CURATE – a database system for the creation of Dublin Core descriptions and the creative use of resources for storytelling
Contact H Freeman, fisiltd@gmail.com

Introduction and Overview
CURATE is a stand-alone or networked database system that has two very different but related functions.

First, curators may use the system to create Dublin Core descriptions of their collections. These descriptions may then be exported easily to web-based SQL systems such as MySQL.

Secondly, the system allows curators to build structured ‘stories’ around the objects in their collections, and to export these for use in web-based information systems.

The system is built for ease of use by people who need to focus on information about objects, rather than be concerned with computer technology.

An example of usage
Below is an example of a ‘story’ about the building of the Great Central Railway:

Railway Archive: The Last Main Line
Search the Transport Archive: Enter keywords

YOU ARE HERE: HOME > THE LAST MAIN LINE > STORIES > GREAT CENTRAL RAILWAY CONTRACTORS

Great Central Railway Contractors Locomotives: Contents
Pick a page to read by clicking on its title in the list below:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Introduction to Contractors Locomotives</td>
<td>What were the contractors' locomotives?</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The work of the Contractors Locomotives</td>
<td>The construction of the London extension was divided into seven separate sections, each one being a contract. These contr...</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>The Life of a Contractors' Locomotive</td>
<td>All of the contractors employed on the railway's construction had their own yards set up at various locations along the route. These yards were where materials were stored for ...</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>What became of the Contractors' Locomotives?</td>
<td>The 'London Extension' was completed in 1899, by which time, some of the contractors' engines were still less than ten years old. Others had been built in the 1870s but still...</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>The Manning Wardle locomotives</td>
<td>The majority of the contractors' locomotives used on the construction of the Great Central Railway's two routes were built by Manning Wardle &amp; Company Ltd in their Boynie E...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The Hunslet comparison</td>
<td>Almost as popular as the Manning Wardles were the similar locomotives built by the Hunslet Engine Company Ltd. Hunslet had already made its mark in the production of small in...</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>The four-coupled locomotives</td>
<td>Working alongside the six-coupled locomotives were the smaller four-wheeled saddle tank types, again originating mainly from Manning Wardle and Hunslet's workshops. Although no...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>The other locomotive builders</td>
<td>Not all of the Great Central Railway's contractors' locomotives were products of Manning Wardle and Hunslet. Although not nearly so numerous, there were several examples of lo...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Logan &amp; Hemingway Locomotive - No. 10</td>
<td>In 1890, Manning Wardle &amp; Co. Ltd rolled 'L class locomotive, No. 1210, out of their Boynie Engineering Works in readiness for delivery to the engineering contractor, Loga...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Cranford Innesdale Quarry Locomotive - Sir Berkeley</td>
<td>After working on several other railway contracts for both the London, Midland &amp; Scottish Railway and the London &amp; North Eastern Railway, No. 10 worked its last railway...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What became of the Contractors' Locomotives?

The 'story' consists of 10 pages. Page 4 is shown below:

The 'London Extension' was completed in 1899, by which time, some of the contractors' engines were still less than ten years old. Others had been built in the 1870's but still had plenty of life in them yet. They all left the Great Central's metals, although others would return in 1901 to work on the construction of the alternative route from Neasden to Grendon Underwood. The work was done in partnership with the Great Western Railway and a new group of contractors were brought in for the job.

Many of the locomotives continued to work in the ownership of the contractors that had worked on the Great Central Railway construction. Some, particularly those belonging to Logan & Hemingway, worked on other railway construction projects including the Wath Concentration Sidings and the Doncaster Avoiding Line which were both Great Central Railway contracts. There was very little railway construction after 1930, and many of the contractors' locomotives were sold to the mining industries, or even sold for scrap.

The lucky survivors found new employment, mostly in the ironstone quarries of Northamptonshire, but age and wear saw many replaced by newer locomotives. A few were given overhauls where decent weather protection was often fitted, and they continued to work until the late 1950's when most went for scrap. Today, only one of the former contractors' engines survives - SIR BERKELEY (formerly Logan & Hemingway No. 30), owned by the Vintage Carriages Trust and currently based on the Middleton Railway in Leeds.

Go to the next page >

Each page consists of up to three paragraphs and three images. A click on any of the images brings up a larger image and a full Dublin Core description of it (see next page):
Contractors' 0-4-0 saddle tank locomotive, BIRKENHEAD.

L1005. Hudswell Clarke & Co. 0-4-0 saddle tank, BIRKENHEAD, (No. 650) of 1903. It is seen near Haddenham in Buckinghamshire during the construction of the Great Western & Great Central link line circa 1903. This section of railway connected the London Extension with the Great Western Railway's High Wycombe line, and was constructed by Louis P. Nott, who also owned the locomotive. The crew of three seen in the picture consists of two men and a boy.

Publisher: Leicestershire County Council

Creator: Person name - Newton, S. W. A.

Date: Creation - circa 1905

Type: Photographs - Black and White

Format: Dimension H - 118mm
        Dimension W - 161mm

Identifier: Newton - CL 5

Source: S. W. A. Newton Collection - Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester & Rutland

Language: EN

Relation: Part of - S. W. A. Newton Collection
          Copy of - Glass plate negative

Coverage: Location Creation Site - Haddenham, Buckinghamshire (O.S. Ref: 473100 208600)
          Location Current Repository - Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester & Rutland
          Period - circa 1903

Rights: Leicestershire County Council
If we now go to the CURATE database, here’s an image of the main menu, showing object L1005 (the ID of the image in the story):

The buttons on the right are in 6 groups:
1. the first 4 buttons are concerned with Dublin Core object characterisation (content, intellectual property and instantiation),
2. the second set are concerned with the creation of stories about and around the objects. ‘Exhibitions’ are longer pieces, constructed in sections as in the story illustrated above. ‘Snapshots’ are shorter pieces about a single image.

The image below shows the first content screen for the image above:
This image will be familiar to users of Dublin Core – ‘TITLE’, ‘DESCRIPTION’, ‘SUBJECT’ and ‘TYPE’ are DC terms.
In order to make the curator’s life easier a ‘quick keyword’ field has been added to make searching for common images a little faster. Clicking in the ‘quick keyword’ field results in a pop-up menu, so an existing term may be used to describe the current object. This list grows as new keywords are added.

The ‘theme’ field in the TITLE section is an extension built especially for this project, so that images could be allocated to any 2 of 4 themes that users might find interesting.

The radio buttons on the left edge allow quick access to 2 controlled vocabularies relevant to the subject and type classifications. These vocabularies are not fixed and may be changed as necessary.

The second content screen is concerned with other familiar DC terms:

Where possible, drop-down lists have been added as qualifiers to the DC terms. For example, the RELATION term has many possible qualifiers:
The drop-down lists have been used throughout the system so that curators adhere to acceptable DC terminology.

Intellectual Property is catered for in a similar way:

Instantiation issues are covered also:

Note that a ‘KEY EVENT’ field has been added. This was created specially for this particular solution so that a time line could be created easily from the core data. An example of the timeline will be described later in this document.
Stories: Exhibitions and Galleries

This section of the CURATE system deals with the use of objects to create stories. This process can be done by curators or others who know the collection: in either case it requires some processes away from the computer. This stage should be completed after the story has been written.

The screen below shows a story being created: the title has been entered and the introduction to it entered in the field. Note that a word count is given for the introduction (and all other fields) as an aid.

The next stage is the creation of the ‘pages’ that go into the story:
This page is the CURATE system view of page 4 of the story (see page 2 above to see this information as a web page).

Many stories can be created. Each consists of as many pages as necessary, and each page consists of three paragraphs, each associated with a single image. This is the set-up for the TransportArchive solution described here, though it can be changed.

The small field to the right (titled ‘LINK’) enables an author to link from one story to another in the system, and this means that end users have some flexibility of movement as they browse the final web site.

One final level of choice open to curators is the layout of the stories on the web pages, as shown below:

By selecting a particular layout format, the curator can choose, for example, to have three paragraphs and three images, or just one paragraph and one image. This means that each page in a story could have a different layout. Whether this is acceptable from an end-users viewpoint is not the issue – the flexibility exists.