



School: School of Humanities

Researcher: Dr Cassie Newland

Project Title: *Victorians Decoded: Art and Telegraphy*

UOA: 28: History

Research Timeline

Date	Rationale of research activities and decisions undertaken
2 Sep 2013	<p>First Scrambled Messages team meeting.</p> <p>Team meetings take place once a fortnight during term time. Each meeting is scheduled for four hours which gives us a great opportunity to discuss many aspects of the project, from administration and events, to more in-depth discussions generated by our ongoing readings, workshops and activities.</p>
15 Nov 2013	<p>Scrambled Messages research workshop 1: Space</p> <p>The first in the series of Scrambled Messages research workshops. Bringing in outside expertise to explore with the team the idea of the network as a medium, heterogeneous networks of long-distance control and digital conceptions of space. The ideas explored in this workshop fed into our thinking about exhibition design and what different terms would mean across different academic disciplines as well as the perceptions of the museum-going public. It led us to use the term 'Distance' in preference to 'Space' in the Victorians Decoded exhibition that followed. It also led directly to my public-facing blog piece: The World Does Not Get Smaller. Full programme and related readings available here.</p>
16 May 2014	<p>Scrambled Messages research workshop 2: Coding</p> <p>The second in the series of Scrambled Messages research workshops brought together historians of technology, choreographers and digital artists to discuss ideas of coding in their work. The ideas explored in this workshop fed into our thinking about exhibition design and what different</p>

	<p>terms would mean across different academic disciplines as well as the perceptions of the museum-going public. This fed directly into the Coding room at the Victorians Decoded exhibition as well as numerous texts within the accompanying exhibition catalogue. Full programme and related readings are available here.</p>
4-6 Sep 2014	<p>British Association for Victorian Studies Conference: Victorian Sustainability</p> <p>Scrambled Messages gave the Thursday Keynote (Caroline Arscott) and ran the 'Persistent but Resistant' panel, which was a great opportunity to present and see work from others working in similar fields and also to participate in a very interesting discussion with papers on sustainability in Mugby Junction and Gutta-percha. The paper I put together for this event <i>Writing a Wonderstuff: Gutta-percha and the telegraph</i> (4 September, 2014 recording of the paper available here), along with the subsequent discussion, formed the basis for my book chapter 'Economic Object: Gutta-Percha' in <i>A Cultural History of Objects</i>. Published December 2020.</p>
3-5 Sep 2014	<p>Archaeologies of Film and Media Conference, Bradford, UK</p> <p>I gave an invited paper as part of the Archaeology As Such panel entitled <i>Junk Mail: An unintentional biography of Sir Charles Wheatstone</i> (4 Sep by video streaming). It looked into the potential of archives to provide researchers with more than textual information. Drawing on ideas of Archive Archaeology I highlighted ways in which archives can be made to tell us more about the development of telegraphy than we had ever thought possible.</p>
20 Oct 2014	<p>King's College Arts & Humanities Festival: Splice: a live event</p> <p>At this full-immersion undersea event we invited guests to experience and participate in the materiality of the nineteenth-century Atlantic Cable and to think about its material history alongside its long-term legacy in electronic messaging today. The event included soundscapes, readings from the logbooks of the cable-laying ships with details of the practices of grappling and splicing and unwinding and rewinding cable, and practical demonstrations of underwater splicing. The focus was on material practice and the materials themselves involved in laying the first transatlantic cable between 1857 and 1866. This was an experimental pilot of methods we hoped to include in the Victorians Decoded exhibition. A recording of my performance <i>Making the Splice</i> is available here.</p>

5 Dec 2014	<p>Scrambled Messages research workshop 3: The Body</p> <p>The third in the series of Scrambled Messages research workshops invited scholars from around the country to discuss the Electric Eel, the American Telegraph System and Race, Hidden Internet workers and Rhythmanalysis. This workshop was particularly helpful in expanding our ideas of telegraphy outside of the dry, traditionally technical histories; something we hope to be able to incorporate into our Victorians Decoded exhibition. This was later accomplished with the 'Great Grammatizator' interactive exhibit. The thoughts that came out of this workshop also greatly influenced many of the written sections in the exhibition catalogue. Full programme and related readings available here.</p>
13 Jan 2015	<p>Scientific Lives: Oliver Lodge and the history of science in the digital age workshop, Leeds Art Gallery</p> <p>An invited paper, coming out of my research with the archive of telegraph pioneer Charles Wheatstone I gave a paper entitled <i>Junk Mail and the Analogue Archive</i> which looked into ideas of engineering and the creation of biography. This paper led directly into some educational work (please see below).</p>
23 Feb 2015	<p>Wheatstone Archive educational event</p> <p>Following on from the workshop above, this educational event was aimed at MA students focusing on biography and the archive. I gave a paper about the nature of archives, the imponderabilities of writing scientific biography and the potential to unlock new stories. I wrote up the content of this day as a blog post <i>Junk mail: an unexpected biography of Sir Charles Wheatstone</i> (available here). This also fed into a journal article <i>Generative junk mail: An archaeology of Sir Charles Wheatstone's archive</i> (in prep).</p>
8 May 2015	<p>Scrambled Messages research workshop 4: Time</p> <p>The fourth in the series of Scrambled Messages research workshop worked with thinkers within the gallery and archaeology sectors to examine in depth the concept of time and what this might mean in a gallery situation. The team drew on time-themed factual and fiction writing to think about how telegraphic ideas of time might be conveyed in a gallery setting. This helped to shape our ideas of telegraphy and time and led us to refine those ideas into the term 'Transmission', which subsequently became a room theme in the Victorians Decoded exhibition. This was supported by several themed sections in the accompanying exhibition catalogue. Full programme and related readings available here.</p>
20 May 2015	<p>Group research retreat to Porthcurno Telegraph Museum Archives</p> <p>The Scrambled Messages team spent three days with the archivists and collections at the Porthcurno Telegraph Museum gathering data and</p>

images in preparation of the next phase of the project: the identification of narratives and objects for the Victorians Decoded exhibition. We explored the coastal landscapes of telegraphy and had the opportunity to discuss different forms of telegraphic signalling with the on-site telegraphic engineers. The tour of the tunnels and machinery still in situ gave us great insight into the functioning of a technology which can sometimes seem monolithic and impenetrable. Discussions ran nerdily into the night and afforded us space away from other pressures to move ideas on markedly. [More details here](#).

13 Jul 2015

Failure: a complete non-event (Research Workshop).

[This research workshop](#) was held to mark the 150th anniversary of the failure of the 1865 trans-Atlantic cable. The event was hosted by the Institute of Making, and we spent the day exploring ideas around making and failure. Discussion of ideas with the 40 or so participants helped us to problematise common historical narratives of success versus failure. The material, making nature of the day took us out of our comfort zones and allowed us to focus not on results but on process. The [many discussions](#) throughout the day helped us to critically shape the narrative of the Victorians Decoded exhibition and avoid falling into common story-tropes about technology and success. This work resulted in a [celebratory blog fest](#) and a [short video](#) about the day.

2 Oct 2015

Student Design Competition

Coming out of our workshop about the Body, a student competition was opened to design and build an 'imaginative, interactive messaging machine' for the Victorians Decoded exhibition. The aim was to display the connections between ideas relating to the history of telegraphy and the art and literary culture of the Victorian period for visitors. The winner of this competition was the [Great Grammatizator](#), a fabulous brass and mahogany steam-punk-esque construction which the visitor could programme by pushing buttons and pulling levers to print bespoke, digitally generated 'poems'.

15 Oct - 19 Dec

Exhibition in the Maughan Library, Chancery Lane

This celebrated the completion of the cataloging and digitization of the Wheatstone collection funded as part of the Scrambled Messages project. Jointly curated by Brandon High (King's Special Collections) and Frances Pattman (King's Archives) the exhibition reflects the wide range of Wheatstone's interests and achievements. The digitization project uncovered many previously unknown and/or unavailable papers and curated the objects within the Wheatstone collection. This allowed the project to work with Wheatstone's papers in new ways (and indeed fed into my own 'junk mail' work above). It also ensured that the collection was accessible for future researchers.

12 Apr 2016

Scrambled Messages in Wonderland, St Anne's College Oxford

The Scrambled Messages team visited some of our research partners, the Citizen Science project in Oxford. We spent a diverse afternoon giving presentations about our respective work. The team took illustrations from Alice in Wonderland and drew out the telegraphic concepts and influences contained within them, such as scale, shrinking, mirroring, space-time and geometry. My paper, *Monstrous Proportions: Mapping and Manipulation*, looked at telegraphic ideas of stretching and scale and demonstrated how our ideas of telegraphy are influenced by 19th century mapping processes and also the way in which telegraphy influenced those very mapping processes themselves.

29 Apr 2016

Frazzled and Dazzled

A Scrambled Messages Symposium bringing together scholars from literature, art history, media studies and archaeology to focus on the flow of data and scrambling of information as historical sites take on new functions, imagery reaches new audiences and social and natural appearances are understood to be liable to blur and deceive. Nineteenth-century instances are considered alongside key contemporary phenomena. The day will offer broad-ranging discussions of photography, newspaper illustration, and other aspects of communications technology as well as the bafflements and reveals to be found in Victorian detective fiction and evolutionary theory.

31 Aug - 2 Sep
2016

BAVS conference: Consuming the Victorians

Panel from the Scrambled Messages team exploring a significant concept for our project, that of code. Code intersects with ways of understanding consumption during the nineteenth century from the commercial advantage of the telegraph to a range of professional interactions. My contribution was a paper entitled *The Codified Consumer* (2 Sep 2016) and examined how we can use bio-/geographies encoded in our paper archives to understand more about the scientific London of the mid 19th century.

20 Sep 2017

Publication of the *Victorians Decoded: Art and Telegraphy Exhibition Catalogue*

The catalogue features full entries for all images and objects on display at the Guildhall with longer (5000-6000 word) essays for selected images and ideas. The catalogue is edited by Caroline Arscott and Clare Pettitt with contributions from Anne Chapman, Natalie Hume, Mark Miodownik, Cassie Newland and Rai Stather. The layout follows the main themes of the exhibition: signals, distance, transmission, coding and resistance,

and can also be downloaded by themed section.

Published online via the Courtauld Institute of Art, the exhibition catalogue is [available to download here](#).

20 Sep 2016 -
22 Jan 2017

Victorians Decoded: Art and Telegraphy Exhibition, Guildhall Art Gallery, City of London

An exhibition to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the first communications cable laid across the Atlantic Ocean, connecting Europe with America. It was a collaboration between Guildhall Art Gallery, King's College London, The Courtauld Institute of Art and the Institute of Making at University College London. The exhibition explored how cable telegraphy transformed people's understanding of time, space and speed of communication. There were over 30,000 visitors to the Exhibition over the Christmas period.

The exhibition included paintings which had never been seen in public before, either because they were restored specifically for this exhibition (Edwin Landseer) or were acquired on loan from private collections (Evelyn De Morgan). The exhibition - somewhat unusually - included Victorian telegraphy artefacts and rare code books, alongside the works from prominent Victorian artists whom registered the changing telegraphic world. It also included 'The Great Grammatizator', a specially-designed interactive messaging machine that enables the public to create a coded message of their own.

Four themed rooms; Distance, Resistance, Transmission and Coding tell the story of laying the heavy cables which weighed more than one imperial ton per kilometre across the Atlantic Ocean floor, from Valentia Island in Ireland to Newfoundland in Canada.

20 & 21 Jan,
2017

Coding and Representation conference

This interdisciplinary conference examined the way that coding and representation are enmeshed in contemporary culture. Cultural instances were examined from the nineteenth century to the present. Fine art, graphic imagery, film and photography, literature, scientific concepts and political form were considered. The conference provided a forum for final discussion and allowed the Scrambled Messages team to reflect on and evaluate the successes and implications of the project.
