REFLECTION ARTICLE

The *Music and the First World War* Project at the Australian War Memorial

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Abstract

The *Music and the First World War* project was a First World War centenary project at the Australian War Memorial that involved the digitisation of a selection of diaries, letters, concert programs and 100 pieces of sheet music held in the Memorial's collection. This article examines the process of developing the project, preparing the collections for digitisation and establishing a publishing framework for online release. The article also discusses some of the benefits of the project for telling the stories of each of these songs, their history and the performers involved.

Keywords: *Digitisation*; *First World War*; *Music*; *Collection management databases*; *Arrangement and Description*

This article focuses on the *Music and the First World War* project at the Australian War Memorial and is based on a conference paper that was delivered at the Australian Society of Archivists annual conference in 2021. The paper, and this article, outlined the development of the *Music and the First World War* project, preparation of the supporting collections for digitisation, and the establishment of a publishing framework to deliver the original project concept. The benefits of the project for telling the stories of each of the selected songs, their history and the performers involved will also be described. Also, incorporated into this article are some of the stories about the songs and the performers that were uncovered as part of the project.

The *Music and the First World War* project was based at the Research Centre of the Australian War Memorial ('the Memorial'). The Research Centre collections include the Memorial's official records; library collections, including sheet music; and personal diaries and letters.

The *Music and the First World War* project brought together the collections of diaries and letters that contained strong musical references, concert programs and sheet music (Figures 1 and 2). It also commissioned modern recordings of 100 pieces of sheet music held in the Memorial's collection. At the heart of this project was the digitisation of these collections and displaying this material online in a meaningful way that allowed researchers to view the historical context of the performances and literature around a selection of 100 songs. The intention of the project was

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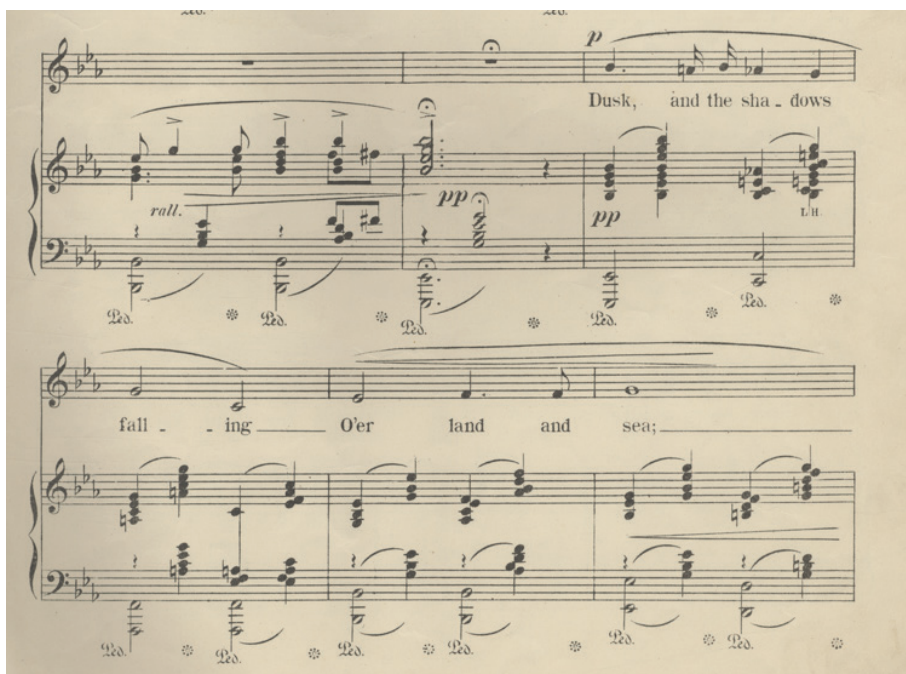*Correspondence: Theresa Cronk, Email: theresa_cronk@hotmail.com

Figure 1. Excerpt from sheet music for 'Somewhere a voice is calling me'.[2]
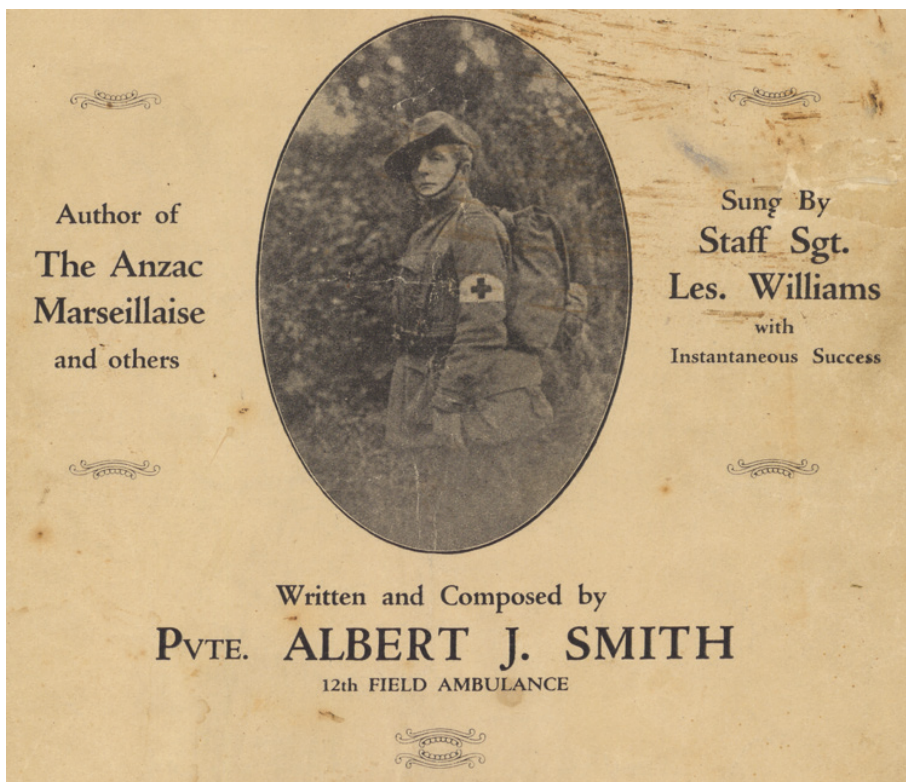

Figure 2. Except from cover of sheet music for 'Give me dear Australia'.[3]

to make music of the First World War period more accessible to a wider audience. All elements of the *Music and the First World War* project were brought together as an online exhibition. The online exhibition deliverable can be accessed via the Memorial's website.[1]

Work on the *Music and the First World War* project commenced in 2014. The project evolved out of research being undertaken at the time into the Research Centre collection to find stories relevant to music during the First World War period. There was interest in doing something with this research so that the knowledge could be shared and not disappear back into the archives. From the beginning, this was a very ambitious project that contained several outputs. In early 2017, the overall project was divided into four phases. At that time, it was estimated that the project would take another 2 years to complete.

The first phase of this project involved identifying diaries and letters in the Research Centre collection that mentioned titles of songs, references to musical performances or a strong connection with a musical performer or bandsman as well as printed sheet music or concert programs. A subject-based collection guide for sheet music held in the collection, related to the First World War, was also to be published online during this part of the project.

The second phase involved the online release of sound recordings specifically recorded for this project and the digitised version of associated collection items (diaries, letters, published sheet music and concert programs). This also included investigating and recording the connections between the collection items and people and publishing these online. During this phase of the project, short biographies for known entertainers and composers who served with the AIF were to be written and published online, particularly those who had been identified as members of battalion bands.

The third phase involved the presentation of research for the *Music and the First World War* project in the form of a display in the Research Centre. This also included investigating possibilities for a data visualisation of the location of concerts, music performed, people involved and the music itself.

The fourth phase involved recording all the research produced in the First World War subject guide for future enquiries and digitisation projects, targeting the acquisition of specific sheet music titles not held in the collection and amending existing catalogue records if required.

This was the original project plan. In the end, some of the deliverables outlined above were consolidated in other ways or removed from the project altogether.

At the time that this project commenced, the Research Centre was digitising diaries and letters for the major First World War centenary project, *Anzac Connections*. The initial collections required for the *Music and the First World War* project were digitised as part of the *Anzac Connections* project. This included 26 collections of diaries and letters that had belonged to bandsmen, musically trained individuals or connections to the role of music in war. An additional 31 pieces of sheet music belonging to Ernest Nicholls, a performer with The Aussies Concert Party at Perham Downs during the First World War, were also included.

The digitisation of these collections started in October 2014. Part of this digitisation process required individually listing the contents of all selected collections down to item level and obtaining the appropriate copyright clearances. This listing process assisted with the discovery of the collections online. From beginning to end, given the complexities of some of these collections, the digitisation of these items took approximately 2 years to complete instead of the expected 6 months.

Among the collections digitised were the papers of Frank Reinhardt Fischer. Fischer was the brother of the Australian soprano Elsa Stralia who was performing in London during the First World War. He was also a talented singer and served with the 6th Battalion during the war. His collection of letters written to his family is full of references to well-known performers of the period, whom he met whenever he caught up with Elsa in England, and information

about the concerts that he organised. On 29 July 1918, he wrote, 'there is no doubt that the Digger's enjoy a bit of music'.[4] Fischer was killed in France in September 1918.[5] After his death, Charles Gould mentioned in a letter to Elsa Stralia, 'Frank was beloved by the whole of our battalion, his splendid disposition and his voice made him the friend of us all when we were resting out of the line, and when we were fighting the enemy, his fearlessness and courage won the admiration of everyone'.[6]

It was Hector McLarty, however, who really summed up the effect of music on Australian soldiers. McLarty arrived on Gallipoli during the landing on 25 April 1915 and remained until the evacuation from Gallipoli on 20 December 1915. He was awarded the Military Medal on 16 August 1917 for his actions and bravery in the field at Messines, Belgium. On 18 December 1916, after 2 years of active service with the 3rd Field Artillery Brigade, McLarty wrote:

> Inside the gun pit a warm cheery fire is burning. For the last four hours a phonograph has been enthralling us. The pit is an inviting spot … Round one side sit six soldiers, drinking in the music as if it were the strains of a Celestial Band – to them it is. The glow of the fire reflects each face. Their appearance is not prepossessing, for dirt has seamed their faces and their ragged mud-splattered clothes are wonderful to behold. Each face has its different characteristics, but for all the moment, bear that far away look which indicates thoughts of home. Personally, I am enthralled. The phonograph has taken hold of my heart strings. You see we have been on the Somme for a long while. It has been pretty rough. I hope I never see another eight weeks like it. We are tired and just about at the end of our strength and a touch of music sends me half mad.[7]

Only some of the 31 pieces that had belonged to Ernest Nicholls were included in the 100 songs that were digitised and then professionally recorded for this project. The bulk of the 100 pieces selected for the *Music and the First World War* project were digitised as an exhibition support project for the planned display in the Research Centre reading room.

At this time, the Memorial had a well-established procedure for clearing the copyright of unpublished archival records for digitising and publishing online, although not so much for published sheet music, and certainly not for recording this music. A new process for copyright clearances was required for this project. This involved liaising with the Australasian Performing Rights Association (APRA) to confirm the status of the songs selected and contacting publishing houses directly. In some instances, this required contacting publishing houses that had assumed the operations of long-defunct publishing houses. It was frustrating to find a great story about a song, confirm that it was held in the collection and then discover that it was still in copyright. This happened several times and each occurrence entailed a return to the drawing board. Eventually, a list of 100 songs was confirmed for the project. A list of some of these can be seen in Figure 3.

The pieces that were recorded were primarily selected due to references in diaries and letters written by soldiers from the First World War period or mentions in concert programs from the period. Others were selected if there was a strong story associated with the item or if it was representative of the sentiments of the period. Also selected were songs that were either written by a soldier serving in the Australian Imperial Force or which were owned by someone who used particular copies of the music during the war. There were also some songs selected because they were mentioned in Australian newspapers during the First World War period.

As you can imagine, these songs are quite different to the songs that we sing today but it was thought that these songs should be shared with a new generation of listeners so that they would not be forgotten. Some were, indeed, very much a product of their time but the majority confirmed that a good song is always a good song, even over 100 years later. Songs like 'A

Original Sheet Music (100)

[Lyric sheet] Its a Long Way Back to Sydney

[Sheet music] All the Trumpets: Stand to Your Horses

[Sheet music] Annie Laurie

[Sheet music] Anzacs, well done!

[Sheet music] A perfect day

[Sheet music] A soldier's life

[Sheet music] A Soldier's Thought of Home

[Sheet music] Australia is the Land for Me

[Sheet music] Australia's Bonny Boys in Navy

[Sheet music] Invercargill March

[Sheet music] It's a Long, Long Way to Tipperary [music]: as sung by the English Expeditionary Force whilst marching through France

[Sheet music] I Want to Go Home

[Sheet music] Just a khaki soldier and a little maid

[Sheet music] Just Try to Picture Me Back Home in Tennessee

[Sheet music] Laddie in khaki: (The girl who waits at home)

[Sheet music] The Kaiser's boast

[Sheet music] The Laddies Who Fought and Won

[Sheet music] The Lost Chord

[Sheet music] The Old Brigade

[Sheet music] The rosary : Le rosarie

[Sheet music] The ruddy platoon

[Sheet music] The singing soldiers

[Sheet music] The soldier's homecoming : describing the arrival of a troopship

Figure 3. Selection of titles featured in the Music and the First World War project.[8]

Figure 4. MimsyXG database interface showing different modules.

perfect day', which was written by Carrie Jacobs-Bond in 1909, published in 1910 and enormously popular during the First World War period. The lyrics of this song relate sitting with your thoughts as the sun sets, reflecting on the joys of the day and saying farewell to friends. The song was performed by the composer herself at American training camps during the First World War.[9] The song went on to be described by some as the song of the 20th century, with reports that when it was at the height of its popularity it was not possible to go to a party in Australia without someone playing it or another of Jacobs-Bond's songs at the end of the evening to signal that it was time for guests to leave.[10] Jacobs-Bond is reported to have become the first female to make a million dollars from her music and she wrote the lyrics to this song while visiting friends in California.[11] It was 3 months later, while driving across the Mojave Desert, that she came up with the melody.[12]

The collection management system that supported the project was the museum collection management system known as Mimsy XG (Figure 4). This database consists of several modules that inter-connect and allow links to be made between catalogue records, media records and people records. This database was also the Memorial's main means of publishing collection data on the web, so getting a framework that delivered the original project concept was crucial.

This project included items from across three curatorial areas of the Memorial:

(1) Published Collections who manage the sheet music
(2) Sound Collections who manage the audio recordings
(3) Digitised Collections who manage the digitisation of the sheet music

Each of these curatorial areas required their own catalogue record for their derivative of each song title. This culminated in a total of 300 catalogue records.
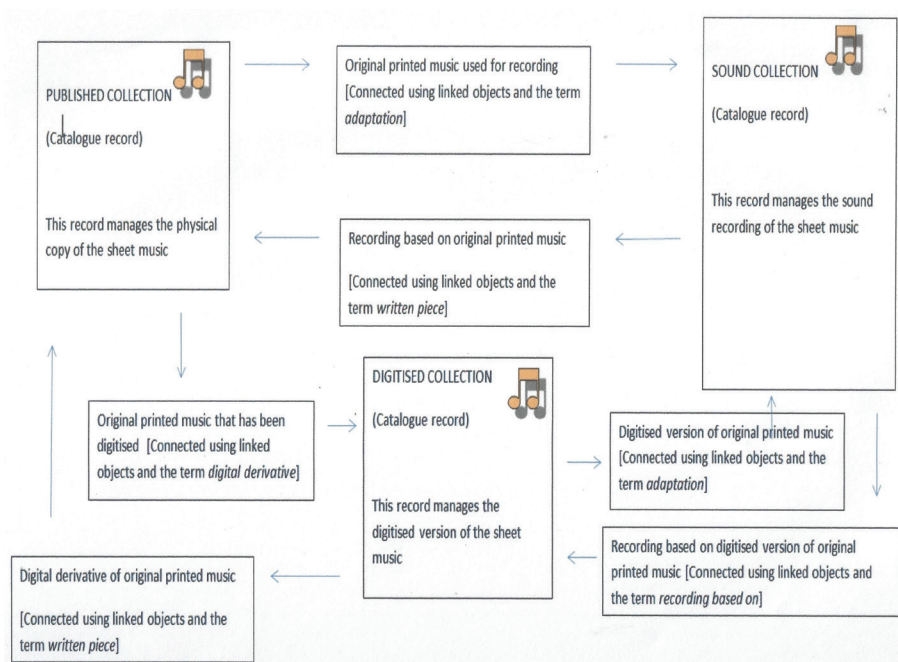

Figure 5. Database linkage model developed for catalogue records in MimsyXG.

The project team brought a variety of skills together to produce the project with some members having musical knowledge and others exhibiting technical skills with the database. The project required developing a model to explain the linkages to be made in MimsyXG (Figure 5) between catalogue records for the sound recordings, the digitised version of the sheet music and the physical copy of the sheet music. This was easier said than done as there were five versions of this model created before it was adopted. The reason for this was the intricacies of the project objective and its representation in the collection management database.

Each of these parts would have its own catalogue record and be linked together. The three catalogue records are linked together using a specific field in MimsyXG and a phrase to explain the type of relationship. The chosen phrases were adaptation, written piece, digital derivative and recording based on.

These phrases were crucial to the publishing framework as they had to be unique in order to ensure that there was no impact on other parts of the collection management system or that catalogue records unrelated to the project were not included when the catalogue records were published online.

The database linkage model shown in Figure 6 illustrates the links for other supporting collections that added to the story of the selected pieces. Another model was developed to make these links. The aim was to clearly show the connections to each piece of sheet music. The biggest collections which related to the sheet music were the concert programs found in Published Collections. It was known that some people performed specific songs at particular concerts and that the programs for these concerts were held in the collection. These were linked to and from the relevant sheet music using the phrase 'Subject'.

A decision was made to not link performers directly to the sheet music catalogue records. It was felt that there was more flexibility in linking concert programs to the sheet music because in doing so, it was not implied that the digitised copy of the sheet music was used in the
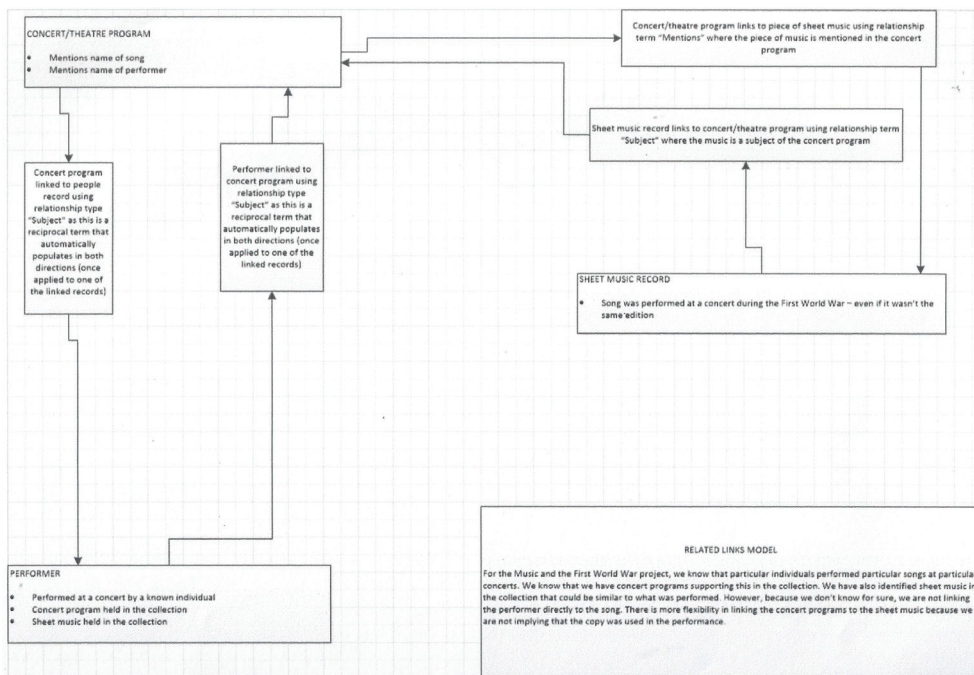

Figure 6. Database linkage model developed for supporting collections in MimsyXG.

rendition by each performer. These were linked to concert programs using the phrase 'subject'. The corresponding link from the concert programs used the phrase 'mentions'.

Some of these linkages became very complicated, but none more so than the database linkage model developed specifically for parodies. This model combined the existing two linkage models for catalogue records in MimsyXG. It defined the relationships between the physical collection record, the sound recording and the digital version as well as the related object, which is the parody. There were three parodies included in the project and each one of them required developing a visual model like the diagram in Figure 4, to ensure that the relationship phrases were entered correctly into the database.

The diagram in Figure 7 is the most complicated of the parody models as both the original song and the parody were recorded for 'It's a long, long way to Tipperary'. For 'It's a long way back to Sydney', four relationship phrases were required rather than the usual three, because it is based on a combination of original music and parody lyrics. Both had to be accounted for in the links. This diagram was originally created and used with different colours signifying the different catalogue records. For the purposes of this article, the diagram is in black and white. The top half relates to the original song 'It's a long, long way to Tipperary'. There are several boxes that include a relationship phrase of 'recording based on', 'subject', 'written piece' and 'adaptation', and these are linked back to other boxes representing the corresponding catalogue record. The bottom half relates to the parody titled 'It's a long way back to Sydney' and it also illustrates the relationship phrases adopted.

Originally, bright green squares showed the phrases used for the digital version, pale blue squares related to the sound recording and charcoal grey boxes related to the physical copy of the sheet music for 'It's a long, long was to Tipperary'. The mid-blue boxes related to phrases used in 'It's a long way back to Sydney', for the digital version, the bright yellow boxes related to the physical copy of the lyrics, and the pale green boxes related to the sound recording.
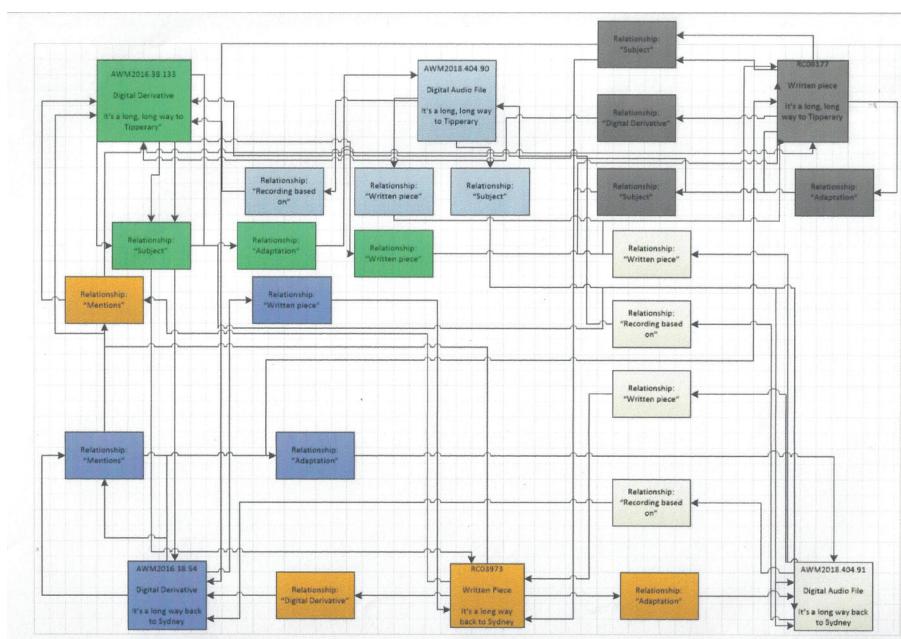

Figure 7. Parody Database Linkage Model showing linkages for the song 'It's a long, long way to Tipperary' and the parody 'It's a long way back to Sydney'.
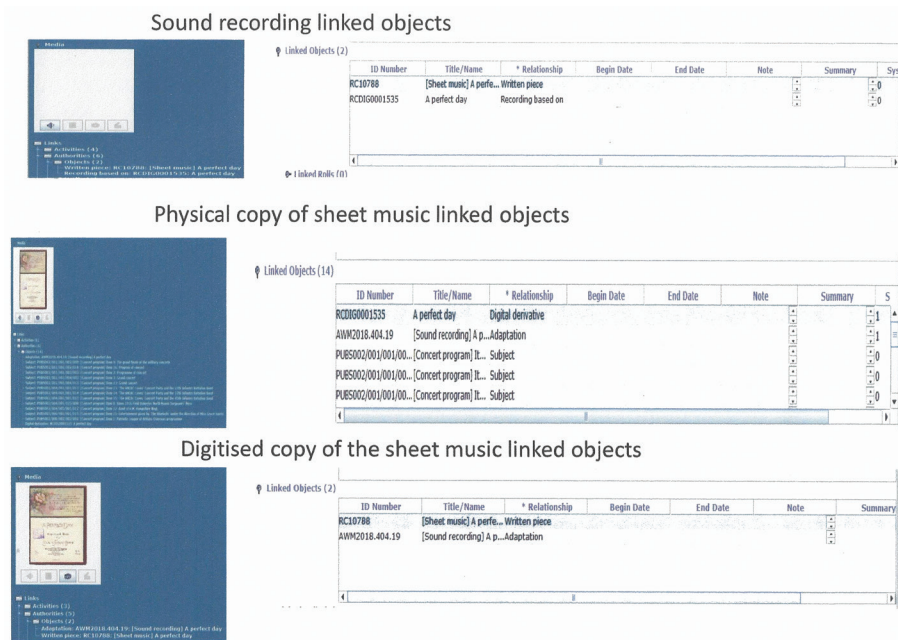
Figure 8. Linked object field collection database excerpts from catalogue records for 'A Perfect Day'.

As a side note, this parody became so popular that it was published in a Swedish magazine during 1915 and then re-published in an Australian newspaper for the Scandinavian migrant community.[13] Many soldiers were also sending the lyrics for the parody home in their letters, and these were also published by many local newspapers around Australia.[14]

The three individual models described above all came together in MimsyXG. Figure 8 features excerpts from the collection database showing the relationship phrases as they were used in the linked object field on the catalogue records for the classifications of Sound, Published Collections and Digitised Collection.
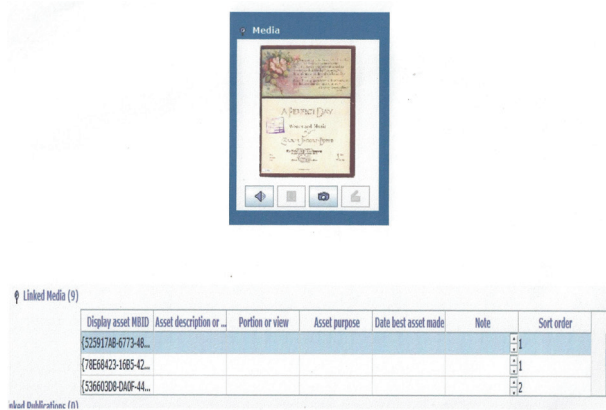
Figure 9. Media and linked media field excerpt from catalogue record for 'A Perfect Day'.

Figure 9 features an excerpt from the catalogue record for the physical copy of the sheet music for the song 'A perfect day'. Underneath the image, a highlighted box of a bell with sound and a camera can be seen. This indicates that media has been linked to the catalogue record.

One of the most important things achieved during this project relates back to the original concept of displaying the original sheet music and the sound recording together. This was not something that had been done for any project prior to this and it presented a new set of challenges. It was not known how to refer to a sound recording on a catalogue record that was just for a physical copy of the sheet music. Using the linked media functionality of MimsyXG, it was possible to combine the music and image all on the one record while still maintaining the links to other relevant records. However, as this was a new process, this meant changing the web rules so that the newly added images and Mp3 recording would show up on a record that was usually designed only for text.

The result of this was that the catalogue record for the physical version of each song now displays on the web with digital images of the sheet music displaying at the very top, ahead of information and a description of the physical copy. Underneath the description that includes information about the song and its composers is the historical description section that was created for this project. The historical description features information about performances of this song during the First World War and references the linked objects that mention the song such as concert programs and the individuals who performed the song during this period. There is also a link to download a copy of the sheet music and an embedded copy of the sound recording. An example of this can be seen in Figure 10 which

Figure 10. Elements that display on the online version of the catalogue record for the song 'A Perfect Day'.

shows the elements described above as they appear on the online version of the catalogue record for 'A Perfect Day'.

Another section of the online catalogue records for the Music and the First World War project is titled 'Related Information' (Figure 11). From here it is possible to click to the catalogue records for other items in the collection that reference this song and from those records, through to the biographies of some of the soldiers who performed these songs during the First World War. You can also click through to find more pieces of music held in the collection by each composer or find other songs that have similar themes or subjects.

One of the biggest benefits of this project beyond the ability to tell the stories of the performers, the history of these songs during the First World War period and the stories behind the writing of these songs, is that the project provided a means to do this and bring it all together in one location. It provided a means to place the songs in their social context during the First World War. It is possible to look at the songs and see which ones were most popular at welcome home events, which ones were popular for fundraising concerts and those that didn't really receive much attention. The project has also provided a vehicle to tell the stories of everyone involved in the writing and performing of these songs. People who have long been

Figure 11. Related information: objects, subjects and people for physical copy of the sheet music for 'A Perfect Day'.

Figure 12. Photograph of Corporal William Darwin, 7th Battalion, AIF taken in c1930s.[15]

forgotten and deserve to have their stories told. One of these people is Corporal William Darwin of the 7th Battalion who is pictured in Figure 12.

Notes

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2. Australian War Memorial, [Sheet Music] 'Somewhere a Voice Is Calling', Digital Scan of Sheet Music, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, ACT, n.d., available at https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C211529, accessed 21 September 2021.
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6. Charles Henry Gould, 'Letter of Condolence from Captain Charles Henry Gould to Elsa Stralia, France, 17 August 1918', Fischer, Frank Reinhardt (Lieutenant, b.1888 – d.1918), Australian War Memorial, 1918, available at https://s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/awm-media/collection/AWM2016.30.56/bundled/AWM2016.30.56.pdf, accessed 10 September 2021.

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10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. Australian War Memorial, [Lyric Sheet] Its a Long Way Back to Sydney, Australian War Memorial, n.d., available at https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1141469, accessed 21 September 2021.

14. Ibid.

15. 'Councillor Darwin', S6.3.1 – Album Projects (Photocopies), Victorian Bands' League Archive, Victoria, n.d. Sergeant William Darwin served during the First World War with the 7th Battalion, Australian Imperial Force and was also a member of the 7th Battalion Band. Darwin participated in the landing at Gallipoli on 25 April 1915 and served there until he was admitted to hospital on 18 September 1915. He had been buried by a shell explosion and dug out, unconscious, after 3 ½ hours. He wrote the poem, 'Anzacs, Well Done!' while recuperating in Scotland and returned to Australia in 1916. This poem became the lyrics for the song of the same name which was published about 1917. Australian War Memorial, Sergeant William Darwin, Australian War Memorial, Collection, n.d., available at https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/P11036419, accessed 21 September 2021.