

Towards a Renewed University History: UGentMemorie and the Merits of Public History, Academic Heritage and Digital History in Commemorating the University

FIEN DANNIAU, RUBEN MANTELS & CHRISTOPHE VERBRUGGEN*

ABSTRACT

In this article we consider alternative ways to remember the university in the twenty-first century. Drawing from insights in (1) public history, (2) academic heritage and (3) digital history, we explore ways to fill in the gap between historians and communicators, the demands of science and the expectations of the public. The insights and many of the examples given are derived from our experiences with UGentMemorie, the virtual memory of Ghent University (www.UGentMemorie.be), which functions as a preparation platform for its bicentennial in 2017. We argue that public and digital history are interesting ways to communicate research on university history and heritage on different levels on the one hand and to integrate in a sensible way the academic culture of remembrance in a historical project on the other. In terms of output, this means that the classic publication of the complete history of the university at least has to be accompanied by other initiatives, such as smaller occasional publications, exhibitions or heritage walks, digital output and social media strategies.

Keywords: public history; digital history; academic heritage; university history; history of science; memory

Introduction

‘Tradition is one of the cornerstones of the modern university’, rector of Ghent University Pieter Lambrechts said in 1960. ‘Every generation is a link in the long chain that connects the past through the present with the future’.¹ Lambrechts, himself a professor of ancient history, referred to the weight of ages universities bear upon their shoulders. This awareness, already manifest in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, provoked – along with

* UGent, Instituut voor Publieksgeschiedenis and Social History since 1750, UFO, Sint-Pietersnieuwstraat 35, 9000 Gent. E-mail: fien.danniau@ugent.be; ruben.mantels@UGent.be; christophe.verbruggen@ugent.be.

1 P. Lambrechts, ‘Woord Vooraf’, *Rijksuniversiteit te Gent. Liber Memorialis* (Gent 1960) 6.

more down-to-earth reasons – an ongoing urge to remember the university. This urge has taken place in many forms and on many occasions.

Traditionally, a university jubilee is accompanied by a university history.² In the nineteenth century, this history took form in formal overviews, often luxuriously edited, and in memorial books such as the *libri memorialis*. The foundation of the university was prominent in these official histories; often the work was published in honour of the founders. This memorial tradition survived the twentieth century and even expanded to faculties and departments, which developed their own remembrance calendar. Along with the emergence of the research university and the expansion of the post-war university, less emphasis was laid on foundation and tradition. The new university histories paid attention to the scientific accomplishments and the (impressive) growth figures of the university. They came up with technical and detailed summaries of the scientific work of faculties and departments, to prove the university's file and rank.

Ghent University is currently looking forward to celebrate its bicentennial anniversary in 2017. But things have changed since the last major celebration. Sibling to the history of science, university history has become a historical subdiscipline with its own historiographical tendencies; from the 1970s onwards, university history managed to transform itself into a historical subdiscipline with a scientific approach and an autonomous historical interest.³ The one-sided institutional approach made way for an integrated history of the 'academic life', which pays attention to all aspects of the university, including social and cultural features, and which is eager to seek for comparative and transnational perspectives instead of focusing on the own institution. That is, an integrated history willing to explore new themes such as transnational networks of universities, university architecture, gender and the university, city life, laboratory life and so on.⁴ At the same time, the universities themselves discovered public relations, which again reshaped the commemoration component of university history. Armchair books with lots of nice pictures replaced the previous dense and detailed studies. To university communicators, university history became a matter of highlights, to be told in a fashionable way.

Not only university history underwent a metamorphosis. 'Memory' and 'commemoration' have become vital concepts in historical scholarship in general and public history in

2 This paragraph on the changing historiography of university histories is based on the case of Ghent University, established in 1817, but there is a great deal of evidence that this pattern also fits other nineteenth-century universities. Ghent's subsequent university jubilees produced: *Cinquantième anniversaire de la fondation de l'Université de Gand. Séance solennelle du 3 novembre 1867* (Gent 1867); *Fêtes du 75e anniversaire de la fondation de l'Université de Gand* (Gent 1892); *Université de Gand. Liber Memorialis* (Gent 1913, a two-volume late appendix on the 1892 jubilee); *Eeuwfeest der hoogeschool te Gent 1817–1917: programma der plechtigheden* (Sint-Amandsberg 1917); *Gedenkboek van de Rijksuniversiteit te Gent na een kwarteeuw vervlaamsing (1930/31–1955/56)* (Gent 1957); *Rijksuniversiteit te Gent. Liber Memorialis* (Gent 1960, a four-volume late appendix on the 1955 jubilee); R.L. Plancke, *Rijksuniversiteit Gent 1817–1967* (Gent 1967); K. de Clerck e.a., *Kroniek van de strijd voor de ver nederlandse van de Gentse universiteit* (Beveren 1980); *175 jaar Universiteit Gent. Een verhaal in beeld* (Gent 1992) and www.UGentMemorie.be (2010-ongoing).

3 At Ghent University, a pioneering role was played by Hilde de Ridder-Symoens. See: H. De Ridder-Symoens, 'Universiteitsgeschiedenis als bron voor sociale geschiedenis', *Tijdschrift voor sociale geschiedenis* 10 (1978) 74–98.

4 P. Dhondt, 'Universiteitsgeschiedenis in België: meer dan een jubileumgeschiedenis?', *Mededelingenblad van de Belgische Vereniging voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis* 24 (2002) no. 4, 5–12; J. Tollebeek and L. Nys, *De stad op de berg. Een geschiedenis van de Leuvense universiteit sinds 1968* (Leuven 2005) 9; and R.M. Friedman, *Integration and Visibility. Historiographic Challenges to University History* (Oslo 2000).



Fig. 1. Regarded as old-fashioned forms of an academic culture of remembrance these busts of famous scientists are banished to the vault of the University Library in Ghent. (photo Pieter Morlion, © UGent)

particular. In line with the ‘heritage boom’ in contemporary Western society, alternative forms of value have been superimposed on university photographs, scientific instruments, archives, etc. Universities have become aware of their ‘academic heritage’ scattered in laboratories, libraries, museums, attics and basements. When it comes to remembering the university, all these features come together: history, memory, academic heritage, science communication and the agenda of the university’s public relations. Too often they ignore each other or cross swords, while actually they can complement each other in a perfect way.

This article will consider alternative ways to remember the university in the twenty-first century, drawing from insights in public history, academic heritage and digital history to fill in the gap between historians and communicators, the demands of science and the expectations of the public. Our insights and many of the examples given are derived from our experiences with UGentMemorie, the virtual memory of Ghent University (www.UGentMemorie.be), which functions as a preparation platform for its bicentennial in 2017. UGentMemorie is conceived as an attempt to communicate and stimulate historical research, to build a ‘heritage’ community and to preserve (intangible) heritage.

The public history approach

The changing character of commemorative events is not the prerogative of universities. Since 1975, historians noticed a change in the relationship that each country, nation, social,

ethnic or family group has with its past.⁵ The wave of memorial concerns, named the ‘age of commemoration’ by Pierre Nora, is revealed not only in remembrance events but also in all kinds of new museums, in a renewed interest in the holding and opening of archives, in a growing fascination in one’s roots, in genealogical research and in the attachment to heritage. Without losing ourselves – and history – in a postmodern relativism, we acknowledge that there are other meaningful forms of engaging with the past than the strictly professional one at the history departments of universities. In this age of commemoration, the historian has lost the sole right to interpret and talk about the past.

Notwithstanding, as the ‘theatres of memory’ have multiplied, historians can play interesting roles outside the academy.⁶ ‘Public History’ tackles this debate about the place of history and the historian in society. Worldwide, courses in Public History prepare ‘public historians’ for an engaged position as interpreters, translators, guides and guardians of history.⁷ What started as a utilitarian movement in the U.S.A. in the 1970s and has its European roots in local history and the People’s History movement, has grown out to be an independent historical discipline.⁸ The research field of Public History is the wide range of historical practices outside the traditional research university, history *for* and *by* the public.⁹ The recent founding of the *International Federation for Public History* aims to enhance the collaboration of public historians worldwide.¹⁰

What does Public History, its research field and approach, have to do with university history and the history of science? Why should university historians ‘do’ public history? There are several reasons. Firstly, public history can enlarge the support for university history. Which department, faculty or collection does not have festivities celebrating their founding, historical breakthroughs or retiring researchers? Since the academic community is commemorating anyway, why not point out some historical research? By anticipating certain festivities – by adding them to a research schedule or even just by communicating research about related topics at the right time – historians can make themselves and the history they study relevant to the general academic community. It might even create some good will in the administration office. Historians who manage

5 P. Nora, ‘Entre mémoire et histoire. La problématique des lieux’, in: Idem, *Les lieux de mémoire. La République I* (Paris 1984) i–xlii. See also Idem, ‘The reasons for the current upsurge in memory’, *Tr@nsit online* 22 (2002); K.L. Klein, ‘On the Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse’, *Representations* 69 (2000) 127–150; D. Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge 1985); Id., *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (Cambridge 1996); P. Fritzsche, *Stranded in the Present. Modern Times and the Melancholy of History* (Cambridge 2004); W. Frijhoff, *De mist van de geschiedenis. Over herinneren, vergeten en het historisch geheugen van de samenleving* (Rotterdam 2011).

6 R. Samuel, *Theatres of Memory: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London 1994).

7 The UGentMemorie-project itself is embedded in the Institute for Public History (IPG) (www.ipg.ugent.be) of the Ghent University History Department. The IPG organises research, education and public services about all kinds of history in society. All over the world these kinds of institutes have emerged. For an introduction to Public History, see K. Ribbens, *Een eigentijds verleden. Alledaagse cultuur in Nederland 1945–2000* (Hilversum 2002). On Public History in Flanders and the IPG, see G. Deneckere and B. De Wever, ‘Publieksgeschiedenis in Vlaanderen. Tussen erfgoed, herinnering en media’, in: A. Van Nieuwenhuysse and S. De Schampheleire (eds.), *Geschiedenis: zijn werk, zijn leven. Huldeboek René De Herdt* (Gent 2010) 59–72.

8 The National Council on Public History was founded in 1979 as a membership association for public historians, and it publishes the journal *The Public Historian*, ‘the voice of the public history profession’ (<http://ncph.org>).

9 P. Knevel, ‘Public History. The European Reception of an American Idea?’, in: *Levend Erfgoed. Vakblad voor public folklore & public history* 6 (2009, 2) 4–8.

10 See: www.publichistoryint.org.

to involve other non-historical departments and faculties, the managerial board, the university collections and the larger university community in their research, showing them how their history and memory fits in a larger picture, will create a public for university history. It might also help to highlight the specific needs and particularities of historical research.

By doing public history and getting involved in commemorative activities, historians can support a self-reflexive formation of the universities' 'corporate identity'. As is the case with any group identity, the identity of the academic community is defined by its internal properties and its relationship to the external world. The internal collegiality of the university is currently put under pressure by the anonymous scale of the institution, the performance stress and harsh competition. Collective memories and history, an important part of group identity, are put under pressure as well, for instance by the acceleration of change and mobility of students and researchers.¹¹ Administrators are experimenting with all kinds of activities to enhance solidarity: after-work parties, university-blogs, invented traditions, alumni networks and ... commemorative events. In regard to relationships with the outside world, administrators focus on branding the university in order to attract students and investors. The old escutcheon made way for a logo, the device became a slogan and the university pantheon is put into battle.

Using history to prop up a corporate identity is something historians do not particularly like: they are very good in deconstructing identities; constructing them, even for an institution they like, is something else. Public history projects about the university history, especially when funded by the university, obviously give voice to critical and ethical perspectives involved with applied scientific research. Is university history sold to the highest bidder? Although a critical stand is important, we believe these issues do not exclude the actual participation of the university historian in public history projects or university jubilees. It can even be a good thing, as the historian can point out the versatility of university history and memory and put the university highlights in an urban, national and international context.

A third reason why university history benefits from a public history approach concerns the sources it produces. To understand the post-war changes both science and the universities have undergone, one could argue that administrative archives – if there are any – do not suffice. This argument is of particular interest for a majority of the European universities which were founded after 1900. A public history project can contrive accounts by means of oral history but also by making public calls for stories, diaries, objects and pictures. Those can help historians to fill in some blanks in their research and to localise potential study fields. Another method frequently used by public historians, archivists and librarians, is crowd-sourcing: outsourcing a particular task of research to the general public or a specific group. For instance, student or alumni volunteers can tag pictures, transcribe documents, describe images, explain scientific vocabulary etc.¹² Historians can set this up in coordination with the university library or archive. For example, Leipzig University successfully deployed members of the alumni network to gather and check biographic information of active university professors

11 The notion of 'accelerated history' was first written about by Daniel Halévy in his *Essai sur l'accélération de l'histoire* (Paris 1948).

12 See, among other sites: www.what-is-crowdsourcing.com; www.lib.ua.edu/libraries/hoole/crowdsourcing; www.chaordix.com/about-us/university-program.

and collect their signatures of approval to use the information in an online academic biographical database.¹³

In our experience, setting up a public history project on university history means you will become, in a certain way, an information desk. Not only to give but also to receive information about university history. This is a fourth reason for using a public history approach on university history. Emeriti, alumni, administrators, department heads ... all come knocking on your door with stories, archives, books, pictures, objects, etc. It is amazing how many academics outside the Faculty of Arts are in one way or another involved in the history and heritage of the university and its scientists, often their predecessors. These contacts provide opportunities to do some – much needed – interdisciplinary research.

Last but not least, and not strictly confined to university history, there are of course idealistic reasons to turn to public history. Communicating to the outside world, being interested in how people perceive the university and its history, supplying historical perspectives to current debates, promoting historical awareness, safeguarding the tangible and intangible heritage of the university... it is all about believing and investing in a role for the historian in society.

Academic heritage

François Hartog explained that we hang on to the past and its vestiges because in these rapidly changing times we are no longer sure what the future will bring.¹⁴ The current obsession with collecting, preserving, safeguarding and opening our tangible and intangible heritage is a result of these feelings. This is most strikingly illustrated by the long series of UNESCO conventions and heritage lists.¹⁵ In the micro society a university is, we notice a similar trend in the recent awareness for – or crisis of – academic heritage by university, national and European governments. In 2000, twelve European universities founded the network organisation *UNIVERSEUM*, ‘which wants to help preserve and provide access to academic heritage, a significant part of national and international heritage with its many unique and unusual collections’. The next year the *International Council of Museums* (ICOM) established a separate International Committee for University Museums And Collections (UMAC), acknowledging academic heritage as a relevant part of the museum world but also recognizing its own identity.¹⁶ Around the same time, academic heritage was put on the agenda of the Council of Europe, resulting in the *Recommendation on Governance and Management of University Heritage* (December 2005) in which the Council urges primarily university administrations to take legal, administrative and moral responsibility for all parts of their heritage.¹⁷ Also, in 2007, *Gewina* dedicated a volume of its journal to academic

13 See: www.uni-leipzig.de/unigeschichte/professorenkatalog/info-en.html.

14 F. Hartog, *Régimes d'historicité. Présentisme et Expérience du temps* (Paris 2003); Id., *Evidence de l'histoire. Ce que voient les historiens* (Paris 2005); P. Gielen and R. Laeremans, *Cultureel goed. Over het (nieuwe) erfgoedregiem* (Tielt 2005).

15 For the articles of the UNESCO convention, see: whc.unesco.org/en/convention.

16 Cp. www.universeum.it and <http://publicus.culture.hu-berlin.de/umac>. UMAC also offers a database of university museums and collections worldwide: <http://publicus.culture.hu-berlin.de/collections>.

17 In 2000 the Council of Europe invited member states to pass legislation in order to preserve the collections of institutions, such as universities, whose mission was not to collect or conserve; *The Heritage of European Universities* (Council of Europe Higher Education series No. 7) was published in 2002; the *Recommendation on the Governance and Management of University Heritage* was unanimously approved by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on December 7, 2005 (www.universeum.it/council.html).

heritage. The wide variety of contributions illustrates the multiplicity of subjects included in academic heritage and the research questions that arise from the universities' collections.¹⁸ Several countries got their academic heritage institutions organised: in the Low Countries we note *Stichting Academisch Erfgoed*, which has taken responsibility for the Dutch Academic Heritage since 2000 and the *Interuniversitair Platform voor Academisch Erfgoed*, which has done the same for Flanders since 2007.¹⁹

The definition, origins, past and future mission of academic heritage were the subjects of a dissertation written by Marta Lourenço.²⁰ She noticed that the future perspective for academic collections, in contrast to collections of non-academic scientific museums, relies mainly in their research value. This is where history comes around the corner. In his contribution in the Academic Heritage issue of *Gewina* in 2007, Huib Zuidervaart noted that university collections are material evidence for knowledge construction and transmission and are, as such, of great interest to cultural historians. The academic collections can show us how people thought about nature, the universe and humanity itself.²¹ Next to cultural history, the history of science is a second area that should benefit from the collections, according to Zuidervaart and Lourenço. For too long, this research field restricted itself to the history of theory. Objects and instruments, buildings and laboratories, give historical insight in the currently much studied 'circulation of knowledge'.²² Finally, as Lourenço stated in her dissertation, the study of university collections – and academic heritage as a whole – is of the utmost importance to understand the scientific and social role of the university. It holds the key to emerge from the current identity crisis of the academy.²³

The material culture of academic heritage is hence a useful source in writing university history. But the argument goes the other way as well. Academic heritage does not speak for itself: heritage *is* not history, it *has* history, history that must be looked for and explained. An expressive example of the synergy between history and heritage in public display is the reconstruction in several university museums of the working cabinets of famous professors: the reconstruction of *genius loci* (laboratories, cabinets, seminaries) allows the exploration of the history of scientific practices. The main argument lies in the triggering effect of academic heritage: these fascinating objects and natural artefacts lure the public into the history of the university. They give the opportunity to recall facts, stories and events – for

18 S. Oosterloo, 'Woord vooraf', *Gewina* 30 (2007) no. 3, 88–90.

19 For an overview of the heritage collections of Ghent University and possible narratives of a new university museum bridging the apparent gap between science and society, see: P. Monsieur, J. Bourgeois e.a., 'Academic heritage at Ghent University: the field's outlook on the future', in: D. Segers, K. Wautier, and A. Jonckheere (eds.), *Mededelingen van het Museum voor de Geschiedenis van de Wetenschappen Universiteit Gent* 4 (2011) 3–17.

20 M. Lourenço, *Between Two Worlds: The Distinct Nature and Contemporary Significance of University Museum and Collections in Europe*, unpublished PhD dissertation, Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers (Paris 2005); S. De Clercq and M. Lourenço, 'A Globe is Just Another Tool. Understanding the Role of Objects in University Collections', *ICOM Study Series* 11 (2003) 4–16. See also: R. Ter Sluis, 'Transitie en transformatie. De veranderende plaats en functie van een academische collectie in de twintigste eeuw', *Gewina* 30:3 (2007) 175–181.

21 H.J. Zuidervaart, "'Een schat van alderlij natuurlijke vreemdigheden". Over de relatie tussen academisch erfgoed en wetenschapsgeschiedenis', *Gewina* 70:3 (2007) 107–126.

22 James A. Secord, 'Knowledge in Transit', *Isis* 95 (2004) 654–672.

23 M. Lourenço, 'Contributions to the History of University Museums and Collections in Europe', *Museologia* 3 (2003) 17–26.



Fig. 2. Probably this vertebra is all what is left of Betsie, the elephant and much-beloved mascot of the zoo in Ghent that died in 1877. The vertebra is exhibited in the Zoological Museum of the UGent. (photo: Pieter Morlion, © UGent)

instance, medical apparatus referring to the first lung transplantation – that happened in the university’s past. They are evocative and in that way appealing to take into account when writing the university history and the history of science, especially for the exact and medical sciences.

Finally, as one member of a university board put it during the 2011 meeting of Stichting Academisch Erfgoed, academic heritage is able to increase society’s support for the university. As the university appears to be, institutionally spoken, a ‘vulnerable thing’, heritage is capable of giving the people ‘a warm feeling’ about the university. In discovering the benefits of scientific progress by visiting and reading the history of the university, people will understand why universities receive so much public money, this director of the board of management said.

Digital history

A third area worth looking into for anyone who is involved with the history, heritage and commemoration of universities, is Digital History. It is clear that the digital revolution we are witnessing since the last quarter of the twentieth century has an impact on researching, presenting and teaching history.²⁴ Online sources, prosopographic databases, data-visualisations,

24 A. Fickers, ‘Towards A New Digital Historicism? Doing History In The Age Of Abundance’, *Journal of European Television History and Culture* 1 (2012), no. 1. K.K. Patel, ‘Zeitgeschichte im digitalen Zeitalter. Neue und alte Herausforderungen’, *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 3 (2011) 331–351.



Fig. 3. The German chemist Friedrich August Kekulé (1829–1896) introduced in 1861 practical laboratory exercises at the University of Ghent. His working place is reconstructed in the Museum for the History of Sciences by making use of authentic material. (photo Pieter Morlion, © UGent)

scientific blogs, electronic learning environments, wiki's, crowd-sourcing, online journals ... all of these have entered the workplace of the humanist/historian. There is 'some' debate whether or not digital humanism and/or digital history is in need of its own definition, limits, methodology and theory. Are digital humanities and digital history new and independent disciplines, or not? The 'Manifesto of Digital Humanities' drafted at a THATCamp in Paris in 2010 helped the matter somewhat forward by stating that the digital humanities are a 'transdiscipline' 'embodying all the methods, systems and heuristic perspectives linked to the digital within the fields of humanities and the social sciences'.²⁵ In its basic form it is an auxiliary set of methods and tools that help the researcher to analyse and communicate research results. Some of these techniques have already been used within the field of university history and heritage.

With regard to university history, digital history offers tools and techniques that allow us to present and communicate the university's past in ways other than plain written text. The best known and most accessible digital application used by scholars is the blog. As an individual or collective initiative, the blog is an ideal way to communicate about research or events and to build a network of researchers and students around you. *H-madness* is an excellent example of a collaborative scientific blog.²⁶ Six scholars assemble news and information concerning the history of psychiatry and manage to make their blog an international and up-to-date contact point for researchers. Several universities are

²⁵ See: www.tcp.hypotheses.org/411.

²⁶ See: www.historypsychiatry.com.

trying to gather blogs of their employees on one platform or promote internal and external communication using blogs.²⁷ Museums and cultural institutions are also exploiting interesting blogs. In the academic heritage sector we notice the blog of *Medical Museion*, a museum and research unit at the University of Copenhagen, that establishes a synergy between posts on the collection and posts on the research surrounding the objects.²⁸ The *Houston Museum of Natural Science* provides a blog with posts from curators, administrators, educators, volunteers and researchers, and by doing so the museum extends its work in the museum to an online community.²⁹ Administrators are also blogging. With *University Blog, Diary of life and strategy inside and outside the university*, Ferdinand von Prondzynski, the Vice-Chancellor of Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen, Scotland, tries to break with the conservative traditions of academic discourse.³⁰ At the *Université de Paris*, Jean-François Méla is doing the same with his thoughts on university and science policy.³¹

The virtual exhibition is a second communication method. Public Historians have acknowledged at an early stage the potential of technology and online tools for their projects and project communication. Online platforms often play a key role in public history projects as they allow for a dynamic and open relationship with 'the' general public. Also, 3D technologies and web-publishing platforms for the display of heritage and scholarly collections and exhibitions, such as Omeka, are widely used to create virtual museum exhibitions.³² In their turn, 'physical' museums are digitizing their collections not only for the sake of preservation but also in order to make the collections accessible to the wider public at a low cost. Virtual museums and exhibitions act very complementarily as an extension of physical museums exhibition.³³

The third digital application that gained our interest in terms of communicating historical research is the podcast. A series of audio pieces, from ten minutes to two hours in length, published on the web or the iTunes Store is proving to be a popular medium to talk about – and listen to – science and (its) history. The impulses for scientific inspired podcast come mainly from radio stations that let some of their broadcasts live a second life in online audio series.³⁴ That the podcast in its wide range of appearances is attractive for all kinds of scholarly use is proven by the existence of the separate iTunesU[university] category in the iTunes Store.³⁵ A podcast is not difficult or expensive to make from a technical point of view, and university teachers use it gladly to publish courses, lectures and talks. Some scholars even

27 Other examples are: www.umwblogs.org; www.dspunt.blogspot.be; www.scientopia.org/blogs/science-professor/; www.blog.professorastronomy.com/2012/06/modern-transit-science.html.

28 See: www.museion.ku.dk.

29 See: <http://blog.hmns.org>.

30 See: www.universitydiary.wordpress.com.

31 See: <http://jfmela.free.fr/jfmblog/>.

32 Omeka is an open source project of the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media, George Mason University (<http://omeka.org>). The Institute for Public History used Omeka for: <http://www.3ojaarovam.be>.

33 S. Styliani, L. Fotis, K. Kostas and P. Petros, 'Virtual Museums, a Survey and Some Issues for Consideration', *Journal of Cultural Heritage* 10 (2009) 520–528.

34 BBC published several podcasts, for example *A History of the World in 100 Objects* and *Don't know much about history*. The *Museum*-broadcast of the Norwegian radio station nrk-P2 on the history and archaeology of Norway is another example.

35 At the Université Libre de Bruxelles a pilot project is currently exploring the educational and science popularization uses of podcasts; see <http://podcast.ulb.ac.be>.

manage to assemble time and content for a (collaborative) podcast that targets a non-academic public.³⁶ In addition to these 'stand-alone' initiatives, all major universities have been offering their own podcasts channels for years.³⁷ The prestige that comes with podcasts in iTunesU is clearly not to be underestimated. For its 800th anniversary Cambridge University was very smart in combining the educational with the promotional in its *Cambridge Ideas* podcasts.³⁸

Among the early adopters of the use of computers to develop new research we find some university historians. Following in the footsteps of Pierre Bourdieu, Fritz Ringer and other scholars advocating a social approach towards intellectual history, the field of university history has always been receptive to prosopographical methods and digital humanities 'avant la lettre'.³⁹ This has resulted in the digitization of frequently used sources such as matriculation lists and cartularia and numerous (relational) databases with information about scholars from early modern times to the present, most of them structured in a different way.⁴⁰ However, finding and using new methods, techniques and tools to exchange or harvest data has proven to be very difficult.⁴¹ A balance between the time invested in data collection and research results has not yet been found. The solution lies between, on the one hand, the integration of the flexibility and user-friendliness of collective hypertexts in which every research community member can create and edit data and, on the other hand, rigidly structured relational database models with a higher analytical potential. The Bestor-project (Belgian Science and Technology On line Resources), for instance, is a collective hypertext (wiki-based) consisting of Belgian scientists, disciplines and institutions.⁴² The wiki allows flexible collaborative research and has a high encyclopaedic and documentary value, but it has hardly any analytical potential as an aggregated 'metasource' that can be used for attribute or network analysis. Exchange with other international databases, which is necessary for comparative or transnational research, is also difficult. The 'holy grail' for any scholar interested in exchanging and harvesting data remains the development of a common meta-semantic data model or RDF (Resource Description Framework). The latest attempt in this direction is project Héloïse, initiated by Emmanuelle Picard.⁴³ It is certainly only through collaborative research that historians will be able to include various spatial scales and different countries, transnational trajectories, etc. This kind of collaboration has been announced before, but

36 The Italian professor of Medieval Studies Enrica Salvatori is founder of *Historycast*, in 2006 the first Italian podcast on history and the winner of the European podcast Award 2010. She speaks regularly on any historical topic, from slavery to Francis of Assisi, and has thousands of listeners <http://www.historycast.org/podcast.htm>.

37 A list of university and college podcasts produced some years ago is published on www.openculture.com/2006/10/university_podc.html.

38 www.sms.cam.ac.uk/collection/535809.

39 See, for instance, the joint research effort FASTI, founded by Hilde de Ridder-Symoens.

40 B. Boute, 'Towards Uniform Database Structures for Prosopographical Research: Work in Progress in University History. The Example of the Lovanienses Database', in: K.S.B. Keats-Rohan (ed.), *Resourcing Sources* (Oxford 2002) 35–48.

41 This was also the central theme at the symposium 'Digitale Databases en de Universiteitsgeschiedenis', organised by P.J. Kneegtmans and Leen Dorsman in 2010. See: www.uu.nl/faculty/humanities/EN/Current/agenda/Pages/20100519-universiteitsgeschiedenis.aspx.

42 www.bestor.be.

43 Cp. www.heloise.hypotheses.org. For an introduction: *Annali di storia delle università italiane* (forthcoming).

without the same amount of proper digital environment or online tools.⁴⁴ Online and accessible tools are not only vital for answering innovative research questions about the dynamics of academia.

UGentMemorie: integrating public history, academic heritage and digital history

Public History, academic heritage and digital history met each other in the UGentMemorie-project by means of the concept of *memory*. For this public history project of the Ghent University History Department, a website (www.UGentMemorie.be) – the virtual memory of Ghent University – is the centre and the engine for the exploration of the university's past and heritage. The subject of UGentMemorie is the impact of city, society and science on the university and vice versa. The occasion for the project was the Ghent University celebration of eighty years of 'dutchification' in 2010, and it got a second term as preparation platform for the upcoming bicentennial in 2017.⁴⁵

Memory was the key to this applied university history. Within 'Memory Studies' and among history theorists, memory is an excessively described and used concept, very much related to *identity*. Broadly speaking, it concerns the different ways a society thinks about the past and how it uses the past in the present. It is used in terms of collective memory, shared memory, popular memory, counter-memory, memory industry etc.⁴⁶ UGentMemorie defines memories very broadly and always in dialogue with history. Diaries, interviews, memoirs, testimonies, speeches... all refer to, and remind us of, historical realities. They attach themselves to places, people and events. These historical and contemporary 'memories' of Ghent University are being actively traced in archives and libraries and contrived by several interview projects.

Memory is a concept that allows recognition and involvement of a diverse public. Not so coincidentally, the expansion of memory studies and rise of public history occurred simultaneously in the late 1970s and have been interacting ever since. For example, public historians gratefully use Pierre Nora's memory derivative 'lieux-de-mémoire', as the concept acknowledges the fading contrasts among history, context and meaning and adds the experiential character of heritage and recollections. Within an academic community of young and old professors, technical and administration staff, students and alumni, some histories and memories are shared, while others are completely different and contradictory. Memories of the student revolts of 1969–1972 differ greatly when recollected by a transitory student leader or by a long-serving administrator; the nineteenth-century labourers who had to make way for new university buildings left other accounts than the city elite of that time. It is this polyphonic version of history that is very attractive for (public) historians. UGentMemorie for that reason is not so much a platform for Ghent University's collective memory but for what James Young introduced as 'collected memories'.⁴⁷

44 Researchers from Ghent University and Maastricht University have recently founded TIC-Collaborative, a Virtual Research Environment (VRE) for the study of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century international organisations and congresses, including a database that integrates existing data collections, digitized conferences reports, yearbooks, etc.

45 UGentMemorie is a 'Science and Society' project primarily financed by Ghent University. It is promoted by Gita Deneckere and Christophe Verbruggen and carried out by Fien Danniau and Ruben Mantels.

46 D. Glassberg, 'Public History and the Study of Memory', *The Public Historian* 18 (1996) no. 2, 7–23.

47 J. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorial and Meaning* (Yale 1994).

The relationship between memory and heritage has been made clear by Hartog and Nora. Heritage, be it buildings, objects or papers, are tangible relicts of the past by which the public remembers and ‘experiences’ the past. Analogously, UGentMemorie approached academic heritage as a part of the academic memory, as a result and a witness of university history. Of course, heritage has the very attractive quality of being tangible and thus visual, not unimportant when using a visual medium as a website. Historical and recent pictures and video are a necessary complement to textual articles and sources. Visitors’ behaviour shows us that images and video (and their captions) are an important channel for absorbing information. In its search for heritage, UGentMemorie thankfully uses the results of all kinds of digitization projects: the archives, university library and university museums are all in the process of digitally unlocking their collections. As historians, we use, contextualise and valorise the digitization work of the heritage institutions.

Using a website for collecting and sharing academic memories has been easy, as the properties of a website and a memory are actually very similar. They are virtually endlessly expandable and flexible, match language and images, and have different levels of profundity.⁴⁸ As is the case with actual memories, the UGentMemorie website combines related content about places, people, events and topics. Using this popular, democratic and approachable format, required no compromise concerning historical content. To the contrary: the permanent and structural built-in contextualisation grants all those different items their historical meaning. Apart from that, it proves to be a good medium to communicate and interact with the public. For (former) members of the academic community of Ghent University the UGentMemorie website is a place to find history, make a trip down memory lane and/or stay current with historical research concerning the university.

To conclude, in our experience, the main value of a website as a publication platform is not its communication capacities, storage possibilities, flexibility, accessibility, hypertextuality, or interaction, nor the reconciliation of history, heritage and memory. It was the opportunity to, at all times, put the wide variety of content in historical context. However, we did encounter some conceptual and technological/financial limits with regard to our digital platform.⁴⁹ On the way, we realized that some parts of our diverse history project should not be integrated in the UGentMemorie website in order to protect its usability. We extracted UGentMemorialis, a biographic database of Ghent University professors, and UGentPassage, a mobile history walk.⁵⁰

It is obvious that a digital platform offers a lot of opportunities for the assembling, presenting, sharing and valorisation of history. However, if it does not want to fossilize into a

48 D.J. Cohen and R. Rosenzweig, *Digital History: A Guide to Gathering, Preserving, and Presenting the Past on the Web* (Washington, 2005), see www.chnm.gmu.edu/digitalhistory.

49 The website UGentMemorie.be was assembled with the open source publishing platform Drupal (www.drupal.com) by PureSign (www.Puresign.be).

50 Cp. www.UGentMemorialis.be. The ‘general public’ and research community expect different things from biographic information. The former looks for readable and reliable but already analysed and contextualized information, the latter needs a rigidly structured relational and exhaustive database. UGentMemorialis.be will be further developed as a research instrument in line with the possibility to adapt a common semantic data model; We decided to extract UGentPassage because we wanted UGentPassage to be, in contrast to UGentMemorie.be, bilingual Dutch/English (cp. www.UGentPassage.be). Also, as we plan to create other walks, we needed a digital platform that allows us to show different routes. Integrating these functionalities in Drupal proved technically difficult and would have made UGentMemorie.be sloppy and confusing.

static showcase, it needs to be surrounded by a variety of activities. It requires continuous investments and is by consequence vulnerable in times of scarcity of resources or when the momentum of a jubilee is over. For UGentMemorie there is, on the one hand, the research and assembling process itself: the texts, images and testimonies are gathered with the help of many students, researchers, employers, townsmen and sympathizers. Their participation enlarges the social basis for the public support of university history and academic heritage. It also assures that the project is embedded in the daily tasks of a university: tuition (by organising student exercises), research (by stimulating dissertations and valorising the work of researchers) and public services (by setting up or collaborating in public events). On the other hand, UGentMemorie uses debates, lectures, exhibits and walking tours to discuss, question and show its subject, in all its diversity. The scientific collaborators even write (in) good old fashioned books and articles.

UGentMemorie taught us that public and digital history are interesting ways to communicate research on university history and heritage on different levels and to integrate in a sensible way the academic culture of remembrance in a historical project. In terms of output, this means that the classic publication of the complete history of the university, in one or more volumes, is subject to critique or at least has to be accompanied by other initiatives, such as smaller occasional publications, exhibitions or heritage walks, digital output and social media strategies. Commemorating the university engages the historian to be more than a writer.