

Ridge, M. (2014). *Crowdsourcing our cultural heritage*. Farnham: Ashgate.

306pp. ISBN-10: 1472410221. £85.00.

This book of 12 essays consists of a mixture of case studies and analysis, and discusses the ideas behind, and results from, crowdsourcing, i.e. engaging with volunteers in an online platform. The case studies form the first two thirds of the book, with the more reflective pieces working as – if not an outright conclusion – then at least a sort of consolidation at the end of the volume. The case studies are chiefly from the UK and the USA, and are reports of projects carried out between 2007 and 2014 (some of which are still ongoing), particularly focusing on activity between 2010-2013. Most of the projects discussed relate to archives, with a few based around works of art or ephemera.

With 20 contributors, it is inevitable that although many of the projects discussed are similar – most are based around either transcription or tagging / informal cataloguing of collections – the focus of each essay varies: ‘Old Weather’ by Lucinda Blaser and ‘Your Paintings Tagger’ by Eccles and Greg look at who contributes and why; “Many hands make light work. Many hands together make merry work’: Transcribe Bentham” by Causer and Terras, and ‘Build, Analyze, and Generalize: Community Transcription of the Papers of the War

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Department and the Development of Scripto' by Leon look at technical systems underlying crowdsourced projects; while 'What's on the menu' by Lascarides and Vershbow takes stock of what kind of projects work well when delegated to the crowd. However, there are a number of conclusions which each author reaches independently: crowdsourcing is not a new idea, merely a new medium for collaboration; individuals require some kind of emotional attachment to the project to keep them hooked; and online volunteers are from a similar demographic to 'actual' volunteers. The most interesting conclusion, however, is that crowdsourcing is misnamed: most projects rely on the intensive labour of a tiny handful of very dedicated volunteers – often no more than three or four people.

As yet, there is not a great deal of literature reviewing crowdsourced projects in the GLAM (Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums) sector. It is noticeable that many of the case studies refer to each other's projects, or to crowdsourced science projects to back up their own findings, and that the analytical essays draw on literature from slightly different academic fields. Just as several of the projects discussed in this book have already been recognised as prototypes on which other institutions can build, so this review will be an important point of reference for future research into crowdsourcing for heritage collections.