australian venues.

Ok, so this 10 minute analysis might not show anything unexpected, but I love the fact that with a digitised text and a few lines of Python I can ask a question and get an almost instant answer.

What the official report doesn't say is that despite these proclamations of scientific brotherhood, not all German scientists were welcome in wartime Australia. Those who extended their stay beyond the meeting dates fell under suspicion.

Two of them, Fritz Graebner and Peter Pringsheim, were interned as suspected spies and imprisoned for the remainder of the war. The press which had fawned over the travelling savants now railed against these 'scientists in disguise' whose 'supreme act of treachery' was undoubtedly part of a German plot to capture Australia. The Minister of Defence noted that the case emphasised the 'real and pressing nature' of the wartime emergency. Honorary degrees awarded to two German scientists by the University of Adelaide were expunged from the record.

> NAA: P1, 4730
> Mirror, 8 January 1916, p. 3
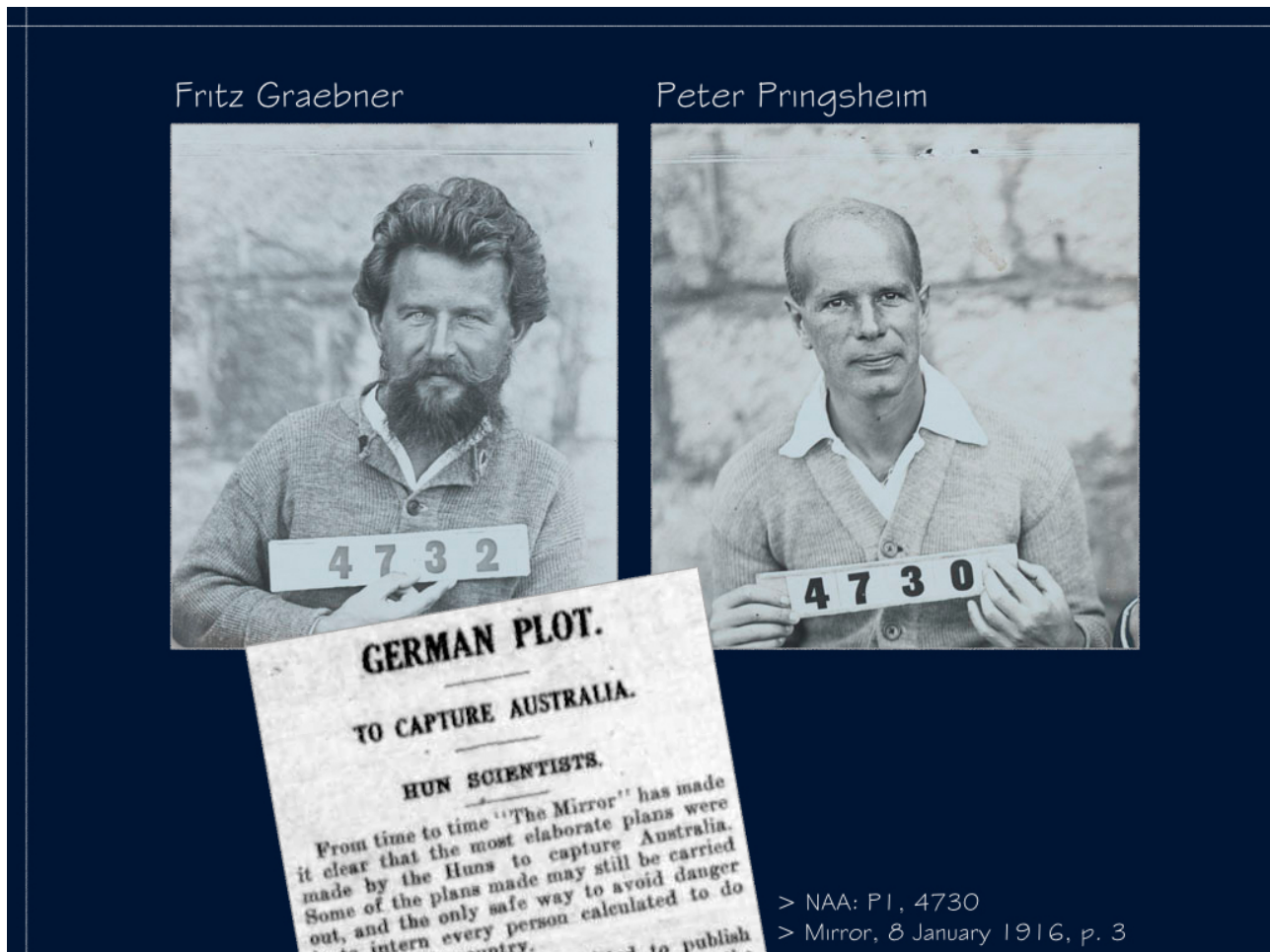
At this point I feel I should warn all our international visitors that legislation introduced in recent years to combat the so-called 'war on terror' has added new limits to our freedom of speech and movement. We are all under suspicion.

The German scientists were interned alongside many thousands of others. Most had had no charges brought against them. Many were naturalised British subjects, or Australian-born of German descent. Australia was their home. That didn't stop the government repatriating many of them to Germany at war's end.

To orient them on their antipodean adventure, visitors for the British Association meeting were supplied with specially-prepared handbooks that described conditions in Australia. At a time when violence against Indigenous people was still common along the frontiers of settlement, the Commonwealth Handbook informed visitors that Australian Aboriginals 'represent the most backward race extant'.

Australia was big, but its population was small. The Commonwealth Handbook noted the challenges of maintaining 'control of so large a territory by a mere handful of people', pointing to the significance of the 'White Australia' policy in avoiding the 'difficulties' of 'heterogenous' populations. Chris Watson, who served as Australia's first Labor prime minister a decade earlier, expanded on this theme in the NSW Handbook. Concerns about the financial impact of 'coloured' labour, he explained, had been fused with an 'abhorrence of racial admixture' to create 'practically a unanimous demand for

a "White Australia"'. 'White Australia' was both an ideal and an obligation, an opportunity and a threat. Watson observed:

> The aboriginal natives are numerically a negligible quantity, so there is every opportunity for the building up of a great white democracy if the community can maintain possession against the natural desire of the brown and yellow races to participate in the good things to be found in the Commonwealth. That the Asiatic will for ever tamely submit to be excluded from a country which, while presenting golden opportunities, is yet comparatively unpeopled, can hardly be expected. Therefore Australians are realising that to maintain their ideals they must fill their waste spaces and prepare for effective defence.

Welcome to Australia a hundred years later where we remember 1914 not for its institutionalised racism, but because it marked the beginning of a war that has come to be strongly associated with ideas of Australian nationhood.

You have arrived here amidst the 'Anzac Centenary' which, the official website notes, 'is a milestone of special significance to all Australians'. It must be true because, according to the Honest History site, we're spending more than half a billion dollars on commemorative activities. That's a lot of remembering.

Amidst the travelling roadshows, the memorials, the exhibitions, and the rolling anniversaries, are of course many worthy digital projects. Some of these will provide new access to war-related collections, or gather community content and memories. They will result in important new historical resources. But who are we remembering and why? As a historian and hacker, as a maker of tools and a scraper of sites, I want today to poke around for a while amidst the complexities of memory.

It's not all about the war. Recent decades have brought attempts to remember more difficult histories. Peter Read coined the phrase 'stolen generations' to draw attention to the devastating effects of official policies that resulted in the forced removal of Indigenous children from their families, through until the 1970s. The damaging experiences of children in institutional care, the 'forgotten Australians', have also been opened to scrutiny. Both of these have brought official apologies from the Commonwealth government. Even now, almost every day brings more horrifying testimony as the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse continues its hearings.

In each case we have learnt to our shame of continuing failures to protect the most vulnerable in Australian society – children.

Often these investigations are cast as attempts to bring to the surface forgotten aspects of our history. But to those who suffered through these events, who have continued to live with the consequences, they have never been far from memory.

Nor have they been entirely lost to the historical record. One of the responses to these inquiries has been to discover, marshal and deploy existing archival resources. The National Archives of Australia created an exhibition based on the experiences of some of the Stolen Generation. They also developed a new name index to their collections to help Indigenous people reconnect with their families through official records.

The eScholarship Research Centre at the University of Melbourne drew on its experience in documenting a wide variety of archival collections to create Find & Connect – a web resource that assembles information about institutional care in Australia and assists care leavers in recovering their own stories. Official records have been supplemented by oral history programs and other collecting initiatives to ensure that these memories are secure.

Such histories are 'forgotten' not because they are unremembered or undocumented, but because they sit uncomfortably alongside more widely promulgated visions of Australia's past. As researchers on the Find & Connect project noted, the stories of care leavers 'did not "fit in" with the narratives in the public domain. Their memories were "outside discourse"'.1 Remembering the forgotten is not just a matter of recall or rediscovery, but a battle over the boundaries of what matters.

Libraries, archives and museums are often referred to as memory institutions. Rhetorically it can be a useful way of positioning cultural institutions in respect to structures of governance and assessments of public value. The idea of losing our memory, whether as a society or an individual, is frightening.

But there are contradictions here. We frequently talk about memory in terms of storage – the ability of our technologies to tuck away useful pieces of information for retrieval later. There's the 'M' in RAM and ROM, the fields in our database, our backups in the cloud. Memory is an accumulation of key/value pairs. Each time we query a particular key, we expect to get the same value back.

Memory, as we experience it, is something quite different. It's fragmentary, uncertain, and shaped by context. The process of recall is unpredictable and sometimes disturbing – memories are often triggered involuntarily. Within a society memories are contested and contradictory. Who controls the keys?

Cultural institutions are trying to respond to this complexity. On the one hand they offer the security of authority – sources to be trusted in world overflowing with information. But they are also looking for ways of capturing and representing alternative voices.

I think we can help with that.

Both in my work at Trove and my own noodling about I use the word 'access' a lot. But the more I use it the more I suspect it really doesn't mean very much. What does it say that we now distinguish between 'open' and 'closed' access?

We tend to think of 'access' as the way we get to stuff. It's the pathway along which we can explore our cultural collections. But as Mitchell Whitelaw argues, one of our primary means of access, the common or garden variety search box, constrains our view of the resources beyond. Search provides not an open door, but a grumpy 'Yes, what?'

I'd suggest that these sort of constraints don't stand in the way of access, they construct it. Through legislation, technology, and professional practice, through the metadata we create and the interfaces we build, limits are created around what we can see and what we can do. Access is a process of control rather than liberation.

> Illawarra Daily Mercury, 24 October 1952, p. 1
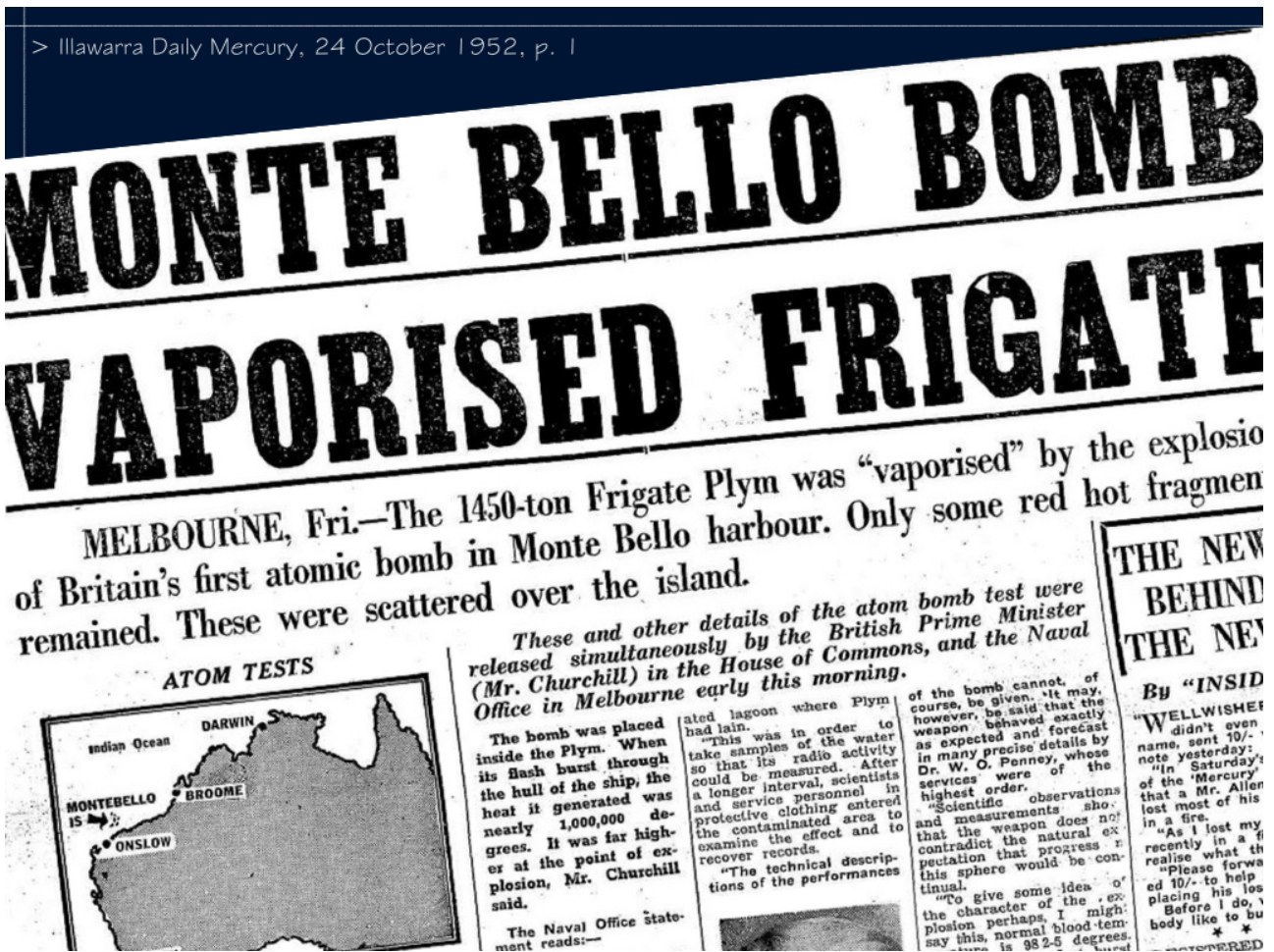
In 1952, in another notable act of 'imperial unity', Britain exploded an atomic bomb off the coast of Western Australia. A further 11 atomic tests were carried out here, most at

a mainland testing site called Maralinga in South Australia. As a young research student in 1984, the British atomic tests introduced me both to the gloriously rich collections of the National Archives of Australia, and to the contradictions of access.

Under the Archives Act, most government records are opened to the public after 20 years (this was reduced from 30 years in 2010). However, before they are released they undergo examination to see whether they contain material that is exempted from public access – for example any secret squirrel business that could endanger our national security. The access process can therefore result in records that are 'closed' or 'open with exception'.

What does 'closed' access look like? A few weeks ago I harvested details of all the files in the National Archives' online database that have the access status 'closed'. The records include the reasons why the files remain restricted. If you group them by reason, you can see that the most common grounds for restriction is Section 33(1)(g) of the Archives Act which seeks to prevent the 'unreasonable disclosure of information relating to the personal affairs of any person'. Fair enough. Coming second is the rather less obvious category of 'withheld pending advice'. These are files that have gone back to the government agencies that created or controlled them to check that they really can be released. So they're actually part way through the process.
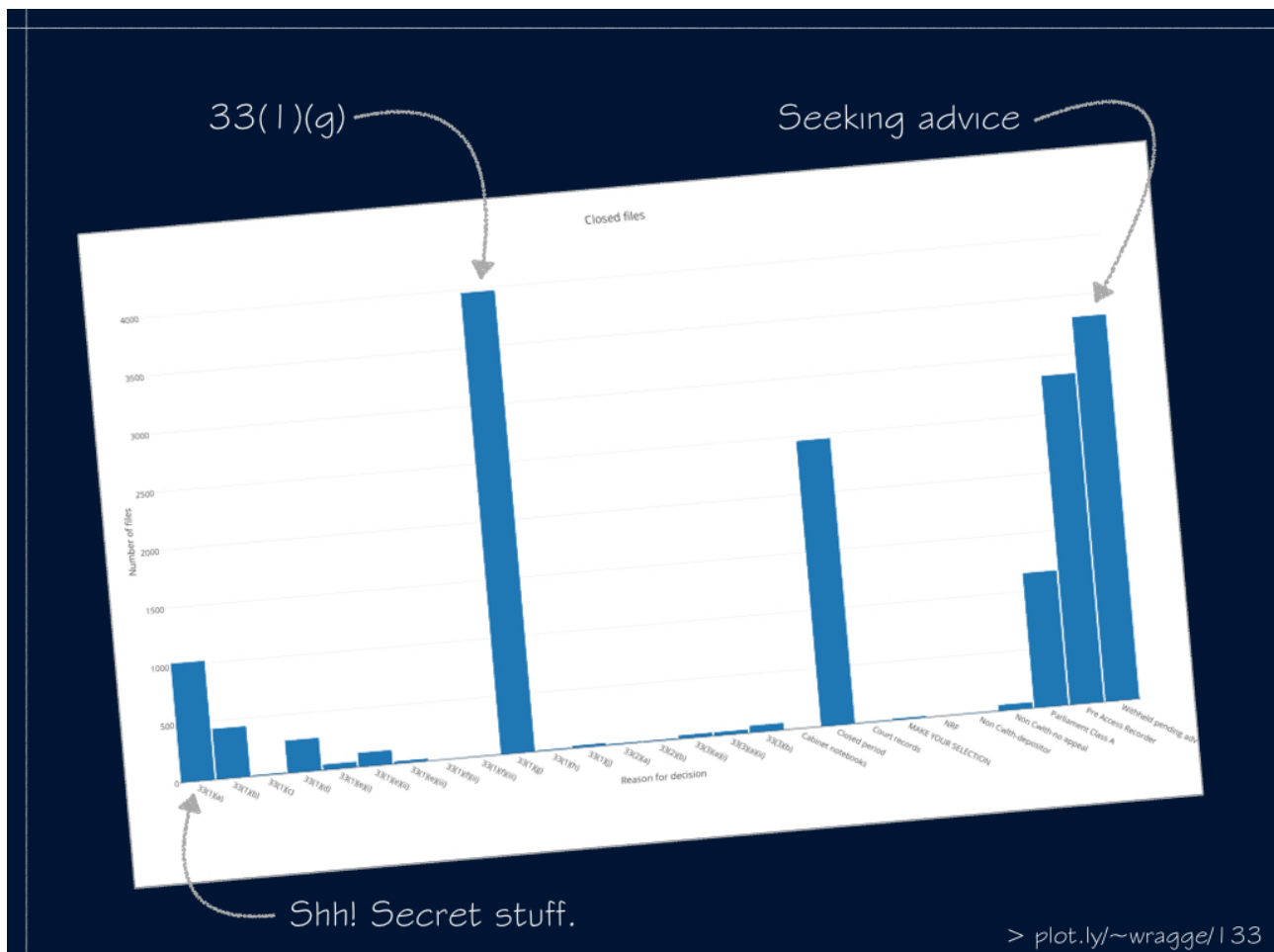
Using the contents dates of the files we can see how old they are. Section 33(1)(a) of the Archives Act exempts records from public scrutiny if they might 'cause damage to the security, defence or international relations of the Commonwealth'. Most of the records closed on these grounds are over 50 years old, with a peak in 1956.
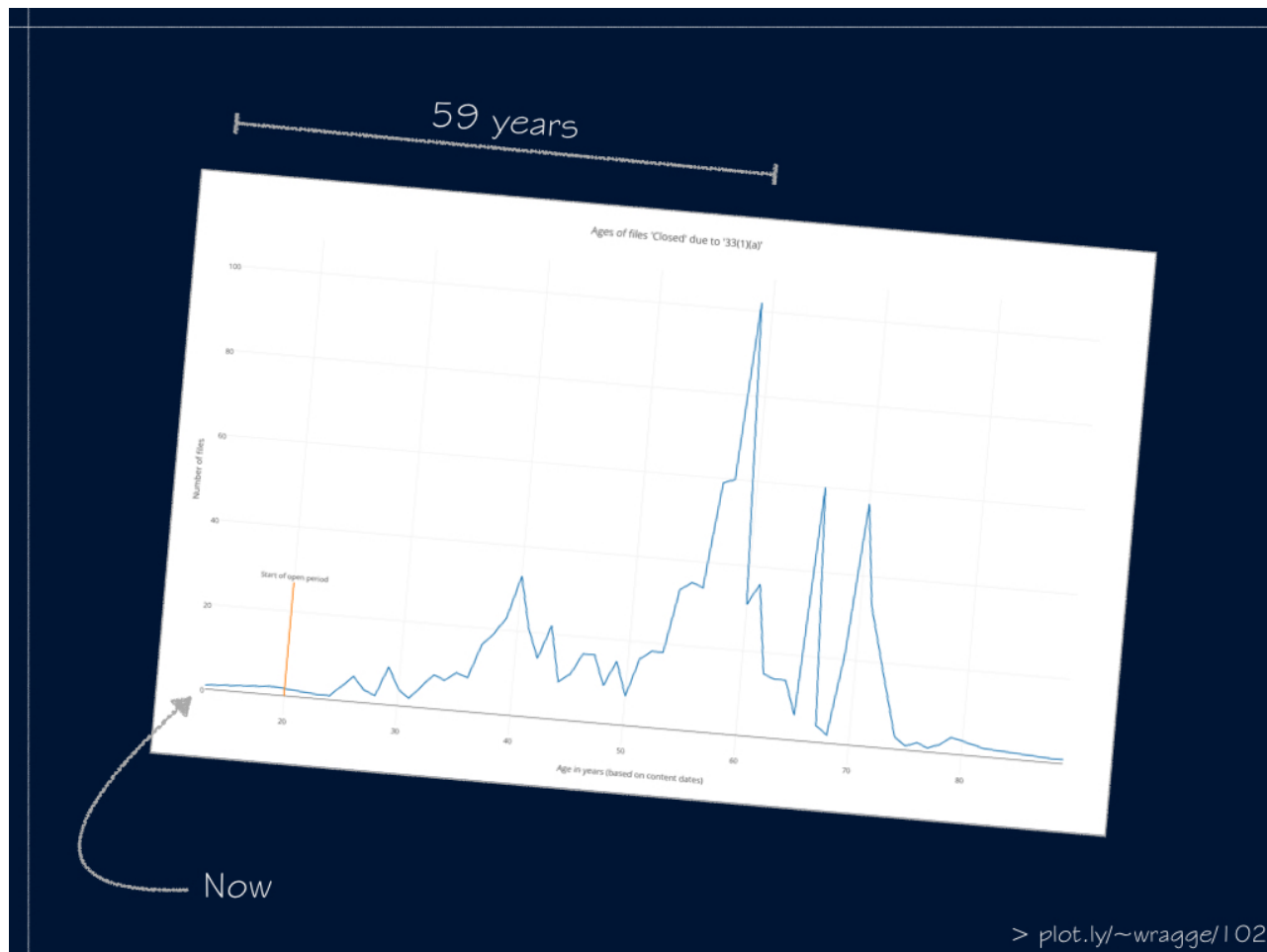
And here's a word cloud of the closed file titles from 1956. I'm sure that we all feel a lot safer knowing all those Cold War secrets are still being protected.

Hits & memories of 1956

> voyant-tools.org

Back in 1984 I asked for some of those secret files to be opened so I could write my Honours thesis on the role of Australian scientists in the British Atomic tests. A number of the files I was interested in went off to agencies for advice, and some even made their way to the British High Commission. Being young, optimistic, and on a deadline, I wrote to the British High Commissioner asking if anything could be done to speed the process up.

'a very real concern to prevent nuclear proliferation'
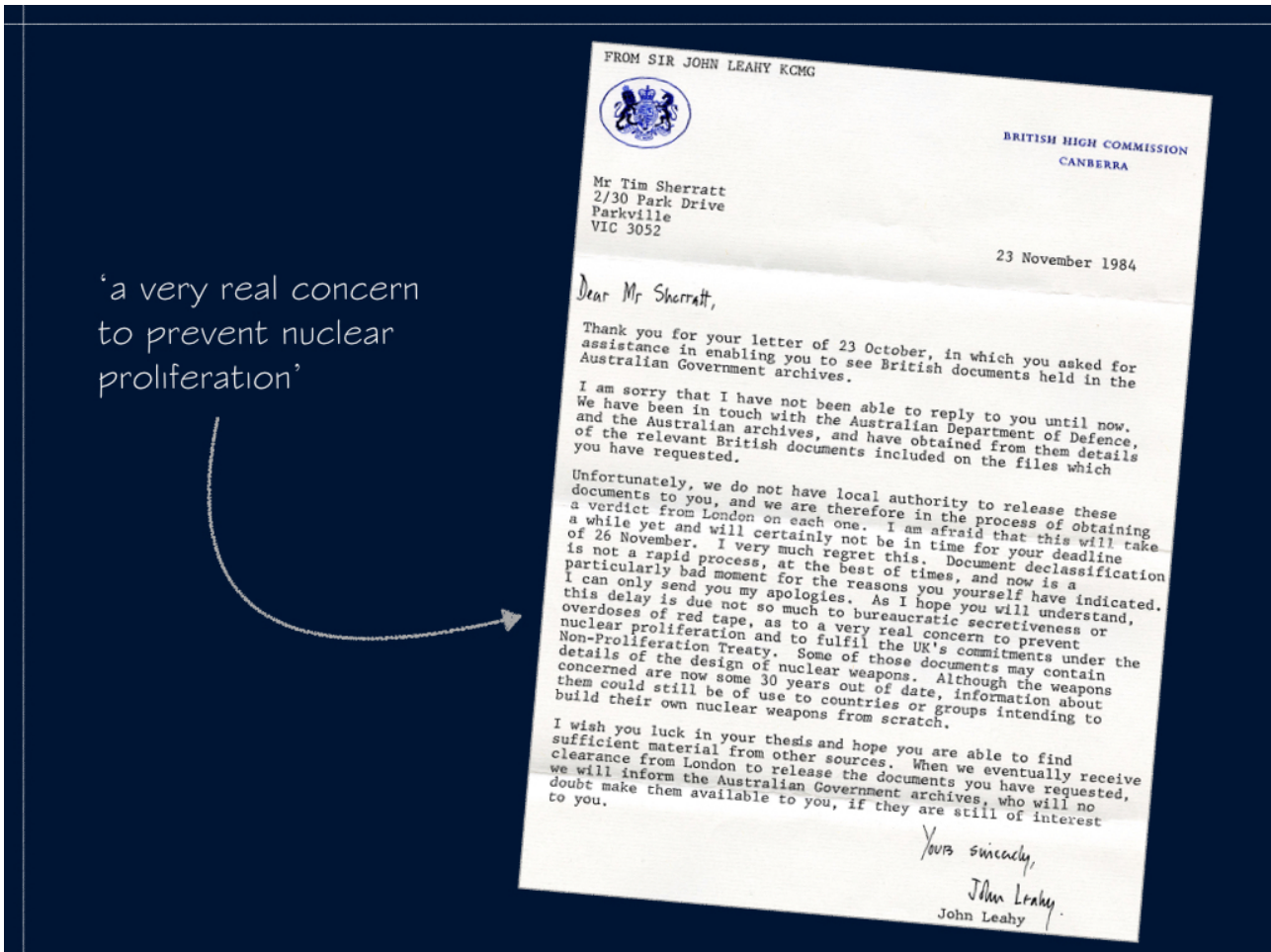
I received a very polite reply explaining that they were obligated under the Nuclear Non-Profileration Treaty to make sure that they didn't unleash any atomic bomb secrets upon the world. This was hilariously and tragically ironic, as the argument of my thesis was that the British government withheld information from their Australian hosts to curry favour with the USA. There was no way that atomic bomb plans would be in Australian government files. Yeah – hilarious.

Access is political. Cassie Findlay has contrasted the Australian government's processes for the release of records with the creation and use of the WikiLeaks Cablegate archive.2 Cassie argues that the 'hyper-dissemination' model of WikiLeaks, through which large volumes of material are shared across multiple platforms, creates a 'pluralised archive' that 'exists beyond spatial and temporal boundaries, transcends state and economic controls and encourages and incorporates people's participation and comment'. Instead of gatekeepers and reading rooms there are hackers and torrents.

Traditional forms of access are often celebrated as if they are a gift to a grateful nation. As Cassie notes, the release of Cabinet documents by the National Archives is a yearly ritual where stories of 30 year old political manoeuvring are mixed with the comforts of nostalgia. But with each release more files are closed, withheld from public access. The workings of a bureaucratic process developed to control the release of information is recast as an opportunity to party. Invested with the cultural power of the

secret and the political weight of national security, access itself becomes mysterious and magical.

We are left to ponder such wonders as: 'Named country [imposed title, original title wholly exempt]'.

At the same time, governments are pumping out 'open data', bringing the promise of greater transparency, and new fuel for the engines of innovation. But for all its benefits, open data isn't. It only exists because decisions have been made about what is valuable to record and to keep – structures have been defined, categories have been closed. As Geoffrey Bowker and Susan Leigh Starr remind us, the definition, elaboration and enforcement of categories lies at the heart of bureaucracy and the infrastructure of the state.3 Data is not just a product of government, it is implicated in the workings of power.

Chris Watson's vision of a White Australia was, by 1914, well established as a system of bureaucratic surveillance and control. The Commonwealth Handbook benignly noted that 'an immigrant may be required to pass a dictation test before being admitted into the Commonwealth'. It added that 'in general practice this test is not imposed upon persons of European race'. The dictation test was a mechanism of exclusion. Any intending immigrant deemed not to be 'white' would be subjected to the dictation test and they would fail. But there were already many people born or resident in Australia of Asian descent. If they wanted to travel overseas they were forced to carry official documents to protect them from the application of the dictation test – otherwise they might not be allowed to return home. Many thousands of these documents are now preserved in the National Archives of Australia. With portrait photographs and inky-black handprints, they are visually compelling, and disturbing, documents. They need to be seen.

> iabrowse.herokuapp.com/browse?series=ST84/1&control=1903/211-220

Peter Wah Young (Hay NSW), Gow Sing (Sydney NSW), You Sing (Sydney NSW), Charlie Ng Kin (Wagga Wagga NSW), Ah On (Wagga Wagga NSW), Pong Dow Key (Sydney NSW), Paul Sue Young (Gunnedah NSW), Ah Chew (Wollongong NSW), Ah Wot (Tumut NSW), Lum Kee (Singleton NSW) and Ah Kee (Narromine NSW) [Certificate of Domicile - includes left hand impression and photographs] [box 2]

‹ NAA: ST84/1, 1903/211-220 ›

A few years ago, my partner Kate Bagnall and I harvested thousands of these documents from the National Archives website, ran them through a facial detection script and created 'The Real Face of White Australia'.
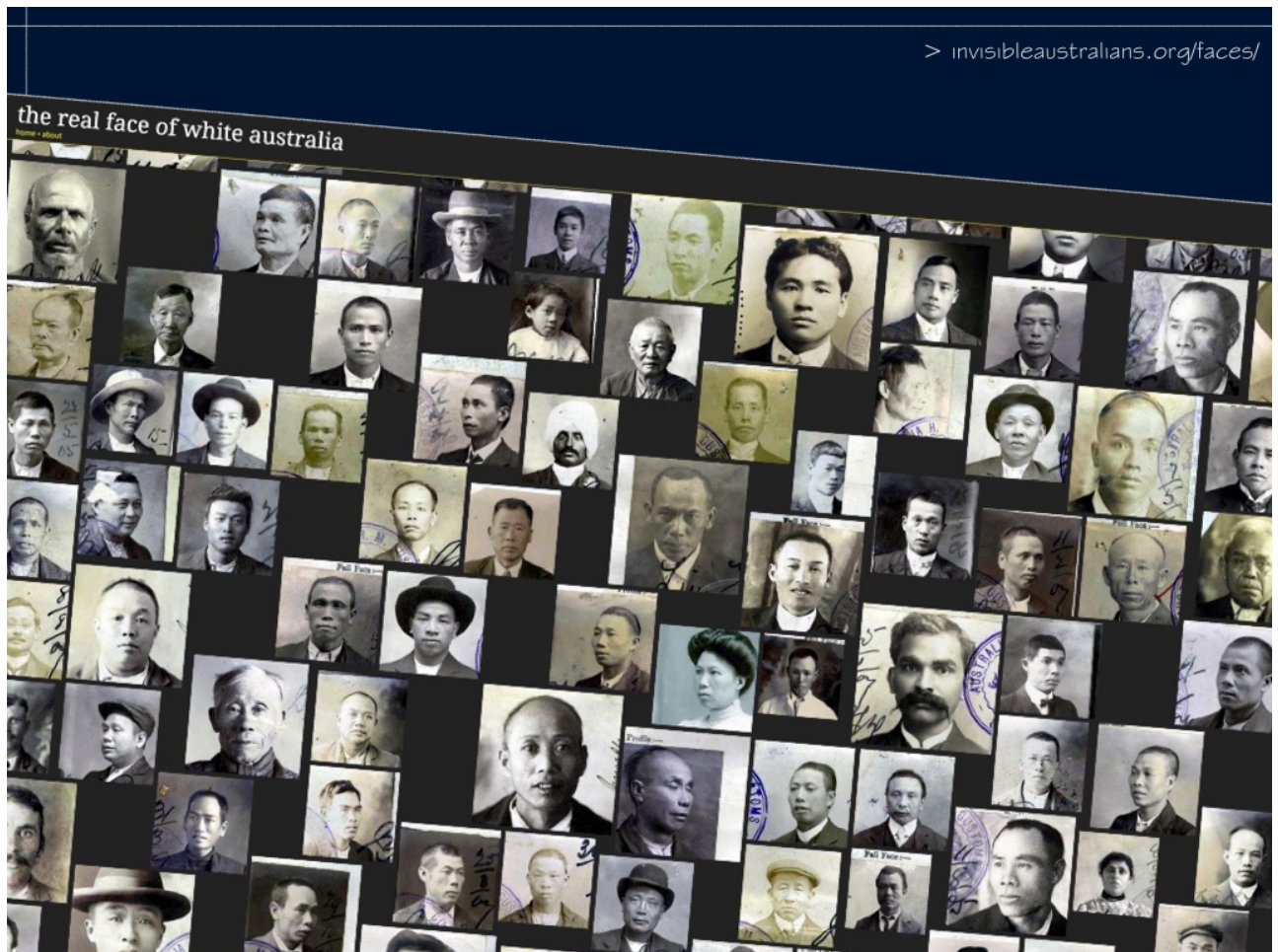
You might have seen it before. It's been widely cited, and it's probably one of the main reasons I'm standing here today. For Kate and me this was part of our ongoing attempts to use the bureaucratic remnants of the White Australia policy to reconstruct the lives of those who lived within its grasp. But it's also an example of the complications of access.

In the past I've tended to gloss over the hardest part of this project – just harvesting those 12,000 images. It was only possible because I'd spent a lot of time, over a number of years, wrestling with RecordSearch, the National Archives' online database. I think it was back in 2008 that I wrote my first Zotero translator to extract structured data from RecordSearch. It was one of those Eureka moments. Although I'd been developing web applications for a long time, I hadn't really thought of the web as a source to be mined, manipulated and transformed. I could take what was delivered in my browser and change it.

Thanks to the Bill Turkel and the Programming Historian, I taught myself enough Python to be dangerous and was soon creating screen scrapers for a variety of sites – taking their HTML and turning it into data. I was no longer bound to a particular interface. The meaning of access had changed.

But screen scrapers are a pain. Sites change and scrapers break. I don't know how many hours I've spent inspecting RecordSearch response headers, trying to figure out

where my requests were going. I've given up several times, but always gone back, because there's always more to do.

Amongst the enthusiasm for open data there's perhaps a tendency to overlook the *opening* of data – the way that hackers, tinkerers, journalists, activists and others have been stretching the limits of access.

The various projects of the Open Australia Foundation are a great example of this – they've even established their own public scraping framework called Morph, to share both the code and the data that's been liberated from websites and pdfs.

The Australian Parliament recently passed changes to the Copyright Act that will enable copyright holders to apply to the Federal Court to block piracy-related websites. Of all the changes needed to copyright, this is the one that went to Parliament.

But what I love is that even before the legislation had passed, even before the first application has been made or site blocked, there was a website and Twitter account ready to document and publicise any site-blocking orders – created not by government, but by an ABC journalist.

Archivists Wendy Duff and Verne Harris have talked about records 'as always in the process of being made', not locked in the past but 'opening out of the future'.4 Cassie Findlay similarly notes that the Cablegate archive 'is still forming'. She argues for models of participation and access around archives that open 'more directly from the affairs that they document'.

The act of opening – records, archives, sources – is contingent and contextual. It creates a connection between inside and outside, past and present, us and them. What we do with that connection is up to us.

> NAA: A2455, I
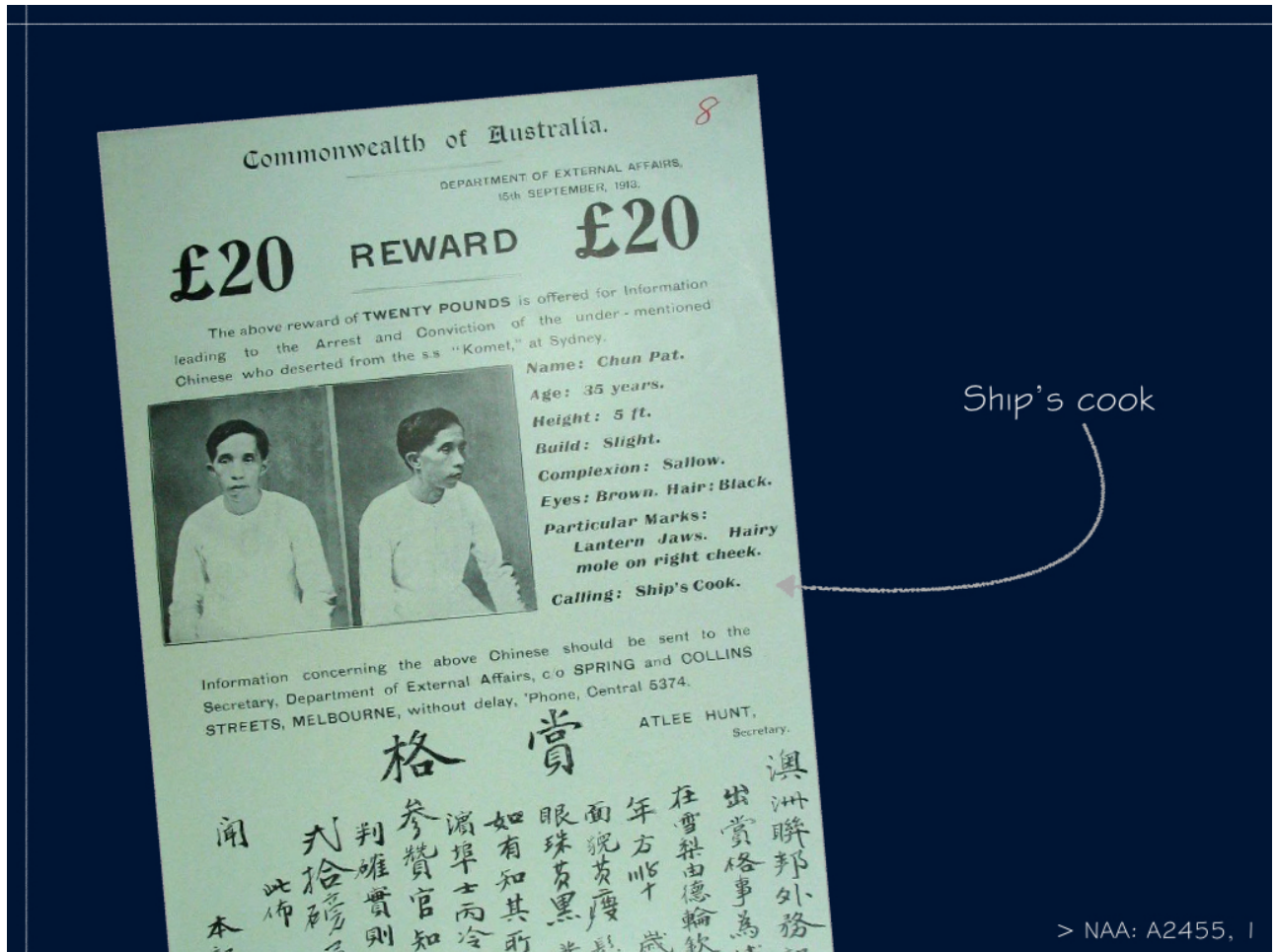
What would have happened if instead of hearing about 'prohibited immigrants', instead of seeing 'wanted' posters of escaped Chinese seaman, Australians in 1914 had seen something like our wall of faces?

What would happen now if instead of hearing about 'illegal maritime arrivals' (IMAs) we were exposed to the stories of those who arrive in Australia in search of asylum?

Access will never be open. Every CSV is an expression of power, every API is an argument. While I would gladly take back the time I've spent wresting data from HTML I recognise the value of the struggle. The bureaucratic structures of the White Australia policy live on in the descriptive hierarchies of the National Archives. To build our wall of faces we had to dismantle these structures – to drill down through series, items, documents and images until we found the people inside. I feel differently about the records because of that. Access can never simply be given, at some level it has to be taken.

> nla.gov.au/nla.news-article122108988

Yep, that's really me...

Court chaos as charges mount in Alice

ALICE SPRINGS: The legal process in Alice Springs was in chaos late yesterday following almost 200 arrests in two days at the Pine Gap joint defence facility.

Police were still charging those arrested yesterday morning and as the first defendants appeared in court their hearings were delayed hours because of missing paper work.

tion at Pine Gap were heard in the last three-quarters of an hour of yesterday's hearings.

Three people charged with trespassing on Commonwealth property were fined $100 for each count of trespassing. One man was also charged with loitering.

they tried to present a petition on behalf of more than 1000 grandchildren.

To chants of "Go granny go", the eight grandmothers and two grandfathers went through the barbed-wire fence into the base.

In 1987 I ended up outside the gates of Pine Gap, a US intelligence facility near Alice Springs, dressed as a kangaroo. Having finished my honours thesis on the British atomic tests, I couldn't ignore the parallels between the bombs and the bases. I even organised a conference entitled, 'From Maralinga to Pine Gap: The historical fallout'. I remember pulling over on the road to Alice Springs because there was one point where you could just glimpse the top of one of the white domes that protected Pine Gap's receivers. It was a pretty thrilling moment.

Now you can just type 'Pine Gap' into Google Maps and there it is.

It's still secret, it's still gathering unknown quantities of electronic intelligence, but last time I checked it also had 21 reviews and an average rating of 3.6 stars. Keep it in mind for your next Aussie holiday!
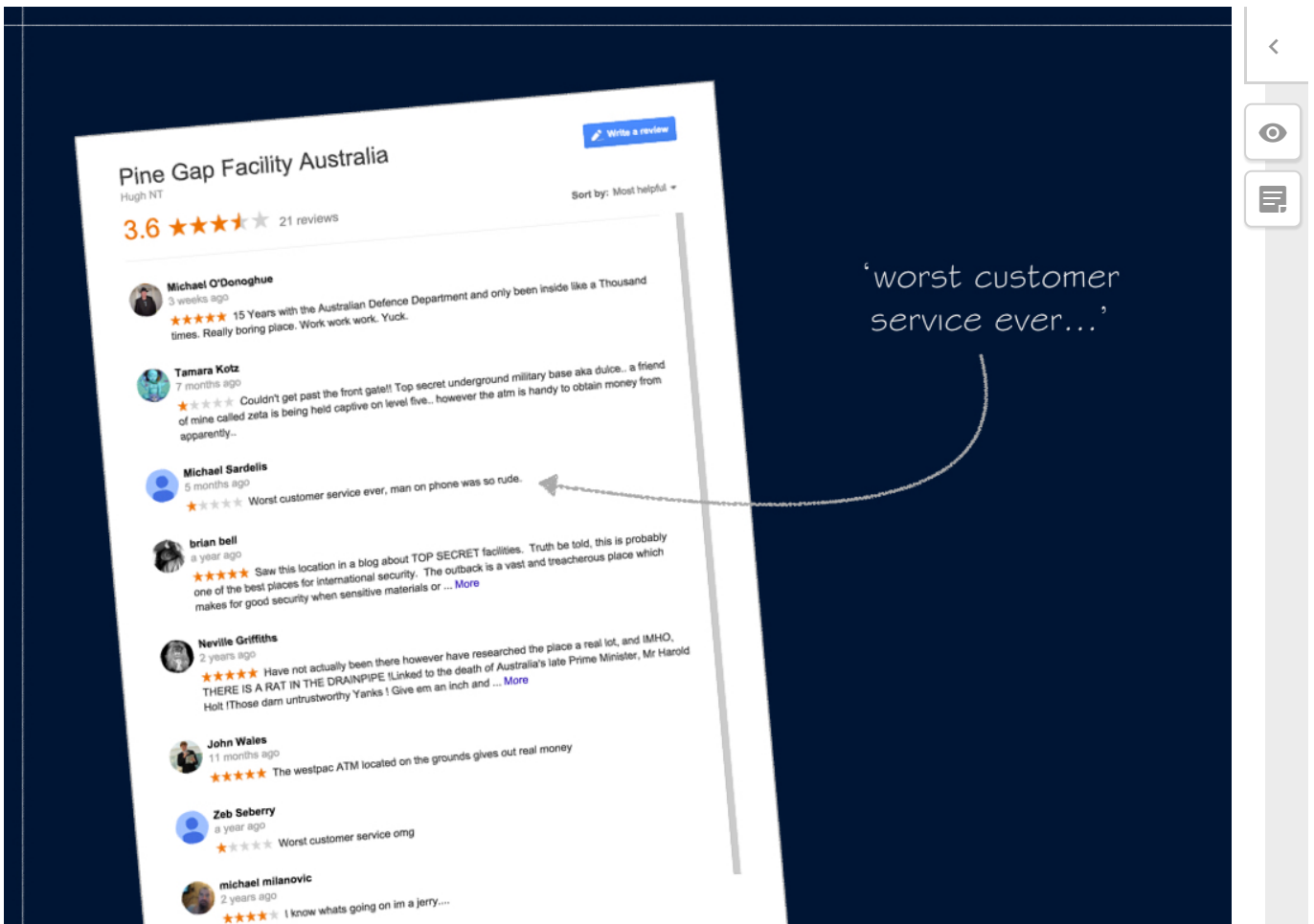
Digital tools enable us to see things differently – to demystify the secret, to expose patterns and trends locked up in tables, statistics, or cultural collections.

Mapping Police Violence, for example, displays your chances of being killed by police in the US based on your location. It also presents the photos and details of more than 100 unarmed black people killed by police in 2014.

@CongressEdits is a Twitter bot, created by Ed Summers, that tweets anonymous edits to Wikipedia made within the US Congress. A similar bot exists for Australian state and federal governments.

I love the way that Twitter bots, in particular, can play around with our ideas of context and significance. I've created a few myself that automatically tweet content from Trove, and I'm interested in what happens when we mobilise cultural collections and let them loose in the places where people already congregate. Steve Lubar argues that 'the randomness of the museumbot calls attention to the choices that we take for granted'. Twitter bots can challenge the sense of control and authority that adhere to our collection databases.

But bots can be more. Mark Sample's important essay on 'bots of conviction' explores the possibilities for protest and intervention. He describes protest bots as 'tactical media' creating 'messy moments that destabilise narratives, perspectives, and events'.

Wendy Duff and Verne Harris warn archivists of the dangers of the story in disguising the exercise of power, in stealing from individuals what they need to construct their own narratives – 'space, confusion, [and] a sense of meaninglessness'. Against the brutal logic of the state, a bot's algorithmic nonsense can help us to see differently, to *feel* differently.

Caleb McDaniel's bot @Every3Minutes is an example of how powerful these interventions can be. Working from estimates of the volume of the slave trade in the American South, it tweets a reminder every three minutes – a person was just traded, a child was just bought – often with links to historical sources. Mark Sample notes that 'it is in the aggregate that a protest bot's tweets attain power' and it is through simple, unyielding repetition that @Every3Minutes reaches us. As Alex Madrigal noted: 'To follow this bot is to agree to reweave the horrors of slavery into the fabric of your life'.

My own protest bot is trivial by comparison to Mark or Caleb's work. @OperationBot merely assembles random words to create new names for national security operations. It's a bot born of frustration and fury as the Australian government responded to the plight of asylum seekers by launching 'Operation Sovereign Borders'. As @OperationBot proudly proclaims, its aim is to 'protect Australia from meaning'.

Perhaps more significant than @OperationBot's supposed subversions is the fact that I could create it in a couple of hours sitting in front of the TV. Digital skills and tools allow us to try things, to create and experiment, without any expectation of significance or impact.

One of the more controversial sessions at the British Association meeting in Australia in 1914 was devoted to the structure of the atom. Ernest Rutherford reported on experiments that pointed to the now familiar model where the atom's mass is concentrated in a tiny, central nucleus. Firing charged particles at a thin sheet of gold foil, Rutherford, Geiger and Marsden had expected the particles to pass through largely undeflected. But some bounced back. As Rutherford later noted: 'It was almost as incredible as if you fired a 15-inch shell at a piece of tissue paper and it came back and hit you'.

I wonder if that's what we're doing – firing off experiments into the net, waiting for one to hit something solid and bounce back. PING!

@Every3Minutes – PING!

The Real Face of White Australia – PING!

In 2012 Kate and I received an email from Mayu Kanamori, an artist researching the life of an early Japanese Australian photographer. She described her reaction to the Real

Face of White Australia:

> When I scrolled down the Faces section of your website, browsing through the
> faces, tears welled up, and I couldn't stop crying as if some sort of flood gates
> had been removed.

We knew that that the documents and the images were powerful, but displaying the
faces on that seemingly endless scrolling wall did something more than we were
expecting.

Jenny Edkins has been exploring the politics of faces, and she suggests that alongside
our attempts to 'read' portrait photographs we also respond in a more visceral fashion,
provoking responses such as 'guilt, obligation, and reciprocity'.5 Like the 'messy
moments' of protest bots, she argues that the connections we make through photos of
faces can disrupt the 'linear narrative temporality' on which sovereign power depends.
We are connected through time, not with history, not with the past, but with people.
And that has implications.

Last year I tried extracting faces, and eyes within those faces, from photos I'd
harvested via Trove's digitised newspapers. The result was Eyes on the Past. It presents
a random selection of eyes, slowly blinking on and off. Clicking on an eye reveals the
full face and the source of the image. Where the Real Face of White Australia

overwhelms with scale and meaning, Eyes on the Past is minimal and mysterious. Eyes on the Past emphasises absence, and the fragility of our connection with the past, even while it provides a new way of exploring the digitised newspapers. Perhaps the best thing about it is the range of responses it has provoked – from those who found it beautiful, to those who thought it was just creepy.
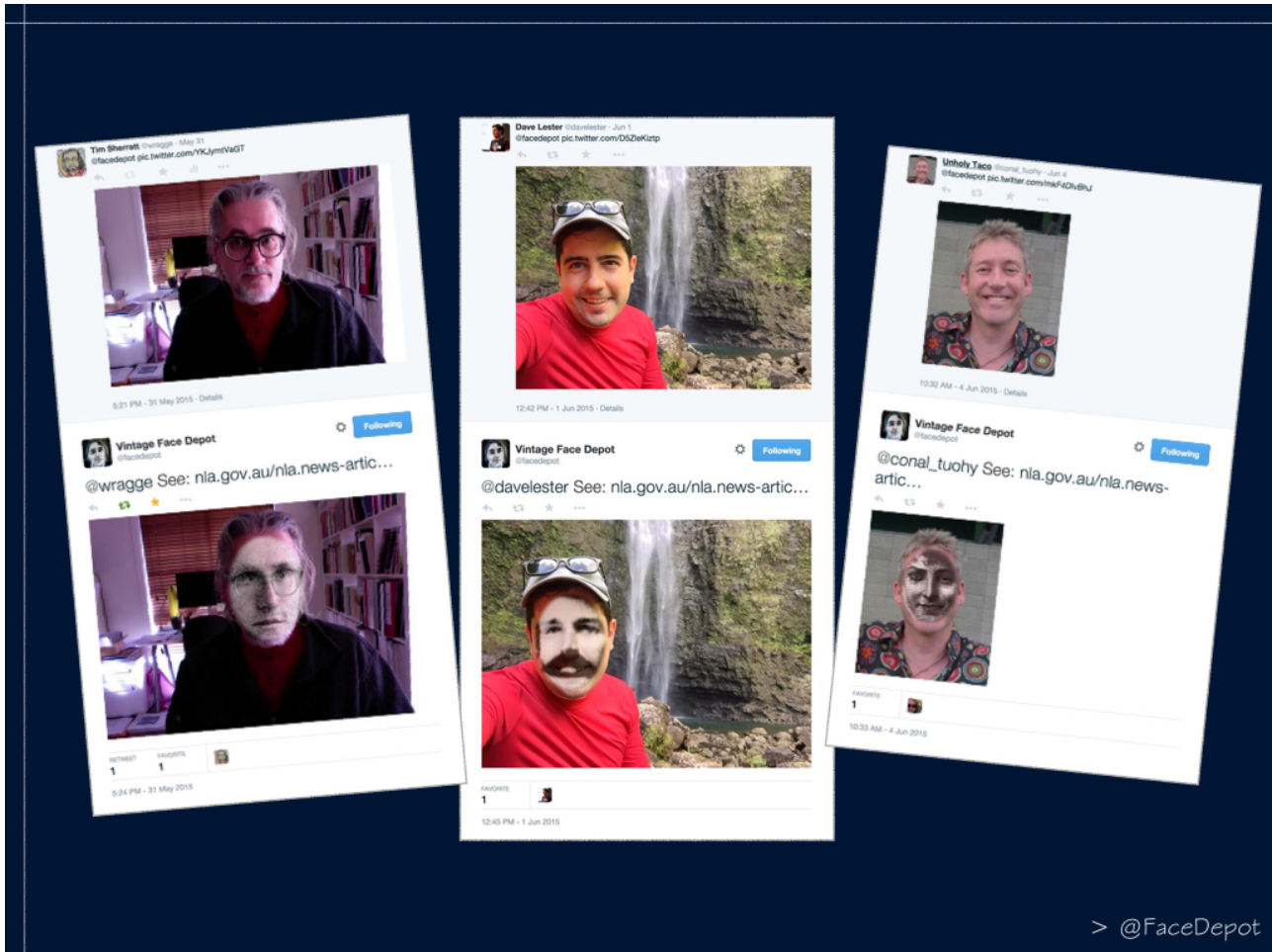
More recently I've been playing around with the possibility of connection, and creepiness, through The Vintage Face Depot. Tweet a photo of yourself to @FaceDepot and a bot will select a face at random from my collection of newspaper images and superimpose that face over yours – tweeting you back the result. It sounds stupid, and it probably is. I'm still waiting for it to go viral like Microsoft's age detection thing. But sometimes… PING!

One night I started fiddling with the transparency of the superimposed images. All of a sudden I could see the colour of my face showing through. I could see my glasses on this face from the past.

Experimenting on Kate, I saw the blue of her eyes peering through eyes of another person. Again, the potential is there to mess around with the barriers that put some people on the other side of this wall we call the past – to explore what Devon Elliot suggested on Twitter was an 'uncanny temporal valley'.


The Australian historian Greg Dening has argued:

> Nothing can be returned to the past. Not life to its dead. Not justice to its victimised. But we take something from the past with our hindsighted clarity. That which we take we can return. We disempower the people of the past when we rob them of their present moments.

There is no open access to the past. There is no key we can enter to recall a life. I do this sort of stuff not because I want to contribute to some form of national memory, but because I want to unsettle what it means to remember – to go beyond the listing of names and the cataloguing of files to develop modes of access that are confusing, challenging, inspiring, uncomfortable and sometimes creepy.

Perhaps my favourite experiments are a couple of simple userscripts. They sit in your browser and change the behaviour of Trove and RecordSearch.
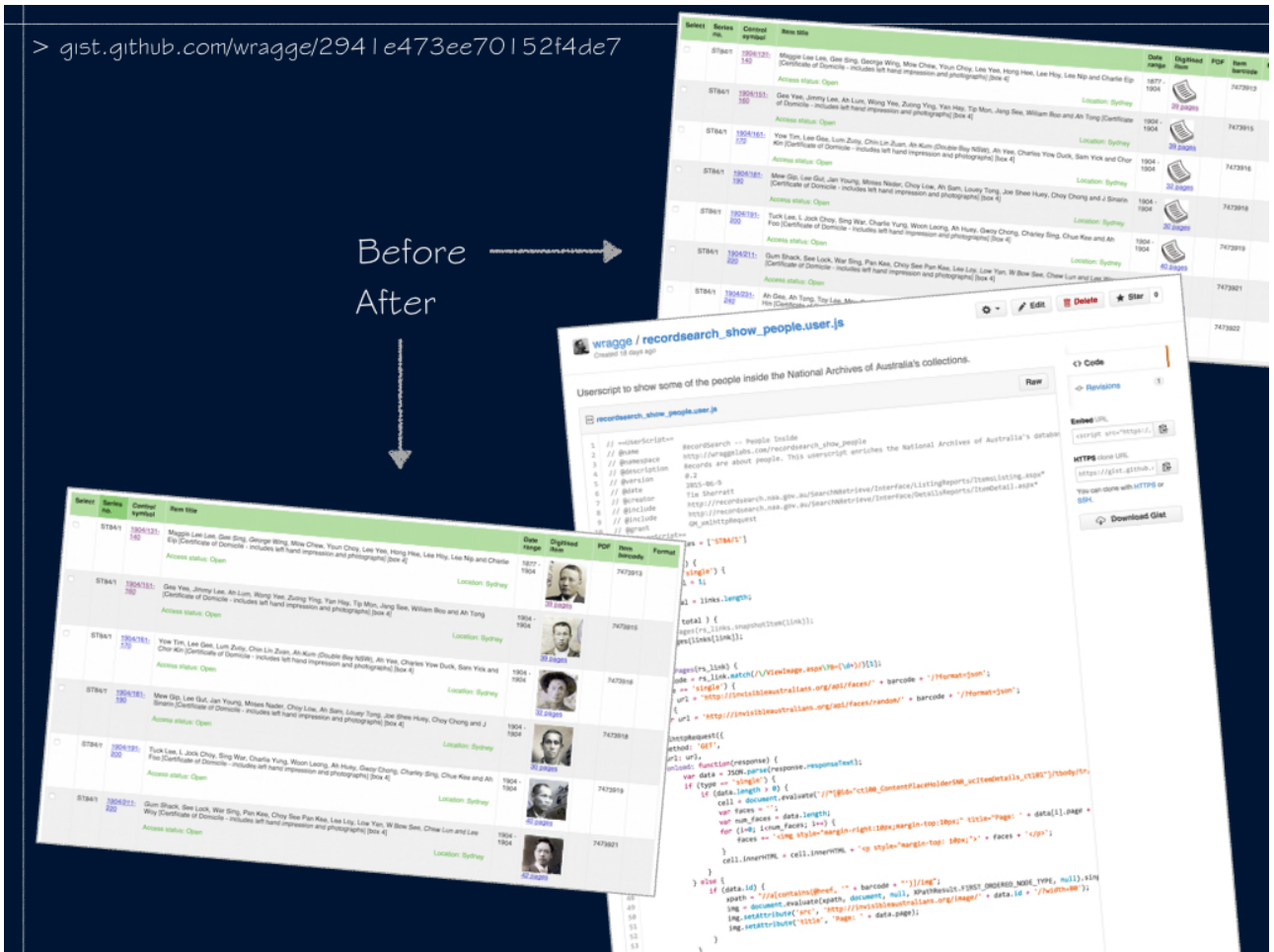
Instead of pulling faces out of documents, they put them back in. Instead of seeing lists of search results, you see the people inside. Like the faces on our wall the people bubble up though the interfaces. They are present.

Despite the apparent enthusiasm for the visit of the British Association in 1914, there was in Australia a lingering suspicion of scientists as 'impractical dreamers', as mere theorists unwilling to address the nation's most urgent needs. In debates over the application of knowledge to Australian development, the scientist commonly battled it out against the supposed virtues of the 'practical man'.

I imagine my grandfather, Henry Sherratt, was a practical man. He was a brass moulder with a workshop in Brunswick, a suburb of Melbourne. His father and brother, both brass workers, lived and laboured nearby. I have a small brass ashtray that Henry made.

Henry Sherratt
BRASS MOULDER
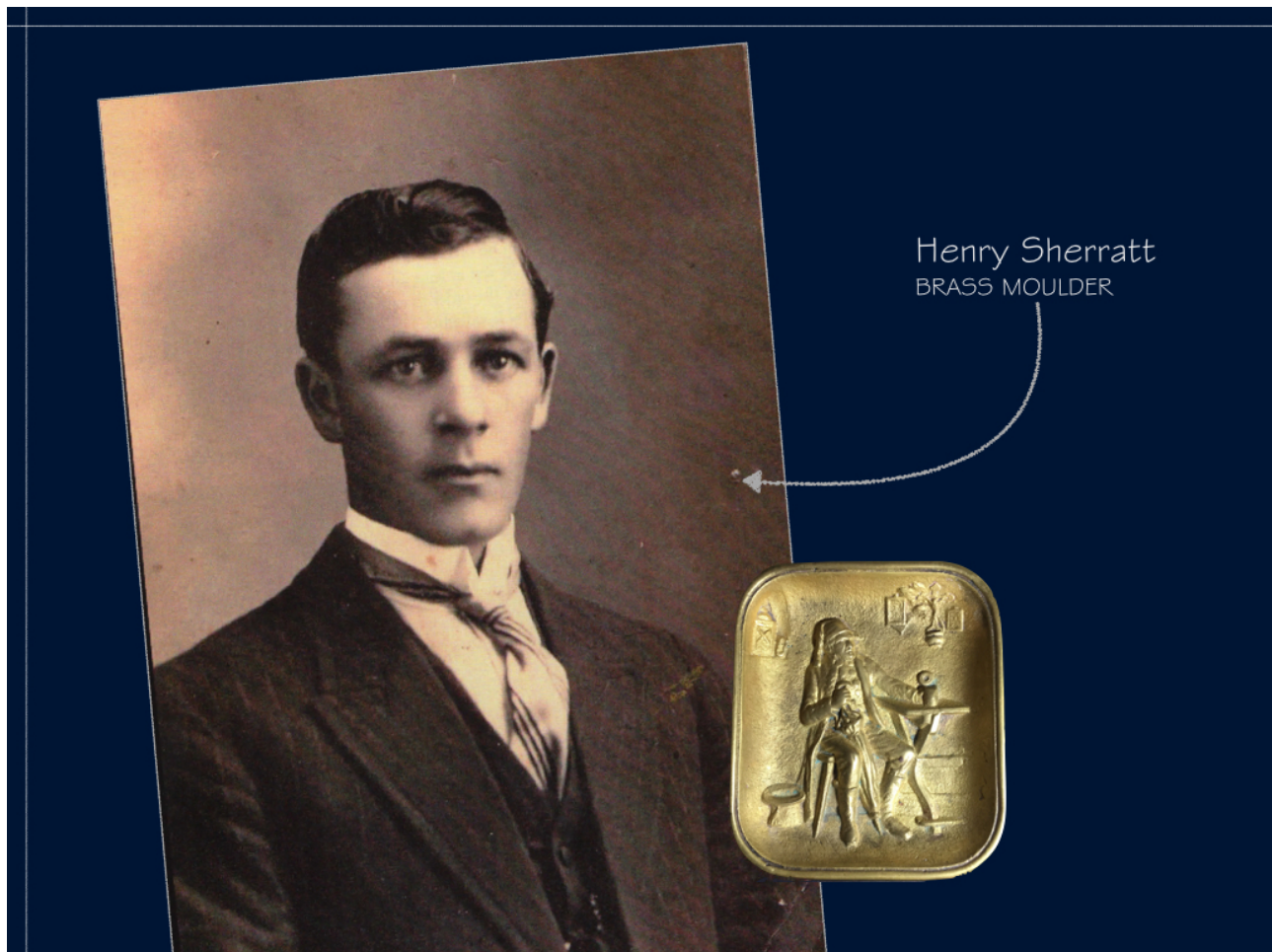
Henry's name isn't amongst those who joined the British Association in Melbourne, though perhaps he attended one of the 'Public or Citizens Lectures' which, until the 1911 meeting, had been known as 'Lectures for the Operative Classes'. Neither is Henry's name amongst those who journeyed to the battlefields of Europe and the Middle East. He is not one of those honoured by the Anzac Centenary for having 'served our country and worn our nation's uniform'. And yet he went to war.

Henry Sherratt was amongst a select group of tradesmen who travelled to Britain in 1916 to help meet the desperate need for skilled workers in munitions factories. He worked as a foreman brass moulder in Scotland, before an accident in which he 'strained his heart' carrying a ladle of molten iron. He never really recovered and as his income suffered, so did his family at home. Henry finally returned in 1919 and was offered £50 compensation with no admission of liability. He died in 1955. I never knew him.

Who do we remember and why?

> Labour and Industrial Branch Report, 1914-15
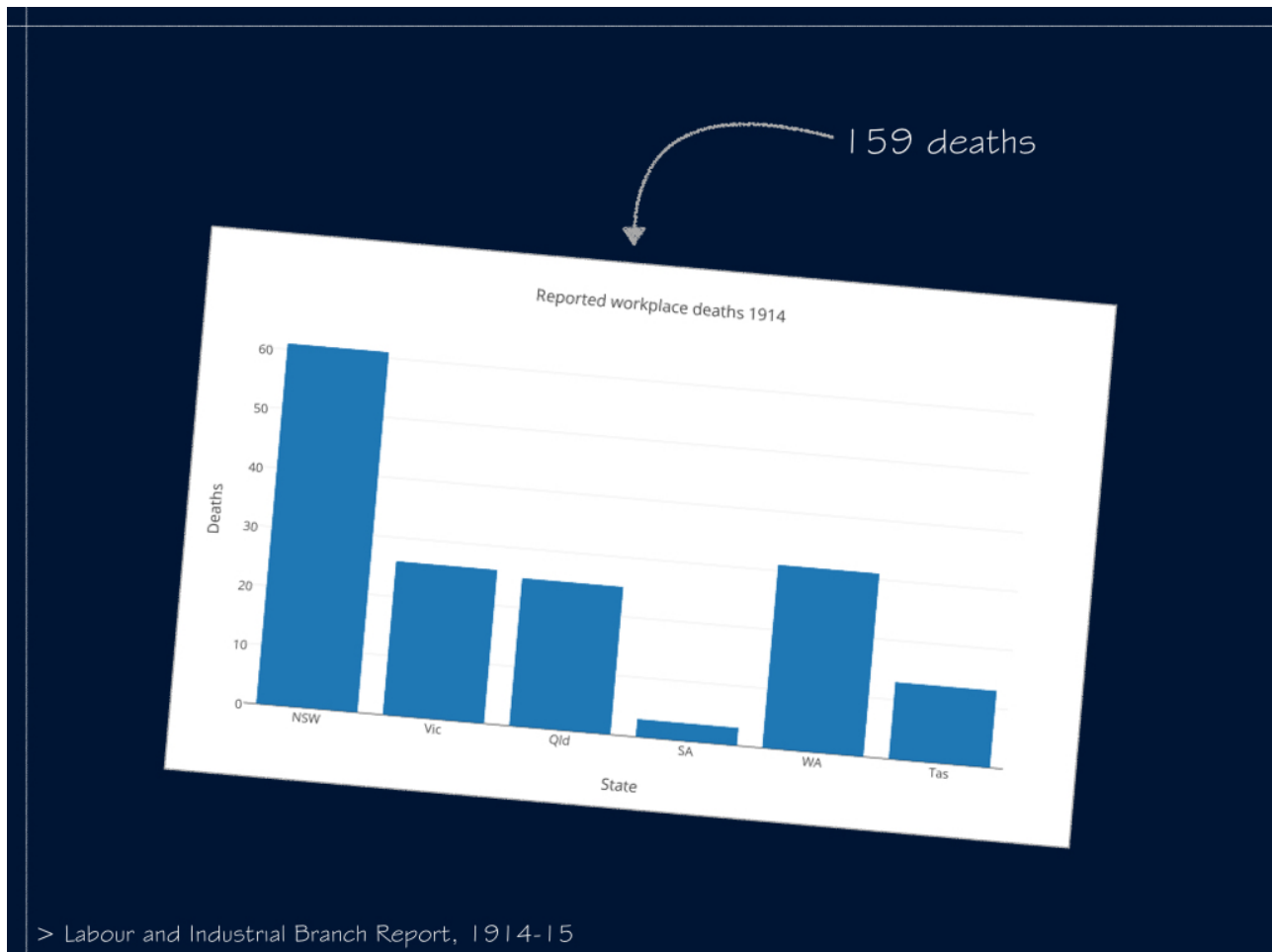
The Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics reported that 159 people died as a result of industrial accidents in 1914. But these were only the accidents that had been reported under the provisions of state legislation. There must have been more. Where is their memorial? What about mothers who died in childbirth, or victims of domestic violence? How do we remember them?

At a recent workshop organised by Europeana, Lucy Delap described how her project to historicise child sex abuse in 20th century Britain was making use of digitised newspapers. As well as documenting individual cases, the researchers hope to create 'a map of change over time in the reporting of child sexual abuse' that would enable them to test theories about how different organisations respond to abuse.

In the week that the British Association met in Melbourne, newspapers tell us that David Phillips, an engine driver, was fatally injured at Flinders Street Station. I'm thinking about how we might use Trove's digitised newspapers to collect the stories of those who went off to work, but never returned. What might we learn about economic history, unionism, industrial legislation – about the value we place on an individual life?

As I've often said in regard to our work on the White Australia records – it just seems too important not to try.

As I was writing this talk I was also keeping an eye on my harvesting scripts which were chugging away, pulling down more images from the National Archives. For the original wall of faces I downloaded about 12,000 images from one series, I've now got more than 150,000 from about 10 series. You'll see more of that soon.

As I was writing this talk I stopped at various times to play around with code – to look at the gender balance at the British Association, to investigate 'closed' files in the National Archives, to create a public Face API for anyone to use. The code and apps are all out there now for you to play with or improve.

Writing, making, thinking, playing, sharing. It all happens together. I'm a maker like my grandfather. While he poured metal I cut code. I do it because I want to find ways to connect with people like him, ordinary people living their lives. Those connections will always be fleeting and fragile, lacking the certainty of commemoration, but hopefully bearing some of the meaning and complexity of memory.

It's a task that needs to be both playful and political. It's not about making things, but trying to make a difference.

Permalink

http://discontents.com.au/unremembering-the-forgotten/

DOI

http://dx.doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.1536150

Internet Archive

https://web.archive.org/web/20150905062506/http://discontents.com.au/unremembering-the-forgotten

GitHub

https://github.com/wragge/discontents-blog/blob/master/_posts/2015-07-03-unremembering-the-forgotten.md

Download PDF

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1. Shurlee Swain, Leonie Sheedy, and Cate O'Neill, 'Responding to "Forgotten Australians": historians and the legacy of out-of-home "care"', *Journal of Australian Studies*, vol. 36, no. 1, 1 March 2012, pp. 17–28. <doi:10.1080/14443058.2011.646283> [↩]
2. Cassie Findlay, 'People, records and power: what archives can learn from WikiLeaks', *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 41, no. 1, 2013, pp. 7–22. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01576895.2013.779926> [↩]
3. Geoffrey C. Bowker and Susan Leigh Star, *Sorting Things Out: Classification and Its Consequences*, MIT Press, 2000. [↩]
4. Wendy M Duff and Verne Harris, 'Stories and names: Archival description as narrating records and constructing meanings', *Archival Science*, vol. 2, 2002, pp. 263–85. [↩]
5. Jenny Edkins, *Face Politics*, Routledge, 2015. [↩]

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ASKING BETTER QUESTIONS: HISTORY, TROVE AND THE RISKS THAT COUNT

NEXT POST

COMING SOON — OUR FIRST LOD-BOOK!

CATEGORIES

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS   DIGITAL HUMANITIES

TAGS

ACCESS   FACES   INVISIBLEAUSTRALIANS   MEMORY

WRITTEN BY:

TIM SHERRATT

I'm a historian and hacker who researches the possibilities and politics of digital cultural collections.

58 COMMENTS

TIM SHERRATT (author)

July 3, 2015

Reply

Here's a collection of the tweetage...

503 Service Unavailable

No server is available to handle this request.

@MANDREWWAUGH
July 3, 2015
Reply

What a fantastic reason to cut code #dh2015 http://t.co/6mVT6EEizi

MIA RIDGE (@MIA_OUT)
July 3, 2015
Reply

A #musetech must read RT @wragge: As promised, my #dh2015 keynote, 'Unremembering the forgotten', is now on my blog: http://t.co/oAMn6ljz0f

QUICK LINKS – TALKINGTOTHECAN
July 3, 2015
Reply

[…] Tim Sherratt at the Digital Humanities conference in Sydney talking about too many things to list in how we create the historical record. A must read: Unremembering the forgotten (@wragge) […]

@PROFGILLIAN
July 3, 2015
Reply

fantastic lecture on digital archives, memory and power. and images: Unremembering the forgotten http://t.co/RicrBlt8Sc via @wragge

@JoHNCOBURN
July 3, 2015
Reply

"I want to unsettle what it means to remember – to go beyond the listing of names and cataloguing of files". http://t.co/Pjz245Hzi2 @wragge

ED SUMMERS (@EDSU)
July 3, 2015
Reply

good stuff from @wragge about unpacking (& mobilizing) access and memory (thx for the @congressedits shoutout) http://t.co/ityfFOMn0f

@MANDAHILL
July 3, 2015
Reply

"We are connected through time, not with history, not with the past, but with people." @wragge's #dh2015 keynote: http://t.co/1xnDZ3rNit

SHAWN GRAHAM (@ELECTRICARCHAEO)
July 4, 2015
Reply

this is the best damn thing. 'Unremembering the Forgotten' http://t.co/iVYeJh6BjA

@MICHAEL_LAPIDES
July 4, 2015
Reply

"Unremembering the Forgotten" http://t.co/DK40Jy3qx2 "Access is a process of control rather than liberation" @wragge @mkgold

@JENTERYSAYERS
July 4, 2015
Reply

Now I want to teach @wragge's "Unremembering" (http://t.co/LldPj2rnGT) alongside @whkchun's "Enduring Ephemeral" (http://t.co/Kv5EyPaVKT).

@ELLENFORSYTH
July 4, 2015
Reply

Unremembering the forgotten, Keynote presented at DH2015, 3 July 2015 http://t.co/idMkegScB0 by @wragge – great to catch up with this

@MTCHL
July 4, 2015
Reply

@hralperta you will enjoy the many other works of @wragge – here's his keynote from #dh2015 yesterday http://t.co/wMSXbK5WHW

@JMDDRAKE
July 4, 2015
Reply

So nice I gotta tweet it twice: Unremembering the forgotten http://t.co/0dH0XC5h7X via @wragge

@JENHOWARD
July 4, 2015
Reply

What am I doing on this long-weekend Friday night? Reading @wragge's #DH2015 keynote, "Unremembering the Forgotten." http://t.co/kD2gaQNX4b

@FITCH_KATE
July 4, 2015
Reply

Unremembering the forgotten: @wragge's #dh2015 keynote re accessing archives is worth a read #OzHist http://t.co/BkS5RLL8lI

@JOSIEFRASER
July 4, 2015
Reply

#DH2015 keynote: "Data is not just a product of government, it is implicated in the workings of power" http://t.co/fSW7k1PKDQ

CASSIE FINDLAY (@CASSPF)
July 4, 2015
Reply

ICYMI this is @wragge's keynote from #DH2015 http://t.co/jvLBt2cEfm Ping @equivalentideas #archives

@JDUB
July 5, 2015
Reply

Unremembering the forgotten – amazing keynote on the politics of history and data, by @wragge: http://t.co/FS6ZnavsVa #opendata

DH2015, SYDNEY | STEVEN E. JONES

July 6, 2015

Reply

[…] outward-facing, politically and socially engaged. (Tim Sheratt's keynote lecture, "Unremembering the Forgotten," stood out in particular.) Geoffrey Rockwell's conference notes, which summarize […]

@BEET_KEEPER

July 6, 2015

Reply

Thoughtful and energetic discussion of records and an 'ever forming' memory; hacking; #archives and more from @wragge http://t.co/JYFS4B97lO

YVONNE PERKINS (@PERKINSY)

July 6, 2015

Reply

…And every #OzHist historian should read @wragge #dh2015 keynote and follow @wragge work http://t.co/vVpqPUKYPC https://t.co/oTRXma2FdX

TREVOR OWENS (@TJOWENS)

July 6, 2015

Reply

"Search provides not an open door, but a grumpy 'Yes, what?'" @wragge in "Unremembering the forgotten" http://t.co/FFtDQ7PifB

@AP_AP_AP_

July 7, 2015

Reply

Those at #OzHA2015 – check out this fab #DH2015 keynote on memory and access to archival sources by @wragge: http://t.co/xGgwy17O7t

@TZANISH

July 8, 2015

Reply

Access is political. I am reading Tim Sherratt's "Unremembering the Forgotten" again:http://t.co/S5HpRi9OON

CURATION AS CREATION: MEANING-MAKING WITH DH CURATION TOOLS | LIBRARIES AND BEYOND

July 8, 2015
Reply

[…] Unremembering the Forgotten by Tim Sherratt Blurb: In this very recent blog post from a keynote presented at DH2015, the author discusses the issues of access and the contradictions inherent in the concept of 'open data' when it comes to government archives and the curation of cultural collections. Using his DH tools as examples of disruption to a single historical narrative, Sherratt emphasizes DH's role in the "opening of data" through hacking, tinkering and creating. […]

@BAIBI

July 8, 2015
Reply

.@perkinsy ends by telling us to read @wragge's Unremembering the Forgotten http://t.co/09ul5Go12V #OzHA2015

HUGH RUNDLE (@HUGHRUNDLE)

July 8, 2015
Reply

Another powerful reminder of what history is, from @wragge – Unremembering the forgotten – http://t.co/mTnQheRyZL

CAMERON BLEVINS (@HISTORYING)

July 9, 2015
Reply

I recommend jointly reading @TimHitchcock and @wragge's posts on history from below: https://t.co/0ROkQW1yjC, http://t.co/F9Ma9OXfQg

@MAMALIGABLUES

July 9, 2015

Reply

Great text on the frailty and power of memory.It's from Australia, but it could be from anywhere.http://t.co/wdTllhQuhg
#memory #archive

@LIBBYMILLER

July 9, 2015

Reply

"every API is an argument" http://t.co/iyhEO91p2R

@A_E_LANG

July 9, 2015

Reply

"Data is not just a product of government, it is implicated in the workings of power": @wragge's #DH2015 keynote http://t.co/hR7r2lhPqZ

@ELMILAM

July 10, 2015

Reply

Thoughtful essay by Tim Sherratt (@wragge) on the politics of "Unremembering the forgotten" for #DH2015 http://t.co/aFU7488ylM #histSTM

TIM SHERRATT (@WRAGGE)

July 10, 2015

Reply

@jwyg @openDemocracy @OKFN Thanks — important stuff! Relates to my recent talk: http://t.co/yL9f8ZGYPM

DH2015 – DH DOWN UNDER | KB RESEARCH

July 13, 2015

Reply

[…] by the subject (such as the White Australia policy), but the Storify is pretty powerful. And the keynote itself even […]

THE NEEDLE IN THE HAYSTACK | STUMBLING THROUGH THE FUTURE
July 15, 2015
Reply

[…] recall one tweep saying last week, Hitchcock's post is one of a bookend pair to Tim Sherratt's keynote address which impressed attendees at the Global Digital Humanities Con… and those following the proceedings via social media around the […]

@DANMCQUILLAN
July 15, 2015
Reply

Unremembering the forgotten http://t.co/rNxi3endPq excellent #digitalhumanities piece by @wragge (inc. anti-colonial facial recognition)

@AVOINTIEDE
July 17, 2015
Reply

Sadepäivän ratoksi voi vaikka lukea tämän hienon @wragge:n keynote-puheen #avointiede #historia http://t.co/UnLjJyhXHv

@HENRIETTEROUED
July 17, 2015
Reply

"Access will never be open. Every CSV is an expression of power, every API is an argument" http://t.co/tjBDevh4z1

MICHAEL J. KRAMER (@KRAMERMJ)
July 18, 2015
Reply

"There is no open access to the past. …I want to unsettle what it means to remember." @wragge http://t.co/9RKxTplwle #twitterstorians

@FLEMING77

July 20, 2015

Reply

@Dr_Black read piece code to collect data on Australians
http://t.co/WHAJWux14q
remerbering the unforgotten

AUSTRALIAN HISTORIAN CAPTIVATES INTERNATIONAL AUDIENCE | STUMBLING THROUGH THE PAST

July 20, 2015

Reply

[...] to summarise this keynote, but there is no need. In an act of generosity so typical of him, Sherratt has made his entire speech and slides freely available via his blog. Make sure you read [...]

@KRISTYKOKEGEI

July 20, 2015

Reply

so disappointed I wasn't there to hear @wragge's keynote. Well worth the read
http://t.co/69HbUyTCYb https://t.co/YEm49SJAk6

INTERNATIONAL RESEARCHERS VALUE WORK OF AUSTRALIAN LIBRARIES AND ARCHIVES | STUMBLING THROUGH THE PAST

July 21, 2015

Reply

[...] Sherratt, 'Unremembering the Forgotten', [...]

A RESPONSE AND REFLECTIONS ABOUT DH | LIBRARIES AND BEYOND

July 22, 2015

Reply

[...] that sometimes a picture is worth a thousand words, and I don't think anyone would accuse of the developers of not possessing enough contextual knowledge or not knowing how to ask questions – humanist [...]

MDOR (@MDOR_TWEETS)

July 23, 2015

Reply

On "modes of access that are confusing, challenging, inspiring, uncomfortable and sometimes creepy": @wragge #dh2015 http://t.co/LRYg0CbnNO

#GUERRILLADH | @ELOTROALEX

July 30, 2015

Reply

[…] and most brilliant keynotes, delivered on opposite sides of the planet, Miriam Posner and Tim Sherratt echo this sentiment and extend it to interfaces in general. We are not only called to follow […]

@NCADRANEL

August 1, 2015

Reply

"Unremembering the Forgotten" @wragge's wonderful #DH2015 keynote on politics of history and data. http://t.co/vdWyQrSPrH #MobilizedArchives

@KRISTINEKOTECKI

August 4, 2015

Reply

On cultural memory and DH http://t.co/FfSc9VmPgc #dhpoco #TransformDH http://t.co/cxWvwQTWaK

TOP RETWEETS FROM 2015 AUSTRALIAN HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE | STUMBLING THROUGH THE PAST

August 12, 2015

Reply

[…] RT @ap_ap_ap_: Those at #OzHA2015 – check out this fab #DH2015 keynote on memory and access to archival sources by @wragge: http://t.co/xGgwy17o7t […]

@OPENDATAAHA

September 5, 2015

Reply

Another absolutely cracking post by @wragge 'Unremembering the forgotten'
http://t.co/AoP8YYyawa mixing history, digital & #opendata #DH2015

@WCALEB
September 11, 2015
Reply

@RachelSchnepper @amandaeherbert @Every3Minutes @alexismadrigal
@samplereality And @wragge DH keynote http://t.co/KiV1mLXwqE

@SCOTT_BOT
October 6, 2015
Reply

Also assign readings of, e.g., @nowviskie (http://t.co/YxlC7GoleK), @wragge
(http://t.co/FRgwtTOog6), & @zeynep (https://t.co/hJULX36Ggw)

@DATAKID23
November 26, 2015
Reply

Morph.io get's a shout out in @wragge's #DH2015 talk https://t.co/KDLdUwGbXj
@henaredegan @DigitalFabulous

@TRC4IDENTICA
December 29, 2015
Reply

"Every CSV is an expression of power, every API is an argument."
https://t.co/MMgKPqfPbn

TIM SHERRATT (@WRAGGE)
July 4, 2016
Reply

Hmm — it was a year ago yesterday that I gave a keynote at the international digital humanities conference: https://t.co/zcZ1yX6tXz #abigday

SPECULATIVE COLLECTIONS « BETHANY NOWVISKIE
October 28, 2016
Reply

[…] admire projects by my Australian colleagues Tim Sherratt (University of Canberra), who has long worked against the grain of existing digital cultural heritage platforms, and Mitchell Whitelaw (ANU), who both creates and […]

HILLEL ARNOLD (@HELROND)
December 19, 2016
Reply

Unremembering the forgotten https://t.co/9dy4fW21R0 via @instapaper

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@WRAGGE ON TWITTER

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