

Report on UK Collaborator Meetings for LEAP, 24 November-2 December 2014

Adrian S. Wisnicki

Overview

I used the occasion of the American Thanksgiving holiday to travel to the UK (Glasgow, Edinburgh, and London) to meet with our British collaborators in order to provide an update on our work for LEAP during the last year. This report briefly summarizes some of the key aspects of that visit. I've also put up a handful of photos from the visit on our blog:

<http://livingstoneonline.wordpress.com/2014/12/05/the-leap-collaborative-spirit/>

Individuals met

Aquiles Alencar-Brayner (British Library)
Karen Carruthers (David Livingstone Centre)
James Cummings (University of Oxford)
Lawrence Dritsas (University of Edinburgh)
Jamie Dunn (University of Glasgow)
India Fullarton (University of Glasgow)
Johanna Green (University of Glasgow)
Debbie Harrison (Cass Business School)
Jo Ichimura (SOAS, University of London)
Chris Lawrence (University College London)
Justin Livingstone (University of Glasgow)
Matt Mahon (University College London)
Anne Martin (David Livingstone Centre)
David McClay (National Library of Scotland)
Sharon Messenger (Royal College of General Practitioners)
Allison Metcalfe (National Library of Scotland)
Allison Ritchie (David Livingstone Centre)
Kate Simpson (Edinburgh Napier University)
Peter Slater (University of Glasgow)
Neil Wilson (Great-Great-Grandson of David Livingstone)

Project review

I gave a series of presentations to our UK colleagues on LEAP progress to date by using a representative selection of our project documents. The documentation covered all aspects of the project, including program management, data and metadata development, digitization, permissions, transcriptions, site development, and development of critical materials. The goal was to review these developments, but also to solicit feedback, which I systematically collected and which will help guide the development of LEAP going forward.

TEI/XSLT development

In London, I spent the greater part of a day meeting with James Cummings (with a special thanks to Melissa Terras, UCL, who loaned us her office). The meeting gave us the opportunity to review the final coding issues related to James's conversion of our legacy TEI P4 and P5 transcription data to the LEAP standard. James and I also took significant steps towards developing the XSLT that will be used to generate transcriptions and metadata on the new Livingstone Online website.

Digitization

At the University of Glasgow, I had the opportunity to meet with Jamie Dunn and India Fullarton to resolve a few remaining issues related to the digitization of the David Livingstone Centre manuscripts. The meeting was particularly useful as it allowed us to address document-specific questions that had proved difficult to review and/or tackle at a distance. We are now just a handful of files from closing out the digitization aspect of the project. In some detail, Jamie and India also walked me through the Photo Unit's workflow for digitizing the Livingstone manuscripts.

Project developments

Staying at Chris Lawrence's lovely house in London created the opportunity to ransack the Livingstone Online archives (2005-2010). In doing so, I was able to identify a handful of key items that had been presumed lost including, most importantly, a CD with images of all the Livingstone manuscripts held by the Royal Museum for Central Africa, Belgium. At SOAS, Joanne Ichimura, who has been a big supporter of our project but whom I'd never met previously, walked me through her experience in staging a bicentenary Livingstone exhibition, and we considered how lessons learned there might be applied to the development of the new Livingstone Online. Finally, with Anne Martin at the DLC, I had the immense honor of finally meeting Neil Wilson, the great-great-grandson of David Livingstone, who has been immensely supportive in granting us the manuscript permissions needed at every stage of our project.

Dissemination

I gave the first of a series four lectures on our work titled, appropriately enough, "Introducing the Livingstone Project," at the University of Glasgow, where I was recently appointed an Honorary Research Fellow. With David McClay, Alison Metcalfe, and Kate Simpson, I discussed the launch of the new Livingstone Online next spring and the possibility of developing a series of academic events at the NLS around the launch as well as subsequent project milestones. In London, Debbie Harrison and I began to develop some of the strategies by which the new Livingstone Online will be introduced to a general public audience. With Aquiles Alencar-Brayner, I also explored the possibility of organizing one of more lectures to mark key LEAP milestones at the British Library.

Outreach

Kate Simpson, Alison Ritchie, Anne Martin, and I reviewed to-date progress on the outreach program and planned for testing our outreach worksheets at the David Livingstone Centre in

January. Kate also updated us on our exciting potential collaboration with Education Scotland, which would result in our outreach programme being promoted across Scotland.

Additional benefits

Although I was officially in the UK for LEAP work, I also reviewed (wherever relevant) the progress that we have made on our funded project to create a multispectral critical edition of Livingstone's 1870 Field Diary. Everyone was impressed by the processed images that Roger Easton and Keith Knox have created for that project. Finally, I also met with Justin Livingstone and his team to discuss the critical edition of the Missionary Travels manuscript that he is developing for eventual inclusion in Livingstone Online.

Outcomes

Meeting with our UK collaborators, some of whom I hadn't seen in a year or more, was an immense pleasure. Although our project team has developed sophisticated strategies for long distance communication, the visit demonstrated to me the immense value of meeting face-to-face on a periodic basis.

This is a key point to keep in mind going forward. In the future, I believe, it will serve us well to have more than one project representative going over on each occasion (and we need to start luring some of our UK colleagues over here as well!). In terms of the project work, we were able to clear up in short spans of time issues that had proved difficult, if not impossible, to resolve by email, Skype, and other means.

Finally, I must say that I ultimately came away with an overwhelming sense of goodwill being directed towards our project. We have accomplished much over the last year, not without challenges, but the visit served to remind me (and, I hope, will do so for you as well) that none of us is working in a vacuum on this. Indeed, there are individuals on the other side of the world (whatever your perspective) that are highly invested in our research. This, I think, truly underscore the value of shared our work and is, ultimately, something in which we can all take pride.