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New online tool will help connect history

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Budding historians are set to benefit from a new online project which will revolutionise the way we search for historical sources on the internet, thanks to a £198,977 cash boost from JISC*.

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The 'Connected Histories' project, which is a partnership between the Universities of Sheffield and Hertfordshire, the Institute of Historical Research, and King's College London, will create an innovative search engine for a wide range of electronic resources relating to early modern and nineteenth century British history.

[Fast facts](#)

This period of British history has one of the largest collections of digital sources available on the web, including not only digitised books, but also newspapers, manuscripts, genealogical records, and even maps and images. These sources, created by both academic and commercial organisations, are accessed by hundreds of thousands of individuals every day, across the world. Until now, there has been no single starting place to search through these sources.

[Meet the team](#)

The new facility will be developed by HRI Digital at the Humanities Research Institute, University of Sheffield, in collaboration with the technical team at the Institute of Historical Research. It will allow searching across a full range of chosen sources by names, places and dates, as well as keywords and phrases, even when this information has not been separately identified in the existing source.

Professor Robert Shoemaker, from the University of Sheffield's Department of History and co-director of the project, said: "This new search facility will bring many benefits to those wishing to use historical sources on the internet – whether it's an interested member of the public looking into their family history, or students and academics carrying out their research. In total the Connected Histories project will provide integrated access to over 3 million pages of text, maps and images, shedding light on all aspects of British history between 1500 and 1900. The project is expandable into other areas of history, and as new digital resources become available."

Professor Miles Taylor, Director of the Institute of Historical Research, said: "Connected Histories will transform the way in which researchers use online source material for the early modern period and the 19th century. Amidst so much digital resource creation there has been a noticeable "silo effect", arising from distributed and unconnected databases and websites with differing access mechanisms, and this project is a significant step towards solving the problem. The project combines the expertise of several of the UK's key players in digital research for the humanities, and the IHR is delighted to be involved."

Co-director Professor Tim Hitchcock, from the University of Hertfordshire said: "Connected Histories will simply change the way we go about researching and teaching the British past. Rather than formulating a project around a specific archive, or directing our students to a single source, this project will allow both academic historians and students to search multiple archives for a person, or place, or concept, and in the process will help us to develop a more nuanced and sophisticated understanding."

Alastair Dunning, programme manager for online content at JISC, said: "JISC has been involved in the digitisation of many crucial primary resources for the study of history, helping create a wealth of digitised materials, such as newspapers, pamphlets and images. The next stage of work is to knit such resources together - identifying the people, places and events that surface in multiple historical resources and making the links between them."

Notes for Editors: The website will be fully launched in March 2011.

* [JISC](#) inspires UK colleges and universities in the innovative use of digital technologies, helping to maintain the UK's position as a global leader in education and research: For more information contact Nicola Yeeles on 0117 331 0658.

For further information please contact: Lauren Anderson, Media Relations Officer, on 0114 2221046 or email l.h.anderson@sheffield.ac.uk

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