Culture Grid Hack Day Report: Newcastle (United Kingdom), February 18, 2011

The first ever Culture Grid Hack Day took place on 18th February 2011, in the Great Hall, Discovery Museum, Newcastle Upon Tyne. It was a fittingly splendid venue for what turned out to be an interesting and inventive day for all involved.

There were a number of Hack Day virgins there on all sides, including the Culture Grid itself, which had recently been used by other Hack events, but had never before laid itself bare to such focused attention. Thankfully for both organisers and participants the outcomes of the day left everyone wanting to do it again sometime!

The Collections Trust jointly organised the Culture Grid Hack Day with the North East Regional Museums Hub, challenging web developers, programmers and designers to take collections information available via the Culture Grid and use and present it in more attractive and engaging ways for all kinds of audiences.

With less than a day to develop ideas and prototypes of how to present this information, the mood was very much set for "cracking on". So after brief introductions to the Culture Grid, its content and technical background; and some brave souls pitching their formative ideas, there was very much an air of heads-down hacks away! Not even half an hour in the freezing February air for a fire-alarm could cool spirits!

There were spot prizes available on the day and the potential of funding for those judged to have achieved most and been most creative, but it was certainly all undertaken in a spirit of collaborative investigation, rather than intense
competition, with one of the best outcomes being the blossoming of relationships between cultural organisations and technically creative ones.

John Coburn, North East Regional Museums Hub e-collections project co-ordinator noted: *As well as the project ideas, it was important for us to get a conversation started with the digital sector in the North East... We’re not the traditional old and dusty institutions we once were. We’re very interested in moving forward and getting involved with projects such as these.*

**A sample of what was produced:**

Adrià Mercader's use of Open Street Maps to plot collection venues on a map ([www.amercader.net/dev/culturegrid/](http://www.amercader.net/dev/culturegrid/)) with accesses to Culture Grid searches, so that people can find what kind of materials are there.

Richard Light's investigations of enhancing data via linked data methods ([www.light.demon.co.uk/cg-search.htm](http://www.light.demon.co.uk/cg-search.htm)). Taras Johnson's tree-ring presentation of the items within Culture Grid, as an example of innovative data visualisation.

Chris Neale and Rob Kilby also came up with an idea that QR Codes could be generated for Culture Grid items and then be placed next to exhibits / stored items, which people can scan with their smartphones to access information and to share it with friends by "liking" it on their Facebook account.

Vector76's Shaun Allen, who creates 3D content for locations such as Newcastle and Gateshead in online world Second Life ([www.vector76.co.uk/ngsl/](http://www.vector76.co.uk/ngsl/)) looked at ways to present collections data in the virtual world, such as placing photos and historical texts relating to the history of the Tyne Bridge, within Second Life environments.
The future and lessons learnt

After such a great first experience, there is definitely a desire to build on this initial day. This is likely to be done by having at least an annual Hack event for the Culture Grid; continuing to make the Culture Grid available to similar events, such as WAG Hack Day (www.waghackday.wordpress.com/) and Europeana Hackathons and also to inject issues into conference and event programmes such as Open Culture 2011 (www.openculture2011.org.uk/) to open up debates in this area to a wider section of cultural and creative professionals. The projects that are initially being taken forward from the Hack Day are Mike Hirst’s and Chris Neal & Rob Kilby’s.

Finally a couple of fantastic feedback points that were made in the pub afterwards...have a wiki for your Hack Day for people to post insights and also have the raw data available locally for the day for easy data-enhancements and access.

All Hack Day outputs will be published at: www.culturegrid.org.uk/

Phil Purdy