

Time travel for beginners ... or How technology can be used for historical research

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Time Travel for Beginners ...or How Technology Can be used For Historical Research

Dr Alison Hramiak



What did she say?

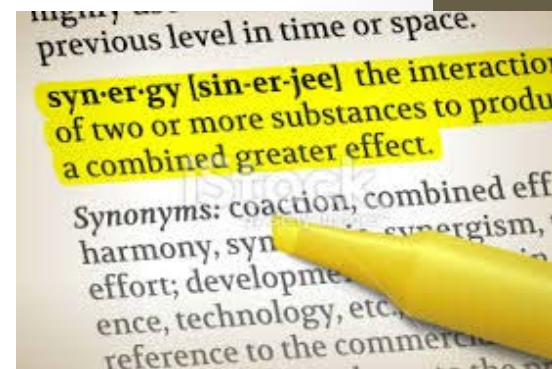


- MA in History by Research: Exploring the Life and Work of Ada Lovelace
- Technology versus 'ye olde ways' when undertaking educational historical research: A comparison of methods for learners in Higher Education
- Pros and Cons
- Synergy



Overview and Main Message

- Technology offers new ways of connecting researchers both to each other and to their sources
- It can grant access to the past without having to leave your room
- Often a double-edged sword.
- The trick is to use it synergistically – a very useful tool when used to enhance not replace



Technology as a Boon



- Look at what you can access without leaving the house...
- Vindication of the Rights of Women ([Wollstonecraft, 1796](http://www.bl.uk/collection-items/mary-wollstonecraft-a-vindication-of-the-rights-of-woman))
<http://www.bl.uk/collection-items/mary-wollstonecraft-a-vindication-of-the-rights-of-woman>
- The Analytical Engine in the British Library at
http://access.bl.uk/item/viewer/ark:/81055/vdc_100037412530.0x000001#ark:/81055/vdc_100037412557.0x000002
- Ada Lovelace correspondence with De Morgan (Lovelace, 1842-1842) <http://www.claymath.org/content/correspondence-de-morgan-0>
- A recollection about Charles Babbage from the American Southern Review of 1867 https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=-0YCL9TAXMAC&dq=ada+babbage&lr=&as_drrb_is=b&as_minm_is=0&as_miny_is=1840&as_maxm_is=0&as_maxy_is=1870&as_brr=0&pg=PA423&redir_esc=y&hl=en#v=onepage&q=ada%20babbage&f=false

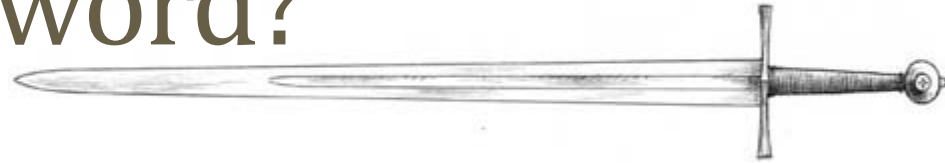


And it's more than just accessing things online

- Emailing/skyping people with similar interests who can help, Sydney Padua, Dr Chris Hollins (Oxford University), librarians and curators, and so on (not forgetting David Longman!)
- Using a digital camera to photograph the sources for reference later
- Real time access to librarians and their knowledge
- It is very very convenient
- **So where's the down side?**



A double edged sword?



- It can negate the need to actively locate and read primary sources in their physical form for this type of research, replacing this with digital views and digital images that can be cut and pasted
- Convenient? Yes. But it can remove some of the learning steps that come from physically engaging with primary sources, such as making notes and discussing them with the experienced librarians who curate them, as well more subtle issues such as the physical quality of the media in which the sources are contained that hold clues to the past.
- You also lose the (invaluable/unquantifiable) sense of engaging with the past



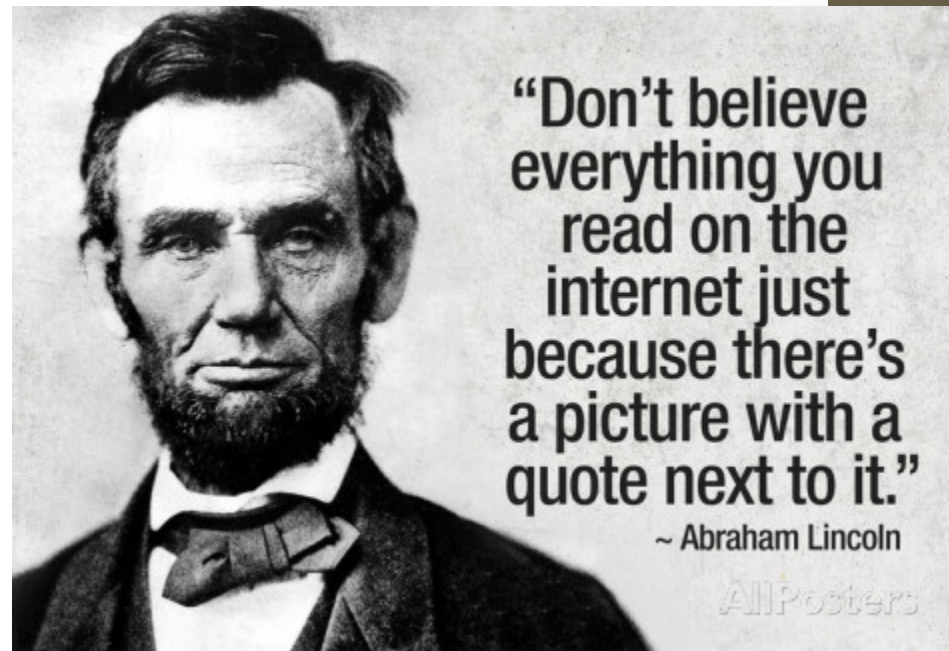
And another thing...

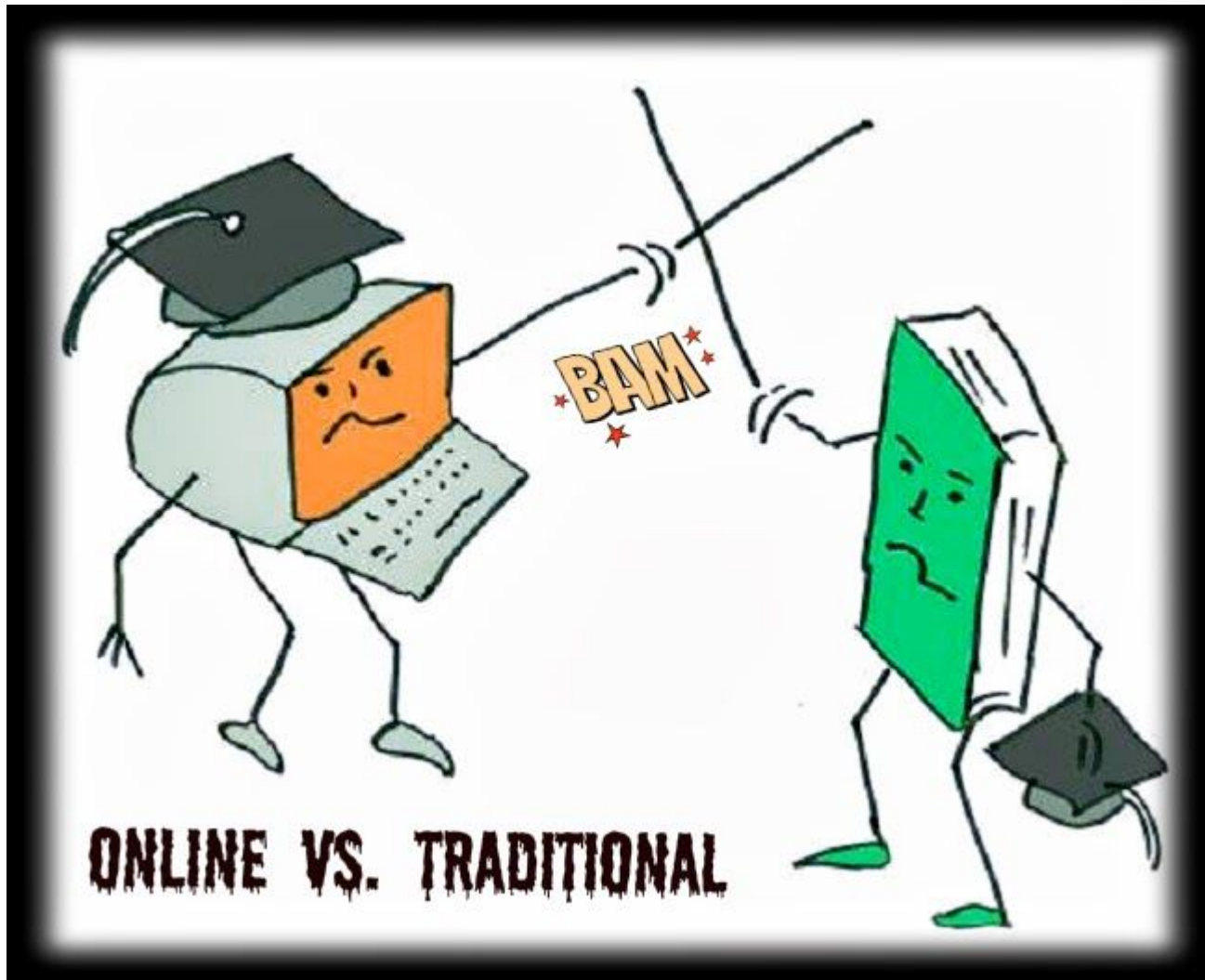
- The curators know the collections...
- I (naively) ordered numerous boxes from the Bodleian collection to review when I was there in person.
- When I got there only 2 of them had been brought out for me, because, as I discovered to my dismay (and excitement), each box contained 10 folders, and each folder contained many many letters – I only made this mistake once...
- I was also the naïve researcher who thought that the Analytical Engine was a diagram with notes – it is actually part of a large book, and the notes are more like essays - it is not small!



Digitisation and Digital Images

- Great – as long as you don't mind that the digitiser may have misinterpreted or misread the original writing
- Biographers use specific part of the original documents (letters in my case) to make their point - they can (do) omit information as it suits them





Face to Face versus Technology then...

- Use them both to their best advantages
- Take digital pictures while engaging with the original documents
- Make friends face to face and online – librarians like coffee!
- Make sure your learners understand that immediate is not always best and that does not diminish the research because it takes longer to do.
- **Some things are worth waiting for...**

