

Tech/equipment report
Richard Mortimer
for
NRRC Meeting 24/April/2023

Conference equipment

- Webcam has now been replaced under warranty. Tested working fine and will hopefully be providing Zoom video for the April meeting.

Website/Email backup

- The data contained on the Mythic Beasts server is now being backed up on a daily basis with full, differential and incremental backup schedule. Monthly full backups are retained for 12 months, weekly differentials are kept for 6 weeks and daily incremental are kept for 10 days.

LDS/Competition Data

- Discussing with Dan regarding replacing two of our timing tablets. These are now approaching 8 year old, are showing some signs of aging as such pre-emptive replacement seems appropriate.
- I am looking for regular access to an Apple laptop/Mac Mini to make live results available on Apple devices for the sculling series and beyond.

History and Archives

- The British Newspaper Archive subscription has expired. Would like approval to renew for a further year to allow Ken Hastie to continue to research items to add to <https://history.nerowing.com/> cost circa £90 for a year.
I suggest we renew this it has proven beneficial in the past.
- James Elder of the Thames Rowing Club archivist is looking for rowing clubs who may be interested in a joint subscription to a hosted instance of Access to Memory (AtoM) an open source archive system that could be used to help to organise our archives and properly index items. This would be a share of a £3460/year subscription that would depend on the number of rowing clubs/competitions/organisations that share the subscription. A copy of his note is on the following pages.
At present this is at initial discussion stages and no firm proposals are being made.
Interested in views/comments from NRRC members.

Dear All

Thankyou for responding to my somewhat enigmatic tweet! You have all said (or someone has told me) that in one way or another you look after the historic records of at least one British rowing club or event.

I'm in the same situation - since the death of Tim Wilson in 2018, I have looked after the records of Thames RC (www.thamesrcarchive.co.uk). I am also an archivist professionally - in 2012 I changed career, completing an MA in Archives and Records Management at UCL and since 2014 I have been an archivist at BT, where we hold records of the UK's telecommunications networks back to the 1840s (including some late 19th century records about special telegraph office arrangements for Henley and the Boat Race!)

The reason I reached out on twitter is that an idea recently occurred to me for a way to get multiple clubs and events to share the costs and technical overheads of caring for our collective heritage, and making it available online, and I wanted to see if it had any mileage.

Back in 2018, I wanted to begin cataloguing and describing the TRC physical and digital records (minute books, circulars, journals, photographs etc) according to sound archival principles. I also wanted to make my work available online as early as possible, so that TRC members and others could see what I was up to and what the club holds.

I was already aware of Access to Memory (AtoM) an open source archive system originally developed by the International Council on Archives and now maintained by Artefactual, a Canadian not for profit foundation - <https://www.accesstomemory.org/en/>.

AtoM does five things:

- It allows the organising and describing of historic records (whether physical or digital) in a systematic way, capturing things like their ownership, copyright, condition, sensitivity, physical location etc.
- It allows the creation of sophisticated and structured records for people, places, events and subjects that are related to the records, so that links can be made between them,
- It allows digital records or scans of physical records (e.g. scans of photos or PDFs of documents) to be linked to the catalogue of records.
- It allows all of this to be made available to people on the web
- It allows links to be made to a sister project, Archivematica, which is an open source digital repository for the long term preservation of digital records: <https://www.archivematica.org/en/>

AtoM is built to be consistent with the principles that professional archivists work to when cataloguing records, as set out in three international standards (ISAD(G), ISAAR(CPF) and ISDF).

It is built on the open source operating system GNU Linux, and other open source software (MySQL, ElasticSearch, PHP, NGINX etc).

It's all available for free (in which case you have to get hold of a server then install and maintain it yourself) or Artefactual and a couple of affiliates offer a hosted service where you pay and they look after all the technical backend.

In my case, back in 2018 I had a couple of days of holiday in which I rented a Virtual Private Server, bought a web domain name, followed the installation instructions and managed to get a site up and running. That was the Thames Rowing Club Archive site, which I have been expanding ever since then:

www.thamesrcarchive.co.uk

I do recommend that if you haven't seen it before, you have a browse to see what's possible in terms of hosting content, organising it and making links between records and the people, places and events associated with them.

You might also be interested in a few non-rowing archive websites also built in AtoM:

University of Westminster: <https://westminster-atom.arkivum.net/>

Borthwick Institute (University of York): <https://borthcat.york.ac.uk/>

New York Road Runners <https://archives.nyrr.org/>

World Bank <https://www.worldbank.org/en/archive/access-the-catalog>

Canadian Women's Movements Portal <https://mouvementfemmes-womensmovement.uottawa.ca/>

I am not an especially technical person and it was a challenge to get the site up and keep it up. I have achieved it, with the help of various books and online resources. However, I am perpetually anxious about backups, upgrades and security threats - and to be honest it takes up time that I'd rather spend on cataloguing and repackaging the Thames collection). I am overdue an upgrade to my server, to Linux and to AtoM itself and to be honest I'm not relishing it.

With that in mind, I contacted Artefactual to get an idea of the cost of a hosted instance of AtoM. The current price for a single UK user is £1680 per year. To be honest, I think that would be a hard sell to the TRC committee which, understandably, is primarily focused on rowing not archives - as I'm sure are your committees.

However, Artefactual also reminded me that they offer a 'multi-repository' option - that's to say a hosted site which can house the archive catalogues of multiple different institutions. Each institution looks after its own catalogue but cross-catalogue searching is also possible, and it all lives on the one website.

It struck me that this might actually be quite a good model for a UK online rowing archives resource. We have a lot of shared events (regattas and heads), some shared members, and inevitably the photos in our collections will also show crews from other clubs.

The hosting cost of a 'Standard+' multi-repository site is £3460 per year.

That's quite a lot but it struck me that if, say, an initial ten institutions were to be interested it already starts to become a manageable amount and, in theory, the site could have far more participants than that. In the latter case more storage would probably be required which would cost extra, but again it would all be very affordable.

Here are some more details about what's included with a hosted AtoM plan:

<https://www.artefactual.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/AtoM-hosting-plans-final-2021.pdf>

So, that in essence is my idea! Several clubs and events band together to share the cost of a hosted 'British rowing archive' AtoM site.

My feeling is that this could end up being a great resource. Having a home for scanned content to live permanently online with relatively low maintenance would be a real boon, and perhaps provide an impetus for club and event committees to spend or fundraise on getting old photo albums and minute books scanned. It's certainly been my experience that making things visible online is a good way of garnering committee support for spending on these kind of projects.

Having one large rowing archive site might also make it viable to come to agreements with professional photographers (or the estates of photographers no longer with us) to legally display images that are still in copyright.

I'd be able to share what I've learned in five years of running the Thames site, and the taxonomy of rowing events that I've built up over that time (<https://thamesrcarchive.co.uk/index.php/subjects>) could provide an initial kernel for others to add more.

What do people think? I'm interested to know!

I should say finally that I'm sending this by bcc in the first instance as I didn't want to be presumptuous in sharing everyone's email addresses, but if this does develop into a correspondence and there are no objections I will include addresses in subsequent messages.

Best regards

James Elder
Thames Rowing Club Archive