

PRESS RELEASE

Bamboo at heart of £423k Rhodesia Project

The University of the West of England (UWE) in collaboration with Bristol's British Empire and Commonwealth Museum has chosen the Bamboo software suite for a major digitisation project on the archives of the Rhodesian army. A £423,000 grant has been awarded for this work by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the project is expected to run over the next three years. The results will be presented at a public conference, and provide the basis for output such as papers, books and theses.

At present the archive is sitting in hundreds of uncatalogued boxes at the Empire Museum. Researchers who have investigated the boxes have found gems such as poignant photographs of soldiers on both sides of the war for independence; intelligence reports; operational instructions, and policy debates exposing the strengths and weaknesses of a doomed but desperate government. However there is no way of locating specific documents and no organising principle behind the collection, which was saved from destruction after independence in 1980 and smuggled into South Africa.

The Bamboo software, developed by the Cambridge firm Lemur Consulting, is designed specifically for these types of large databases on PCs or the web. It handles multimedia data including text, images, audio and video and uses a combination of relational (Boolean) retrieval with the powerful system of probabilistic (Bayesian) retrieval. Searching is very fast and intuitive and Bamboo can run on a server, allowing many users to access the data at once using standard web browsers. Commenting on their choice of software, Project leader Dr Diana Jeater, Principal Lecturer in African History in UWE's Faculty of Humanities, Languages and Social Sciences, and also Chair of the Britain Zimbabwe Society said:

"We needed a package which could handle and search across mixed media and unstructured materials, quickly and accurately, and then present findings clearly. Bamboo is excellent for this, and our data will be held in a highly compressed and efficient form and may be input and output as

industry-standard XML. Lemur Consulting developed Bamboo as an efficient and flexible tool for humanities computing, they have a proven track record with sustainable software, their costs are competitive and their provision of support is consonant with an academic project."



Project Leader, Dr Diana Jeater

Also referring to Bamboo, Research Fellow Tim Lovering, who is a military historian and trained archivist, commented:

"The ability to make unexpected associations and connections in our data will be an immensely valuable tool for users researching the collection. Crucially, Bamboo allows a search query to be any shape or pattern of words. This flexibility, combined with the chances of Bamboo finding a range of records relating to the same theme, will greatly expand the potential for users to make new discoveries which will enable them to apply the material in innovative ways."

The project will produce a comprehensive searchable catalogue of this unique collection, with user-friendly web-based access, and a guide to the contents. Up to 10,000 pages of material will also be digitised and included in the Aluka Struggles for Freedom in Southern Africa collection, which documents the liberation struggles in southern Africa since the end of World War II. Aluka is a separate project supported in part by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

For more information on Bamboo and to arrange a demonstration, please contact Mr Charlie Hull at Lemur Consulting on tel/fax: 08700 118334, email: charlie@lemurconsulting.com