

Vital Data for the future

It was a great pleasure for Lead CI Martyn Jolly to visit the Historic Environment Image Resource (HEIR) in the Institute of Archaeology at the University of Oxford's School of Archaeology. The HEIR team (pronounced as in 'heir to the throne'), Senior Research Fellow Dr Sally Crawford, Institute Archivist Dr Katharina Umschneider, and researcher Dr Janice Kinory, took Martyn through their amazing collection of lantern slides and their on-line [HEIR database](#).



Dr Sally Crawford, Dr Janice Kinory and Dr Katharina Umschneider examine some of the thousands upon thousands of magic lantern slides at the Institute of Archaeology.

HEIR is the repository for no-longer-needed magic lantern slides, glass plate negatives, and 35mm slides from across Oxford, donated by places such as the Ashmolean Museum, the Bodleian Library, the Radcliffe Science Library, the Classical Art Research Centre and the Imperial Forestry Institute, amongst many others.

Since the slides arrive at the Institute in their original storage cabinets and boxes, Sally, Katharina and Janice are a bit unsure of exactly how many of these vital visual documents they have saved from the dumpsters of Oxford. They think perhaps between fifty and seventy thousand, and they have already put about twenty thousand online (including about two hundred from Australia). A browse through their database will reward you with many beautiful images, some even hand coloured, which can be downloaded at a generous size.

These images were taken from the 1880s unto well into the twentieth century, and HEIR is dedicated to

their importance because they document sites, all of which have now been altered or destroyed by either time or war. For instance, computer programs can now virtually 'rebuild' lost buildings and sites from the photogrammetric data of aggregated image sets. But, as HEIR well knows, archaeologists and scientists photographed the bits that casual photographers miss — the foundation stones for instance, or the hidden structures behind the front facade. So, this visual data the lies latent in the banks of wooden drawers will be of immense importance to the future.



Cloud Observed during a S Burster [Southerly Buster] Sydney 1894. Attributed to Henry Ambrose Hunt, Geography Collection, Radcliffe Science Library, University of Oxford.

Martyn was able to discuss with Sally, Katharina and Janice the similarity and differences of their database to our own Heritage in the Limelight database, now at over five thousand images. He also discussed the existence and importance of similar intact scientific lantern slide collections in Australia, such as the collection at the [Australian Museum discussed in a previous 'Spotlight on the Archive'](#), or the [Macleay Museum, also discussed in a previous 'Spotlight on the Archive'](#). Future research may reveal how these collections networked together in a global exchange knowledge, and they may be able to network again.



Natural regeneration of *Pinus insignis* 6 years old following on clear felling of plantation 34 years old and piling and burning debris. Wirrabara forest, South Australia, R. S. Troup, Plant Science Collections, Radcliffe Science Library, University of Oxford.



Curved trestle bridge on Lansdowne Forest logging railway, New South Wales, Australia, R. S. Troup, Plant Science Collections, Radcliffe Science Library, University of Oxford.