DIGITAL FORUM

Digital Spaces – Introduction

The contributions to this Digital Forum derive from a panel at the 2012 annual conference of the British Association for Victorians Studies (BAVS). The panel was a direct response to an apparent lack of interest in digital culture at the previous BAVS conference, held in Birmingham in 2011. I was one of the organizers of the Birmingham conference and had resisted suggestions that we organize a special panel on digital humanities and nineteenth-century studies. I was conscious that such sessions were often a fixture at conferences in the field but represented an awkward compromise, acknowledging digital technologies, tools and methods as something to discuss but, at the same, as distinct from the discipline(s) proper. Digital resources and methods underpinned much of the work presented at the Birmingham conference but, without a dedicated space for their discussion, they became invisible and outside of the formal scholarly discourse. When discussing this with the then President of BAVS, Regenia Gagnier, she suggested putting together a panel for the following year’s conference, held in Sheffield. The panel that produced these papers was the result.

Each of the papers in this digital forum engages with the digital and space. Ian Gregory and David Cooper’s piece on Geographical Information Systems (GIS) and nineteenth-century studies provides an account of the ways in which data can be combined with information about location to reveal things about the past. Their essay describes some of the work that has been done to date and sets out some of the methodological and interpretive challenges that such approaches entail. Lisa Hager’s contribution provides an account of JVC Online, the successful blog that accompanies this journal. The blog was initially conceived as a supplement to the journal but, because of the affordances of the blog and the textual genres that it enables, quickly became a lively publication in its own right. In the final piece, Adrian Wisnicki reflects on the Livingstone Spectral Imaging Project, a project that allowed Livingstone’s field diary to be visualized against the copy of the Standard upon which it had been written. The project is fully documented on the site; here, Wisnicki considers where such work fits into an academic career.

Whether discussing the spaces of scholarly publishing or historical spaces and their representation in the present, these papers make visible the many ways that digital scholarship underpins scholarly practices in nineteenth-century studies. The digital humanities provides a disciplinary space for the discussion of digital technologies and methods (and much else besides); however, given the way that digitization has transformed both the materials with which scholars in nineteenth-century studies work as well as the way in which that work is carried out, it remains
important that we also find a complementary space for these discussions within our own disciplines.

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