

Case Study: Digital Museums – Empowering Volunteers in Digital Projects

Title:

City Cemetery Records Project



Description:

In 2016, the Tower Museum' Archive team called on members of the public to help preserve and record the valuable burial registers of the City Cemetery by contributing to an exciting new database holding the historic burial records.

Since the project began in May 2016, over 50 volunteers have helped to transcribe and verify over 36,000 entries from the Cemetery's Burial Registers. Following dedicated training, the volunteers were able to complete the work from their own homes. These records which date from 1953 to 1926, are now available online.

The records detail not only the names of those buried in the cemetery, but also their age, their place of birth and who their parents were, amongst other valuable genealogical information. Most importantly for those trying to trace their ancestry, they also reveal the location of the grave within the large cemetery site.

With support from multiple partners, the group were provided with training in excel and adobe reading. They were each given 'record packs', consisting of guidelines and digitised records. In turn, they provided their unique local knowledge of surnames and street names, turning seemingly illegible 150 year-old handwriting into a powerful genealogical tool. An exchange of information was gifted across generations among the volunteers; a unique merging of local knowledge and IT expertise.

Outcome:

The volunteers have spent thousands of hours of their own time in silent dedication to making highly valuable records available to the public. Having waited patiently for the records to be made valuable online, they then approached the Tower Museum as a group, expressing their interest in transcribing the rest of the records from 1927 to 1961 as part of a second phase, which is now 50% complete and will result in another 30,000 records being made available online in November 2019. This research is essential for those researching

family history but more importantly, it ensures that the memory of those interred is no longer at risk and not forgotten.