3rd November 2011, 'Technical Meeting', ShaLT Notes

Peter Sillitoe

- Meeting began about 1.30 pm

- Present:

  - 5 members of ShaLT team: Gabriel Egan (GE); Andrew Gurr (AG); Geoffrey Marsh (GM);Peter Sillitoe (PS); Maurice Hindle (MH)
  - Kate Dorney (KD) and Malcolm Sutherland (MS) (both at V&A)
  - Chris Going of GeoInformation Historic Ltd (CG)
  - Paul Sculthorpe of Rock Kitchen Harris (Paul S)

- Intros.

- Intro to project from GE.

- 5 slides from PS as starting point for discussion.

- Interesting point from MS on the 'second wave of web technology – mobile internet etc. Expressed concern over the dangers of 'commodification of experience' – ie the need to have different apps/sites for different platforms (Android, IOS 5 etc); 'HTML5=one message, 6 formats'.

- GE identified key area of meeting – relation of App to the website.

- Scale of view for visitors: It was agreed that the App/s will be for I-Phone and Android 'phones, not I-Pad and tablets. That said, they will be able to run the smartphone Apps (with less visual quality).

- CG discussed his company and the forthcoming London Mapping Festival ('History of Mapping' (London) to be published online via the festival project). PS to investigate the website in future weeks.

- Discussion of voice / audio for the App.

- CG brought up important of accuracy – the core of the idea of the App.

- This brought in a discussion of London and the walking App. GM stressed importance of the App as a tool for tourists to physically walk/visit the sites. This was agreed by all present. Idea of early modern London as a small(er), walkable, urban space.

- Key discussion of the technical specifics of the App: Assisted GPS and triangulation via mobile networks and wi-fi; to stream live or have a 'complete' downloadable App, or a mixture of the two?

- Paul S. pointed out that as ShaLT content is fairly concrete and unchanging there may be no need to be 'live' online, and that an offline complete App would suffice with pre-loaded data and maps. This was described as 'in your pocket'.

- KD made the useful point that this 'ready' App would be useful for the AHRC, in that the App might then be used offline in another country, thus disseminating the project's info. further. PS to contact 'Visit London': any data for the no of tourists who use 3G data in the UK, despite the high costs? i.e. how many use their live 'roaming' facility? But, MS: smartphones are able to use navigational technology without wi-fi/3G.

- General consensus emerging: App not to be a 'catch all' in terms of the sites. Rather, the website will give more information to for those tourists wishing to engage with all of the sites in far more detail. Paul S described what this as a more 'hybrid' system.

  - CG: Interesting idea of 5 (?) key sites for the App, including the Rose, the Globe, The Theatre and others.

  - This brought discussion back to the emphasis of GM and the experience of walking – physicality of experience. Many sites may not be favoured by tourists (for instance, Whitechapel).

  - Idea of the App containing a virtual postcard for tourists to send comments / express interest / 'prove' that the walk was accomplished (useful for AHRC monitoring of statistics and take-up). There might be incentives to entice the walker to use the App, such as completing 'treasure trail' questions that lead to a code and unlock part of the website. Or, discount vouchers to be used at local shop/cafes etc?

  - MS stressed need to avoid the concept of the 'human guide' who safely guides the walker from start to end. Thus, AG pointed out the key need of an accurate and reliable map.

  - CG pointed out that his company have mapped London and can provide visual reconstructions of early modern London. GE pointed out that the site may use theatre history archive of theatre illustrations. C. Walter Hodges' drawings will have copyright issues, though. GM suggested having these recopied to help with rights clearance.

  - Idea of Visit London and meal discounts for tourists.

- GM brought discussion back to idea of 5 key sites.

- MS: manufacture narrative around 5 sites. MH stressed the need for a user experience, with visuality and narrative centre to the concept. Visitors to be enabled to experience the 'magic of place', one of the project's core ideas. Importance of getting across that the 'theatreland' aspect of London in the period: up to late 1590s Theatre, Curtain, Bull, Bell, Cross Keys, Rose, Newington Butts all near a line of roadway going from Shoreditch through City over London Bridge towards Elephant.

- AG: Quality, rather than quantity (certainly for the App at least). This led to agreement in terms of the overreaching aims of the App: it is not needed to 'do everything' but to be an enjoyable but accurate snapshot of the project which the other deliverables can take further. So, it is likely that the App would feature a great deal of content on, say, the Rose, with less information on the Inns, for example? Presumably it is therefore particularly important that the experience of the App at consumer level is both informative but aesthetically pleasing?

- Paul S. introduced idea of a 'slider' to alter the level of detail based on the interest levels of the individual user.

- GM: Idea of featuring Shakespeare's London residence / lodging at Silver Street.

- MS: Audio – a need for multilingual aspects?

- KEY POINT: Paul S introduced idea of a database as the core format, which the App and site draw from. Material to be written / used once, then reused. API system?

- PS to author website material; training at Loughborough University to be undertaken regardless of the nature of the site / database.

- GE summarised the Paul S. initiative as follows (favourable response from all present):

  Database = images and text (100,000K?) = feeds web site live / updates

> = feeds static App once, with occasional versions to be uploaded (periodic updates)

This fits well with Paul S's idea of a 'curated' App based on the site (key sites and ideas only on the App).

- CG discussed map-stretching technology and indicated that there could be useful material produced for £ X / 'thousands' (presumably rather than 'tens of thousands'?)

GE - concluding remarks:

V&A (MS / GM) possibly interested in technical aspects (hosting).

CG to look into mapping costs / estimates.

Paul S. interested in working on the project, including the database and App.

General agreement on the use of his 'mixed' system via database for the site and the App.