Digital Nineteenth-Century Serials for the Twenty-First Century: A Conversation

Laurel Brake and James Mussell

James Mussell: My name is James Mussell, I'm an Associate Professor in Victorian Literature at the University of Leeds.

Laurel Brake: And I'm Laurel Brake, and I'm an Emerita Professor of Print Culture at Birkbeck.

James Mussell: We've been invited to talk today a little bit about digitization and digital periodicals, and what we'd like to do is think a little bit about the digitization of historical periodicals, periodicals that are in the archive and have been put online in various resources; but also to think about the way we use digital periodicals today, to support our scholarship and to reach audiences, both online and offline.

Laurel Brake: Yes, and to think about the history, but also the future of *19*. We were both very involved in the beginnings of the journey and it was — at the time it would seem to be — quite an innovative thing to do and there weren't many good examples, so we are so delighted to see what's happened in the last decade.

Genealogies of digitizing periodicals

James Mussell: So, we'll start talking about digitizing historical periodicals, then we'll move on to *19* a bit further on. Maybe we can start by thinking about some of the challenges that are involved in digitizing periodicals in the archive. What are your thoughts about periodicals in the archive?

Laurel Brake: Well, we need to think about how mixed the archive is itself, how imperfect bound issues of single copies of nineteenth-century journals are. So the task of then remediating them and putting them in digital form is two-fold: it's obviously changing from one medium to another, but it's also the problem of how complete/incomplete the archive is, and I don't mean only missing journals — missing issues — but I mean the fact that most of the advertising has been stripped out and also, for example, sometimes the prelims. So recently, I saw a periodical that had failed and we couldn't find any evidence that it was going to do that, and yet when I looked in the press they all talked about the obituary of the periodical that was included in it, and the reason we didn't see that was because in the archive there was no prelim. So this is lost, unless there is another copy in the archive somewhere else, so one of the things about the historic document is that digitizing historic periodicals means that only one copy is digitized and made available and that copy is bound to be a form of that historic object, so we always need to work between print and digital and we need to, if possible, work between different copies of prints — they are not all, quote, 'the same'.

James Mussell: That's one of the things that happens when we — in the digital world — privilege the archive, or we think about it in a rarefied, pure form. Our experience of working in the archive is that it's messy and complicated and often the most valuable information is the most ephemeral, and that only exists maybe on one run and not another run. I guess to me one of the real challenges of digitizing these things — there's two — one is you have to know what it is you are digitizing, which means you have to ask questions of this material in the archive and have an idea of what that object is: what is the periodical? what is the issue? what is the volume? what is the run? And then what do you include and what don't you include? what aspects of it are worth recording and what gets left behind? And that's really difficult intellectual work.

Laurel Brake: It is.

Nineteenth-Century Serials Edition (ncse): learning by digitizing

James Mussell: We did a project together a few years ago called the Nineteenth-Century Series Edition and I think one of the things we learned while doing that project was how little we actually knew about these periodicals and these newspapers — the raw material of our careers, right?[1] And we learned a lot just through the process of having to ask these fundamental questions: what is this stuff? what needs to be saved? what can get left out? how do you remediate?

Laurel Brake: Of course, almost all digital copies are taken from volume forms of journals, not issues, and I was looking at a magazine called *Universal Review* the other day and I saw it in Senate House Library and it had no covers. And then I saw it in the British Library and the covers were bright red and it made the whole difference. Now, they didn't have all the covers; they had two bound in at the end of the volume. Now, does the digital project copy the Senate House copy, if that's what the access is, and never know about the British Library copy? And, of course, there is no bibliographical record of which copies have covers, or which have or don't have prelims. I don't think we'll ever find the missing prelims for that periodical that failed, for example, never; I just don't believe it. And we know nothing bibliographically about where single issues lie in the archive. So, ideally, the digital edition of the historic archive would include multiple copies; it would not only seek to fill in, quote, 'the issue that's missing', but it would try to recover illustrations and so on. It's not only about filling in individual issues; it's a matter of trying to see what the penumbra of any single issue is — as opposed to commercial copies of historic periodicals. If it really was an ideal copy, then we would have a large amount of multiple manifestations.

James Mussell: It's difficult, isn't it? That's the second important question, I think, that digitization raises: we don't have a sense of what the archive is as a whole. We have — in terms of finding print copies of periodicals — various finding resources: we have *Waterloo Directory*, which is our biggest list of periodicals; we have the Wellesley Index, which is probably our most detailed account of who contributed to periodicals; we have the British Union Finding List, which is an old document now, which lists extant runs of periodicals, but we don't have a good idea of what's in all of the different archives that are out there. In many ways it's easy to think of the archive as

[1] All hyperlinks in this interview were accessed on 11 November 2015.

the pure source, but it's also a bit of a mystery: we don't know quite what's in it, what's waiting to be found.

Laurel Brake: There is something called the *Newspaper Press Directories*, which are annual volumes that list whatever appears in the media in any single year, and, of course, they do provide us with a snapshot annually for a hundred, for seventy-five years, for the period. But, it's true, we don't know what's in the archive, and the only portion of the archive that is digitized in nineteenth-century historic periodicals is less than 1 per cent. Say there are fifty thousand copies, individual titles, separate titles, which is what John North from *Waterloo* has calculated. We have less than 1 per cent of that: 400 titles, something like that, have been digitized. So there is this huge proportion of the historic archive that is not available: it's only geographically, specifically available where it's held.

James Mussell: And that print archive itself is incomplete. As you are saying, all these issues exist in multiple formats; they've been captured at particular points in their lives; they've been transformed when they've been made part of a broader collection. So all the time we are talking about periodical studies, we are talking about studying things that no longer exist or we can only posit; and people, when they write articles, talk about a particular issue of a journal. But what people usually mean is the issue of that journal that's bound in one particular volume, somewhere in a very specific archive, but a lot of that bibliographical information is cut off in a kind of shorthand. We pretend we are dealing with the press as it was, but we are dealing with the press as it is now, today.

Laurel Brake: The remains.

James Mussell: The remains.

Laurel Brake: The remains, I think that's right.

The incomplete print archive

James Mussell: Maybe you could say a bit about some of the physical constraints that make digitizing these things difficult. So, the archive is big, first of all, isn't it? It's huge.

Laurel Brake: Unfathomable. We don't know what the archive is.

James Mussell: So there is a lot out there to be digitized and people who come with these projects have to decide which specific titles to include and which to leave out. The other issue, I guess, is that the runs are often fragmented, there are portions of runs in various places and we found in ncse that we had to piece together some of our periodicals: the *Tomahawk*, I think, was one that we sourced and we used hard copy for some issues and then microfilm copies of other issues, because we couldn't find the hard copy of that microfilm which was filmed from, so there is a kind of reconstruction that goes on too.

Laurel Brake: And the digital format is the latest reconstruction, right? You know, it's comparable to the volumes that the libraries and the publishers published.

James Mussell: I'm very keen to move away from the idea that the archive is a fixed and bounded entity, a pure source of historical research. It's an interpretation in its own right and then every time people return to the archive and do things in it, every return leads to new ideas and new ways of conceiving the past. And some of these digitizations — it seems like it's a new step or remediation of archival materials, but archives themselves remediate their content.

Laurel Brake: All the time. And we see that, for example, in the way in which nineteenth-century periodicals often escape from the date stamp by producing pamphlets; or they produce illustrations that they then reproduce for independent circulation; or they decide that they will take a particular section and reproduce it as a guide to the Great Exhibition. So there are really very canny and persistent strategies of the publishers to recirculate the material at the time; and in the next six months they produce volumes, and then in a year they produce volumes, and they want those volumes to go into libraries. And when they produce them in the volumes, they strip the adverts out, so the idea that periodicals are ephemeral is not altogether reliable, I would say. The publishers have a lot of strategies about how to reproduce them, not least in volume library editions.

James Mussell: Yes, so there is a difference. Even periodicals have different relationships with time and being memorialized in that way. And different parts of the same periodical also have a different relationship with being memorialized, so the contents — the insides — are designed to be kept, maybe, whereas the wrapper is designed to be stripped away. And then different types of contents are packaged to circulate in different networks, circulate over different portions of space, some parts of periodicals are designed to be reprinted and

copied elsewhere. The content in the object isn't bounded by that object, it's in many cases designed to go…

Laurel Brake: Fall apart, yes. I mean the centre holds, because regularly there is an issue — monthly or weekly or daily — of the journal, right? — which readers come to rely on in terms of a rhythm. But the fact is it splits apart in all kinds of ways and it's perpetuated and it disappears.

James Mussell: And even then rhythm is complicated, so we know the multiple editions of one of our titles, the *Northern Star*. We found that there were at least three, sometimes four, editions every day, but in the British Library holdings we found eight copies that were kept and we never could quite work out whether those were eight separate editions or four separate editions plus a few spare copies. Nonetheless, the library decided to keep them all, so we thought we should digitize them all, when we came to it, to remember that act of previous remembering by the library, which obviously thought it was important to keep these eight distinct copies. We had conversations at the time where people said, 'Well, why do you want eight copies of the same thing if only one or two articles are slightly different?'. But to us those were the telling differences.

Laurel Brake: The publication came from Leeds, but it was circulated in London and Ireland, if you recall, and then there was a Welsh edition. So it was very interesting, and, however imperfect and uneven that archive is, we want to show the raggedness of it, of what survives, for sure. I agree with you that the date stamp is an irregularity or, it seems to me, not any longer a fantasy we should be entertaining. I think that's right, I think that's right. The question about digitization, however, does not meet the problem we had of geographically specific located archives, because we now have this small number of digitized texts, which of course is almost more than we can bear, and we have printed so many to have them accessible in that way, except they are only partially accessible. They are behind paywalls and that's a real problem, and some of these are so successfully behind expensive paywalls that they are hardly seen at all.

Behind paywalls

James Mussell: In many ways the paywall — the conditions of access of periodicals — works against one of the great benefits of digitization.

Laurel Brake: Absolutely.

James Mussell: Sets this content free from the structure of the archives, that the periodicals are contained within.

Laurel Brake: That is such a sadness, really. I think that's right. And the other interesting difference in distribution between print periodicals and digitized ones is that mostly these periodicals on digital platforms are only available through institutional access. In other words, these publishers do not sell to individuals and that's quite an issue, it seems to me. Some of them are beginning to sell to individuals, but it's quite rare still, and the publishers refuse to deal with the individual reader.

James Mussell: So you were saying that paywalls are a barrier to access, but also one of the ways in which these resources can finance themselves, because, as we found out from ncse, digitization doesn't come cheap. There is a cost, and the cost is both for the work of the actual digitization, the scanning, it's all the processing, and also the editorial work as well is quite labour-intensive. I wonder if we could spend a minute thinking about the different types of digital resources that are available to us and how they differ. You mentioned that some were sold to libraries on a subscription model and then some were sold for individual users to use. So the *British Newspaper Archive* is a good example of the latter, which works on sole subscribers, but do you think those funding mechanisms affect the way they present periodicals?

Laurel Brake: Yes, I think they do. It's a very interesting history about how these two models originated. It seems to me that *British Newspaper Archives* came from the British Library, and very soon after the British Library began to digitize its own collections, they clearly decided they couldn't do it themselves. And so they began to work with corporate groups, didn't they? And the people who produced the *British Newspaper Archive* are now the British Library's chosen party, and their interest publishing-wise is ancestry. Clearly their choice of what to digitize has to do with the wealth of information possible for people who are interested in families and genealogy, and so a lot of titles that scholars might wish to produce through digitization do not fall within their preferred remit. Whereas, some of the other publishers — the bigger publishers like Gale and Cengage — they have extant microfilm and nineteenth-century stuff was out of

copyright, and so they used extant microfilm. And, of course, those microfilms were filmed decades ago, so the choice of text wasn't anything to do with best practice; whereas I think for the *Times Digital Archive*, which is one of the first projects of digitization of historic periodicals, they were working from sheets, and they were trying to do the best possible at the time they did it.

James Mussell: It was interesting. There are different criteria for selection for what gets included and what doesn't get included and there have to be some criteria of selection, specially given what we say about the archive, the abundance of stuff there is yet to digitize and the way that academic fashions change as well. There were some no-brainers: if you are going to digitize a newspaper, *The Times* is a good one to start with, but when it comes to periodical press you could follow the Wellesley, maybe, and get those Wellesley titles involved. But, as we know, there are all sorts of assumptions about what are the most important titles in the period. It was interesting to think about how the intended users of these archives shaped what gets included in them, but also how they are presented within the archive. So, the *British Newspaper Archive* has quite a nice browsing mechanism: you can scroll through it; it presents individual issues as individual issues; and you can zoom in and out of the pages. Whereas the ProQuest and the Gale resources are a bit more database-like and so they resemble a library catalogue with a simple search and an advanced search. It asks a lot more of its users, actually, that kind of resource.

Laurel Brake: Oh yes, it does and it's very vexing about the way in which it presents individual issues. It does a hilarious thing: they organize the contents alphabetically. They don't reproduce the issue in the sense that you wouldn't see the first article first or the prelims first for that matter. You might see them twelve items down, depending on their alphabetical title place. So to reconstruct, if that's what you want to do — maybe you don't want to do that — but if you want to read an issue as a text, for example, it's difficult to do in some of the historically produced archives, like we had first in *British Periodicals*.

James Mussell: It is, isn't it? and I think that shows that perhaps we are in the minority in terms of what we want to do with these periodicals. I think what most users want is just to find articles about stuff: they are interested in a topic, they want to throw in some keywords, and then get articles that are relevant, that apply to those keywords. Whereas you and I are interested in the objects themselves that are

beneath this process. But, anyway, to square those two things it seems to me is to understand the process of digitization, to understand the stages that this material has gone through and all those choices that have been made about how to digitize it, how to structure it, who the people that have done that think are going to use it. You need to have that history — that bibliographical history — of the digital resource, to recover the absent object that it's been based upon.

Laurel Brake: And it seems to me that one of the things that we see with those alphabetical lists is the disconnect with the scholar. Because, of course, at that time when they first did *British Periodicals*, their target audience was us, it was academics, for sure, and if anybody ever asked us, we would have said to them, 'Don't do it that way, that doesn't make much sense.' But the other thing that's happened, the nineteenth-century press was one of the earliest available out-of-copyright materials, and so ten years ago these publishers were very interested in us, and they came to a lot of conferences, and so on. But, one of the things that's happened in the course of this, is that periodical studies or media history have come into their own, so there are more of us now.

James Mussell: There are.

Laurel Brake: There are more of us. However, although there are more of us, there are many more people who want items, individual items, and they are searching for results. One of the things the archives should do it seems to me — the digital archive — is to offer them the material in such a way that they are conscious of where it's coming from, what that means, what its position is in the paper. If necessary, if possible, a title page and a cover — it would be wonderful to have a cover — it would be wonderful to have them in paper, in colour. The digital archive, of course, was in black and white, and that will change.

James Mussell: But that's often due to microfilm…

Laurel Brake: It has to do with microfilm. So fresh filming is a real desideratum it seems to me, if it means that we can in some way make the digital object attractive, and so that it is a facsimile in some sense and that it trails its history, its visible history, and it should encourage people to look into the trail of iterations, of which the digital is one.

Archive versus edition model

James Mussell: We'll see a tension between two different models: the archive model which goes, we've got all this content, what we are going to do is turn it into a searchable database of articles about stuff; and then an edition model, which is trying to model a print object in a new medium, in a digital medium. I think the best resources could combine a bit of both, because there are times as a scholar that you do want articles about something and you need a way to recover them, and let's not forget that search is one of the big benefits of the digitization. And if you go to any conferences there are always endless discussions about the limits of OCR — Optical Character Recognition — but just having rough and ready textual transcripts which are searchable turns the press inside out and it opens it up in a way which we've never been able to experience before. And it's important, I think, not to take those steps for granted. I think there are other things you might do with that processable data, so the archive model is important, but I think you need that edition model as well, an opportunity to see the page as a whole or to recognize that these are issues, that these pages belong in a set and, yes, see things like layout and typography. I'm often really keen on saying that we've never been so able to see what the Victorian press has looked like as we are today and we can see more of it today probably than people could in the Victorian period, because we can conjure it up from just a few clicks on a keyboard, or on a mouse, or whatever. It's worth saying too that there are other ways of getting nineteenth-century periodicals in digital form and we've worked with publishers during the years who've been publishing these things and selling them back to us. But because the nineteenth-century press is out of copyright and there is so much of it in prestigious libraries around the world, it's been taken up as part of Google Books or as part of the *Internet Archive*.

Laurel Brake: Or *Making America*.

James Mussell: Or *Making America*. So there are a lot of other ways in which you can recover nineteenth-century prints in digital form outside of some of those structured archives. I think those other resources demand different skills of users too. I mean, if you've ever tried to use the *Internet Archive* and get hold of periodicals, it's difficult because it's designed for books, not periodicals. So if you search for a periodical you get numerous hits, because it's all different volumes and often the metadata is not good enough to tease out which

one you want. But nonetheless, it's there and it's a great resource that can be used.

Laurel Brake: It's kind of there, yes. One of the things we clearly need to do when we teach is provide the immense literacy skills of how students and researchers can access this. There is no single finding list of which nineteenth-century historic periodicals are digitized or where, so you have to search all over the place. You search maybe one of nine or ten possibilities and, you are right, if you get *Internet Archive* it may be there, but you may not be able to find it. And sometimes you are really lucky because someone has been interested in it at some library, so they do it and there it is, but in a very variable format; so you don't know what iteration you are looking at. Often there are a lot of problems, but I do think of course that this notion of digitizing the archive is never going to… there is no way that it's going to be any responsible portion of the archive; it's always going to be a *huge* majority of the nineteenth-century archive [that isn't digitized]. Libraries will run out of interest, energy, and so on; and of course the ones that are digitized are the ones that people work on. It's as though our students think there isn't anything else and very often we say, 'well you really need to go to the library.'

James Mussell: I think that's a really important point. There was a moment where, as you are saying, large chunks of the Victorian press were digitized as part of the resource, so ProQuest *British Periodicals*, Gale's *UK Nineteenth-Century Periodicals*, the Gale newspaper project, ProQuest *Historical Newspapers* and *British Newspaper Archive*, which is ongoing with the British Library and it seems like publishers are settling on individuals titles. So Gale have done a *Punch* edition, they've done *Daily Mail* historical archive, they did the *Illustrated London News* archive. But it seems like those broader sections of the press, those have been done now. But because there is digitization still going on in the *Internet Archive*, there still are additions to the digital things that are available. It's interesting that we still need to exert some bibliographical control over those and to try and make those lists and point people towards them. But it's also worth remembering just because something has been digitized, it doesn't mean as an object that it's finished: it's possible to revisit these things and do different things for them. So the *Internet Archive* is pretty available to users around the world and you can download PDFs at the moment, you can download plain text, it doesn't mean that this can't be tidied up and cleaned; this material can be worked on further. Even though the publishers might have done a product at one point and are maybe revising and

updating it — it doesn't mean that the rest of the community can't take on periodicals, tidy things up, initiate projects of their own.

Laurel Brake: If the publishers are willing to allow them. If it's only *Internet Archive*, that material is accessible, but there is a real problem with some of the publishers, who specifically outlaw anything being done from their fixed article.

James Mussell: You can understand that, because they've got a commercial interest in this stuff.

Laurel Brake: But you know what? It's the worst of print in my view. There it is, digital format is the worst of print. Well, it's fixed, right? It's fixed, and maybe we move on then from these historic newspapers. One of the great things, before we do that, is to say that one of the things that digitization of historic papers has provided us with is a consciousness of print culture. And when I took my title, when I got my professorship, I don't know, fifteen years ago, whenever it was, I used that phrase 'print culture' — it was so rare, but it was really because digitization was teaching us to look at print. Of course, people who dealt with early printed books looked at print, but they were bibliographers of a fairly arcane group and small and selected, but now we all look at print and the qualities of print.

James Mussell: Certainly. And what people call the new history of the book has been a resurgence of interest in material culture, in historical artefacts, and has largely been driven by digitization. We've only become aware of the properties of archival objects that are important when they are no longer there: touch, smell, all those things, all those kinds of aspects.

Laurel Brake: Thing theory is born after we have become enamoured of material culture.

The digital as a material object

James Mussell: It's important to remember that digital resources themselves are material objects and have their own properties. We are not moving from a material path into that intangible present, intangible future; these are objects in their own rights. What you said

about literacy earlier on, I think one of the crucial things we need to teach people is that the digital is also an object.

Laurel Brake: It's a material object, right.

James Mussell: Yes.

Laurel Brake: And when we did, really, all we have to do is try and remediate the printed page to the digital object and you realize what the rules of the codex are, the rules of print, and the rules of digitization. The resistance in those models is immense. It is a different medium, and one with very much its own rules, some of which have to be discovered.

James Mussell: I think that's right. Digital objects can be as truculent as material things can be.

Laurel Brake: For sure.

James Mussell: And we all know when digital objects misbehave — they are quite capable of doing that. I want to come back to a point when you said about how digitization has made print culture more visible; and one of the arguments that you've made for a long time is that periodicals and newspapers are some of the central documents of Victorian culture. Do you think people are more aware of periodicals now they've been digitized? Do you think there has been more awareness in Victorian studies?

Laurel Brake: I do. I think with the birth of Victorian studies as an area, an interdisciplinary group, came a birth of a very tiny Victorian periodicals group and they grew up simultaneously. But with that outburst, if you like, proliferation of digitized titles and the access through the medium, through the Internet, I think periodicals have really come into view of students and researchers and I think that's right. We went to a conference in Oxford on medical periodicals and it was interesting about the range of knowledgeability about the press. Some people were interested in medicine, but there were a lot of people there who were talking about the press. Maybe we should try and shift and talk about born digital.

Bibliographical awareness: the invisibility of the digital

James Mussell: Before we do that, I have one point: I think you are right that periodicals have become more visible, but maybe the periodical resources themselves still seem strangely invisible. So, in my experience, you can read an article, and I reach for an example from the press, and it will be to some maybe provincial newspaper and we know the reason for that is because it's been digitized and that's why it's there, but the resource is seldom mentioned. It's as if that person is still consulting print, and the MLA guidelines usefully ask you to name the medium in which your source has been found, but I think digital resources, which are so central to our scholarship are still somehow invisible and given the work that goes into making those resources by scholars, by publishers, I think citation is really, really important.

Laurel Brake: I think that's right. I've been editing a book recently on the *News of the World*, and if you look at the citations, you know that many of them are digital, partly because there are no page numbers and so when I say to them, 'Okay I want an access, I want an URL and an access', they haven't kept the record — it's so interesting how people obscure [digital mediations]. Digital resources are not quite as acceptable, even in the scholars' mind, even though they are so reliant on them. So not only did they not maybe acknowledge the provincial newspaper, but they don't tell us that they saw this, of course, online.

James Mussell: It's that broader bibliographical awareness: this content is coming from a particular newspaper, at a particular moment, and it's been digitized in another moment for another set of purposes. And I think if we are going to take born-digital scholarship seriously, a lot of these anxieties about digital scholarship come from preconception that digital is somehow insubstantial, it's ephemeral, it's not as real as print is. But really, it's our own scholarly practices that need to catch up and just eradicate some of those outmoded ways of thinking, given that the future of scholarship, both of Victorian periodicals, I think, and of scholarship more broadly is digital: it's our main mode of reading and writing now. So we have to take it seriously; we have to take what we've learned from print and apply it to the digital, without getting hung up on some of the assumptions that are born from being rooted in a print culture, a print culture which is now of the past or lives alongside a dominant digital culture.

The British Library: a 'museum of print'

Laurel Brake: I was with a colleague in the British Library who had been employed there and we were walking out and he turned around and he looked at the British Library and he said, 'In twenty-five years it will be the museum of print.' Wow. Now, I don't think that we will in the next two centuries eradicate print; we will have an archive of print and I think that it may be that scholars do continue — scholars, I mean very odd few people — do continue to use print resources, but I do agree with you that material that is not available digitally will fall off the radar and that is one of the great, it seems, areas of conscience of historians and of people in the academy who talk to students about past forms of discourse.

James Mussell: I think your librarian is wrong.

Laurel Brake: I do too. I think he is wrong too.

James Mussell: But the point is true, isn't it? That it's a digital culture in which print will play a part, but the way we understand print is in relationships with digital and will continue to be so, so maybe print does seem more real and solid because we have the digital, but we need to take what we've learned about print and apply those same scholarly skills to digital resources too.

Laurel Brake: I think it's partly wrong because the British Library has totally changed: they are alive to this danger; they were alive to the danger and they have changed and they are carving out, as we all are changing, as *19* is changing. We have to look at the present and what the main medium of communication is and think about what the future formats of our reading will be.

Born digital: *19*

James Mussell: One of the radical things about *19* when it started back in 2005 was that there was never a suggestion that it would be a print journal as well as a digital journal, but that was partly to do with resources. We knew full well that print was expensive and that digital seemed to be a cheaper option — there are things to say about that too — but it was a confident statement that the future of scholarship, of nineteenth-century scholarship, was digital and this was a new medium, in which it was possible to do different kinds of things. What were your memories of those early days?

Laurel Brake: Oh right, well, I was very excited. We didn't know how to scope this and what kind of markup skills we'd need to develop and how we were going to distribute this and bring it to people's attention. But we were very excited about the possibilities of making the journal look very appealing and it was a sumptuous, it was a sumptuous journal: all those colour pictures, colour images, the graphics of the title, and so it was an exciting screen you looked at, for sure.

James Mussell: I'm hoping that at the anniversary celebrations of *19* we might see some of those earlier issues and some screen shots over the decade, because that's quite a nice archive and how the history of the Web has changed over the last ten years too.

Laurel Brake: If we still have them.

James Mussell: I'm sure they are recoverable.

Laurel Brake: We tried to look at them today and I think that you've said that they have all been now brought into uniformity with Ubiquity.

James Mussell: It's one of the differences between… so a run of a print newspaper, if you look at older issues, you see how it used to look, whereas if you look at older issues of a digital journal, you'll see those old issues within the new current frame. There is a kind of presentism about serial publishing in digital form, which there isn't quite — or it's in relation maybe with the past — in a print volume.

Laurel Brake: So it's collapsed, really.

James Mussell: There are Web archiving tools and, of course, I think there is a case then for a journal to do its own archiving and to reflect — as periodicals used to do in the nineteenth century in the end-of-year prefaces and things like that — just reflect on where it is and what it stands for, how it's changing, and the reasons why; because, as we said, those are really interesting things for people in the future: why decisions are made in those contingent moments, the things that tend to get stripped out and left. The scholarship likes to think it's talking for all time, but of course it always addresses the present.

Laurel Brake: All you need to do is to look at the titles of nineteenth-century journals and you see a history of infinite merging, infinite title change, it's remarkable. So when John North talks about 50,000 titles, that's because there are 150,000 titles and he has traced them back to genealogical families as it were; they are changing over the years, but that's because they are taking each other over, they destroy each other. So yes, I think that the situation with the archive of the digital is really an interesting one. But to go back to *19* and its start, it was, it seemed to me, a very enlightened thing to try and build it into teaching and the graduate programme, and that was such a distinctive thing; so that as we learned, as we designed it with the help of people who had digital skills and who could do digital design, so our students, so the intern project and the way in which the students were involved with, not only editing, but formatting and marking up and dealing with the incorporation of illustrations, and dealing with contributors and all those things, that was really an exciting thing for people who were interested in the project of the magazine in a new format, and so it was a real community thing. We met a lot to talk about what we might be doing and so on, and it seems to me the commitment to free access was really liberating, that was another thing that…

James Mussell: Yes, we were very conscious at the time that open access was vital. We talked about problems of paywalls and institutions with historical resources and it always seemed that scholarship was being produced and given away by scholars who were operating in an economy of esteem rather than getting paid — we don't get paid that much, if at all. It made sense to circulate it as widely as possible and an online platform managed to do that at very little cost. It's a really easy way of taking advantage of digital properties: the ability to be reproduced and to be distributed very, very cheaply. But to go back to the interns: I think that was one of *19*'s real contributions in that it provided a mechanism for teaching those digital literacy skills, the kinds of skills that are needed to recognize what digital objects are as objects as well as those practical and editorial skills.

Laurel Brake: The other thing was the decision about interdisciplinarity. We had a Victorian Studies MA here and it involved the Art Department and the History Department and English. They were separate departments quite that way then and the Arts Faculty wasn't as coherent as it is now, and so this enabled this interdisciplinarity. So it was a digital rethinking of the project that started Victorian studies, which was *Victorian Studies* as a journal, a paper journal in

the United States, quarterly, etc. So this was a wonderful register of where not only the journal was coming from, which was these departments which were contributing to an MA in Victorian Studies, but also the way Victorian work on the nineteenth century looked to us, and it was also the very interesting translation of Victorian to nineteenth century, the '19', right? That also reflected the desire for the consideration of periodization and we are talking about the long nineteenth century, how 'Victorian' had limitations that we were thinking about and going outside-up and so on. So it was a real… it does reflect a moment.

James Mussell: It also reflects a place.

Laurel Brake: A place, absolutely, it reflects this place.

James Mussell: And *19* has kept that relationship with the Centre [Birkbeck Centre for Nineteenth-Century Studies] obviously, which publishes it and whose interns work on the journal. And also the way it connects to, it draws on recent events of nineteenth-century studies for its content too, so it has an interesting relationship with Birkbeck, with London, and with the unfolding series of events, which are rooted in space and time. And the journal, in a way, comes out of those moments, usually within a year or so there will be an issue of *19* — I don't want to pin anyone down to anything! — but it will kind of capture that moment — which otherwise would be ephemeral, it would pass away — and memorializes it in a series of journal articles, remediates that event, and turns it into something which exists in a much more recognizable scholarly form.

Laurel Brake: It's true, and one of the things that we were thinking about in terms of the way *19* appears, is that of course it appears as a series of items, it does still appear as issues, twice-a-year issues, but readers could read and often do read — as we often reprint — individual things that interest us to which we can go back. But there is a shape of an issue and the themed issues make the issue more than the sum of its parts. It does invite, for you the reader, the user, to look at an article and you think, 'Oh yeah, look at the one that's following it.' Because that's what we want readers, that would be my design on readers, who would read in some ways alive to the shape of an issue, and of course digital publication does undermine that, to say the least.

James Mussell: It's weird, isn't it? because a lot of scholarly journals, which now have electronic versions, are publishing issues, but there is no reason to do that — that's a hang-up from print culture, where you gather your contents, you publish it at once; but often online platforms… I'm publishing in *Notes and Records of the Royal Society* at the moment, and my article's going online in two weeks. I don't think the issue is out until November.

Laurel Brake: So it's prepublication.

James Mussell: Yes, and so the digital publishing is geared up to publish content as and when it's ready and in some disciplines such as the sciences that timing is vital.

Laurel Brake: Absolutely.

James Mussell: Whereas in terms of lots of humanities scholarship we are still imposing print deadlines on to digital content, structuring our digital journals as if they are still in print, and it's a kind of hang-up from print culture, which is unnecessary and a kind of nostalgia maybe for a certain way of doing things. I think it has capital, it gives credibility to the issues in that it looks like it was a print journal and so we go 'We know what that is.' But it seems a bit redundant.

Laurel Brake: It does, and when you think that *19* was born digital, but it has all these redolent notions of print, I mean like it's trailing print behind it, and so I thought that the introduction of images and colour… which of course very few journals were able to master in print.

James Mussell: It's something so simple like colour introductions.

Laurel Brake: Absolutely, we saw it on the *Blake Archive* and in [Jerome] McGann's work. But really *19* was glorious, it was glorious, and of course the fact that it can be searched, that was remarkably good, and it was delivered to our screens and that was wonderful, and, as you say, it captured events and it spun events too. We planned an issue, but there was also a conference or a workshop. What isn't there now, it seems to me, is any interactivity, which of course digital resources do invite, so let's just think about… So this issue that we are doing this for has all kinds of openings, as it were,

of this rather traditional print format: that is, the scholarly article that is peer-reviewed and a succession of them in an issue, full stop.

James Mussell: Not least we are doing film.

Laurel Brake: Yes, now, so the new one, this one has podcasts, it has video, it has illustrations, it'll have articles, it is really beginning, it seems to me… What it doesn't have is links. I mean you and I talked about this, that when you look at *19* on screen it is, dare I say it, a dull text.

James Mussell: I don't think that's a *19* thing; I think it's part of the way in which the legacy of print has been imagined and it's striking that we've had the Web now for almost twenty years and scholarly publishing still basically means PDFs, which are modern paper and there's been little embrace of things like the link — the fundamental building block of the Web — instead relying on scholarly citations and references, which is sensible. I don't think it's an either/or.

Laurel Brake: No, no. But it would be interesting to have links, right? In the text, so that's orderly and it does open the article to other places. I know that there is a problem about link rot — yes I've heard about link rot — but you know what, that's no different than going to the library because you are following a reference, as I recently did, and find that the reference is bloody wrong, that there is no issue, there is no article in the 1860 *Quarterly Review* on the press directories; I'm afraid there isn't. But also if you go to books and they are not there anymore, they've been stolen, or they are too old or they are just not there. So I don't think link rot online is any more or less frustrating than the kind of thing you do in the normal course of trying to get hold of a reference in the library. And if you are really lucky it might be on your digital event, the reference I mean. But what I was saying is that I think that that interactivity in the text of *19* and the possibility that future issues would include similar videos and podcasts and activities and that maybe — I don't know what you think — but maybe there should be some blog space, so that there is some… I think scholarly journals are pretty bad — normally print ones — about letters and commentary, and print is really, or at least academic print, it's really fixed, isn't it?

Journals in the digital media ecology

James Mussell: The genres of scholarly publishing have shown themselves to be tenacious, they don't change.

Laurel Brake: Even at the end.

James Mussell: Even the material media that produce — the forms of production that produce — those genres now are substantially different. We still cling to those older genres and there certainly is scope for exploring how digital scholarly publishing might develop and try and push against the resistance of the scholarly article. It still plays a part that we have with the REF and all those ways in which our scholarship is measured: we probably still need a place which looks traditional, authoritative. Nonetheless, there are plenty of opportunities to do different types of scholarly publishing, so different things with technology and publishing different kinds of modes as well.

Laurel Brake: I think peer review, that phrase which is a guarantee of quality, is the tip of an iceberg of the unwillingness of scholarship on the whole to move. I mean, it's a way of keeping people out; it refers to the whole edifice of selection and fenestration really of what we do, and I think that it would be helpful if there was a porousness, which we could control. But links might be one way, blogs where people could respond to material and raise questions.

James Mussell: I'm very interested in a journal we've both been connected with, the *Journal of Victorian Culture*, which has got a separate online blog, which sits alongside the journal space and in that case they are interconnected. But because the journal is published by a publisher, which keeps the articles behind a paywall in order to generate revenue, the blog space is open and available and interactive and includes the community, but the general space is quite closed. Whereas in *19* we don't have those kinds of constraints and so we could bring in or we could exploit blogging technologies, interactivity, comments. We could publish shorter articles, we could reach out to a broader audience, broader scholarly audiences, but also more broadly into the wider world beyond: the Dickens *Our Mutual Friend* Reading Project — a fantastic unfolding exploration of a novel that we know and are relearning as we are reading it in separate parts — could be part of a journal rather than kept at arm's length from a separate blog space. There would be more dialogue, I think, between

scholarly articles as we've understood it and there are other ways of interacting with audiences beyond.

Laurel Brake: It's true. I thought that the *Our Mutual Friend* project did have its birth from actually this anniversary issue, but there does seem to be quite a separation; there is no reference to it, for example, in the latest issue of *19*. As you say, the parallel universe that *JVC* [*Journal of Victorian Culture*] has is because *JVC* is a journal that charges… whereas the blog is free. But we now have the possibility with *19*, it seems to me, of integrating a blog and thinking about how to activate readers, who might be willing to put short comments on articles that were constructive and helpful and interesting.

James Mussell: There are editorial challenges with all of this. You have to build a community and you have to get an audience group willing to write interesting blog posts in the first place, and you have to monitor and moderate and do all those kinds of things. But I think we are in a maturer digital culture now, in which I think it's important because it means we can push against some of the genres of scholarly publishing and we can have the latitude and opportunity to try and do slightly different things. I think short-form scholarly writing is something we can make much more use of, which is something that's been pioneered in blog spaces, where people are writing shorter versions of scholarly works on blogs — they are freely available with an eye on people reading on short journeys or mobile devices. It's a way of making scholarship seem a bit more urgent, like cutting out the delays between having an idea, presenting at a conference, writing it up, publishing an article; a way of making scholarship seem a bit more immediate. And, given the way in which the humanities is often characterized in broader cultural and broader political circles, any opportunity we have to show that scholars are thinking about urgent affairs which matter, I think we should seize these opportunities.

Laurel Brake: I agree, one of the things about the article length in *19* is that it's fairly similar. I remember we talked about article length at the beginning, but a variation in it and, as you said, space for notes of interest, not necessarily only in the blog space, I think that would pep up the journal.

James Mussell: *19*, as we said, comes out of a culture, a community, a community of scholars based around Birkbeck and based around

London, and the more we can make the journal reflect that community and the vibrancy of that community, the better, I think. There is a place, of course, for scholarly articles, understood, and we have to make sure that centres around what the journal does, not least because it answers a lot of questions people have about the authority of digital publishing.

Laurel Brake: Absolutely, and the peer review thing is really important.

James Mussell: One of the things we value about *19* is its connections to the place and we value the fact that its issues are related to events. Then let's make more of that community, there is more of a place and let's reflect some of the vibrancy that goes on, because I think the collection of themed articles is one way to do that, it's a way of memorializing the event, writing it up into a reach for permanence. But I think there's lots more transitory ways of writing and capturing a moment, which have their own value and their own place in digital culture.

Laurel Brake: Absolutely. It's very interesting that, of course, online the Nineteenth-Century Studies Centre [Birkbeck Centre for Nineteenth-Century Studies] is very alive and very much in dialogue with its readers and so on and none of that is reflected, as you say, in these twice-a-year journal issues. And it's another interesting thing about free publication — I don't know what *19* would want to do with that — but that is another possibility because, if it seems to me like historic journals often published in different timeframes, we could do that.

James Mussell: I think that's a good point that you could have an unfolding series of things that go up as and when they are ready and still have the themes content coming out periodically as and when it's ready.

Laurel Brake: Which is a different thing: then you read for the theme, for the whole shape.

James Mussell: It would be like publishing, say, a daily edition of something and then a weekly budget edition as well, which comes out — and by budget I'm thinking of *Pall Mall Budget* — have a kind of bigger publication for a different kind of reader at the moment, for a different sort of moment.

Laurel Brake: But so many nineteenth-century journals do that: *Household Words* did that; they publish weekly and they publish monthly, and it was just routine, many, particularly weekly publications, but absolutely. So six-monthly is very sedate, shall we say; it's almost as sedate as quarterly — it's more sedate than quarterly even — and so one way of keeping *19* vibrant and in people's faces would be to release material as and when it was ready.

James Mussell: *19* is so well established now, it's been going a decade, which is a long time.

Laurel Brake: For a digital.

James Mussell: And it's a well-established journal, its scholarship and the articles speak for themselves. I think that bit of *19* is established and done. It's got its place in nineteenth-century scholarship; it's got its place in the world of the history of digital scholarship as well in a way, and now I think it's the next phase of *19*. What might be done now? How do we take further advantage of its digital media? How might it push back against the forms that it inherited? How might it engage new readers — new scholarly readers — but also all those other people who can call up *19* in just a tap of the keyboard? Because I think it needs to serve more than the people it covers…

Laurel Brake: We talked about Facebook, a Facebook site for *19* and Twitter feed. You thought that was really quite important.

James Mussell: I think in terms of finding-aids and building community, social media are important; it's just other channels through which content could be distributed and disseminated, could be talked about, and that buzz that goes around scholarly articles — or we want to encourage around scholarly articles — might be fostered.

Laurel Brake: Absolutely. And you said that you thought that we needed to go out and get our readers and that Twitter would do that — absolutely it would do that — and I thought it was a very convincing suggestion.

Funding models

James Mussell: So, finance. There's always a cost with publishing, and there are costs that are bound up with both editorial work and

also working with the medium itself too; and in digital publishing it remains the case, and so, for *19*, it's been funded, as I understand it, through various sources of money around Birkbeck.

Laurel Brake: Temporary money, yes.

James Mussell: And the money has funded the interns: one of the strengths of *19* is the internships and the fact that the interns are paid. I think we have to be very conscious about using the free labour of members of the scholarly community. But the challenge in journal periodical publishing is ongoing funding: it was in the nineteenth century, and it continues to be so today. And I guess for a journal like *19*, which hasn't got a formal publisher as such, it doesn't charge for access, that's the challenge. And we are being encouraged in British scholarly publishing to think about green and gold open access: gold open access, an author-pays model; green open access, a model that kind of sidesteps those kinds of questions entirely by encouraging authors to archive their articles or to publish in venues which don't charge their readers and cover their costs in other ways. And *19* at the moment very much falls within this green open access model: it doesn't charge its authors, it doesn't charge its readers, it finds its ways.

Laurel Brake: Its own finance, yes.

James Mussell: Do you think the endowed journal…?

Laurel Brake: It is an endowed journal.

James Mussell: It's the way to run scholarly publishing?

Laurel Brake: Well, I know and you probably, from the beginning, heard all the really terrible scrabbling around we had to do for finance and we have to do it periodically. And so very often when we met this spring, there would be this dour meeting and we'd say, 'Well, the money has run out.' And people would go away and try to find sources and we got another year and so on. So Jim and I were talking over lunch, since you asked us to talk about finance, and I came up with — and I don't know to what degree Jim would agree to this — but… One of the things I thought about was advertising and I thought that advertising, even in a free journal… if in fact these adverts were resplendent, they might actually liven up the journal.

Now, I don't mean glancing second-long moving images the way we see on the Web in Web advertising; I mean more sedate, fixed… They would have to be attached to the articles, because otherwise nobody would see them, because the journal is not presented as an ongoing PDF, so they would have to be attached to articles, but that could be done, it seems to me. And I'm thinking about nineteenth-century journals, where display adverts were really interesting and very wonderful digressions of graphics; they had all these ornaments in the nineteenth-century press and they used fonts inventively and so on. So, quite interesting Victorian analogues to what we might do with advertising. I'm interested in advertising to see whether a publisher… You brought up this point that such an advert would last for six months and beyond — it would have a longevity — so if it were for books or a journal, it would be there for anybody who then looked at the journal to look at and maybe think, 'Oh yeah I forgot about that book' or that magazine. So, advertising was one thing we thought about. There was something else, what else did we talk about?

James Mussell: For me, the thing we really value about *19* is its contribution to scholarship and the opportunity it gives the people to learn about digital literacy and to learn about editorial practices. And I think institutions have a vested interest in showing off their activities in the best possible light, and I think it's a case that's difficult to be made in straitened times that it is worth endowing a journal in this respect. But the sums are quite small in institutional terms and the benefits are immense to the students who pass through the programme and to scholarship more broadly; but also in terms of marketing, to be vulgar about it, in terms of showing off.

Laurel Brake: Fundraising and locating donors as a university target.

James Mussell: But also about raising the profile of programmes that are taught in a particular institution, raising the profile of activities that happen. I think scholarly publishing is part of the job of the university in a way, and it also pays dividends in ways that are perhaps more recognizable by university management and administration.

Laurel Brake: So people might be attracted to Birkbeck because we produce this journal and because it comes out of our faculties. The other thing…

James Mussell: Especially if the reach is developed of the journal; if we could reach a bit beyond the audiences that perhaps have reached us so far, out into the city, into the nation, into the world even, and just draw attention to the kinds of scholarly conversations, draw more attention to the scholarly conversations that happen in an institution like this.

Laurel Brake: I must say, I think that the notion of an endowment fund that would be dedicated to the journal would be the best option. I see no reason why that is incompatible with advertising; I think advertising is interesting copy — that's my view. But I also mooted this third alternative, which is much more controversial and it's this: it's Project Muse. Well, we know that *Victorian Periodicals Review* went from — for a short time — really worrying about money because of the few sales of its cover price, to being in a very healthy financial state as a result of money from Project Muse. But Project Muse, of course, which buys access to distribution, depends on the journal being charged for, and if in the event there really was no other source of funding, it seems to me that it would be possible for *19* to make some modest charge, which, after all, *VPR*'s charges were quite modest, and then become eligible for purchase by JSTOR for the archives and Project Muse for the current issues. I think it's a last resort, but I think that it is a possibility, and of course the dissemination through Project Muse is quite considerable, isn't it?

James Mussell: It is. I don't see, though, those kinds of databases of journals. I think they are a way of maintaining a scholarly integrity over the back issue of the archive in a way of sort of imposing bibliographical order over scholarship in the past, and they are an important way of raising revenue, sure, but at the cost of denying access to content, and I think holding scholarship to ransom like that should always be the last option, particularly old scholarship, because it's a way of going back to some of the worst aspects of print again by saying there's this stuff that's been published and it's fixed, but we are going to keep it in some very privileged spaces, that only certain people have access to. Whereas, what we've got now is a publishing media, especially on the Web, in which we can publish very quickly, very cheaply, and so the costs of doing those aspects of print are no longer there. For me the costs are in labour and if we can recognize that labour, *19* is a tremendous asset for Birkbeck.

Laurel Brake: Of course, I agree.

James Mussell: And so I think we should build on that as an asset and part of its asset is that it's free — it's available to everybody — so let's make that service to the scholarly community.

Laurel Brake: I'm just thinking about the financial community and climate that we are in and the way that universities have been pushed and shoved financially. It may be that we can make this argument, and of course I would regard this as a very last resort, but I do think that it has to be on some sober set of alternative plans. And it's also hard to know how the institutions will think about themselves in three years' time and how scholarship plays out, and whether the commitment of the community is greater because we can organize some of these ways of bringing *19* to the attention of everyone and enhancing it through podcasts and different forms of interactivity. I just think that finance has kept… as it has in all journals, of course — that's partly why journals are short-lived or have longevity. Of course, private patronage has always been there. If the institution gets a patronage programme, a donor programme, going, then this seems to be a very good reason for, as [W. T.] Stead said, endowment. I think it's a great journal that has evolved with technology, with scholarship, with Birkbeck and so I think it's got a really interesting future. I'm really watching that space.

James Mussell: I agree. I think *19* was a pioneer when it appeared in 2005, appeared shakily and bravely into a world that I think we were all trying to understand.

Laurel Brake: Was born.

James Mussell: But it was. It quickly found a place and ten years — like we said — is a real achievement: a decade's worth of scholarship, a decade's worth of content, all those interns who have passed through the programme, all those scholars who have written for the journal. I think it's in the moment now where it's ready to embrace the next stage, the future, and it is ready to carry on in the pioneering spirit in which it was founded, to explore possibilities of scholarly publishing in the digital age.

Laurel Brake: I agree. I think when you talk to interns, they remember Birkbeck through *19*. It's really something.