Binders Full of History: The Forgotten Interwar History of The University of Melbourne

“There are those who think the University of Melbourne different from any other University in the world. And so it is, and so it ought to be.”

The first comprehensive written history of the University of Melbourne began in the 1920s, during Leigh Scott’s post as the University’s Chief Librarian. The other contributors were S.S. Addison and lead author A.W. Greig. Work continued well into the 1930s, before it was deposited into The University of Melbourne Archives (UMA) unfinished, unpublished and effectively discarded. My research into this forgotten University history – what I term the “Melbourne Manuscripts” – began when I found a digitised record of a handwritten note that had been affixed to a binder that contained research notes and annotated drafts. The note, written by Leigh Scott, read: “The intention to publish was abandoned when Professor Ernest Scott undertook, at the request of the Chancellor Sir John H. MacFarland, to write his history of the university.”

In undertaking my research, I set myself two tasks: to examine the unpublished work, and to find out why the Melbourne Manuscripts and their associated volumes were discarded.

The starting point for my research was Professor Ernest Scott’s History of the University, published in 1936, commissioned by MacFarland in spite of the Melbourne Manuscripts. Indeed, MacFarland almost certainly knew of Greig’s ongoing research into the University since they worked in the same office. Further, on the recommendation of MacFarland, Greig had been selected as the University’s representative for the State of Victoria’s centennial history published in 1934 – amongst other sections, he wrote the part on the University.

At first it might seem obvious why MacFarland selected E. Scott, the respected Professor of History, but the nature and scope of history was different at that time. Most academic history – indeed, E. Scott’s best work – was grand volumes on empire, nations, war and male explorers. The University history was, conversely, concerned with the intimate and the local, the social and the cultural; themes that did not spark E. Scott’s interest. In all probability, E. Scott, on the brink of retirement, accepted...
the commission reluctantly and only because it had come from a venerable colleague. E. Scott's indifference is reflected in a letter he wrote to his wife Emily: "It will for the most part be rather dull stuff and more detailed than I should like it to be."

While E. Scott's foundational role in formalising Australian history is well known, the considerable work of Greig remains under appreciated outside of the Royal Historical Society of Victoria (RHSV), of which he was a founding member. Greig was an employee of the University for over 25 years, mostly in the Registrar's office, and so the University held significance for him. During the interwar period, Greig was also a vocal exponent of local history, conveying his antiquarian imagination into popular discourse. Although he was a published author, most Melburnians encountered Greig through his articles in the Argus, traversing diverse topics from country roads to churches to parks and pleasure gardens. Indeed, it was during the course of my Honours thesis on pleasure gardens that I first stumbled upon Greig. His personal archive, held by UMA and the RHSV, includes government records, published histories, memoirs, biographies and early newspaper articles. At the RHSV, Greig's work on the University is indexed with his notes for the centennial history. Research for these two projects – the centennial and University histories – was not only undertaken concurrently, but also shared a similar degree of significance for Greig. In contrast, E. Scott's card index (held by UMA) contains no references to the University.

Despite their draft form, the Melbourne Manuscripts yield some interesting insights. They might be considered alongside E. Scott's published history, other contemporary university histories and subsequent publications. The Melbourne Manuscripts are more thorough than E. Scott's published history, though they lack his colourful prose. With hundreds of pages of unedited text, for the curious researcher they offer a distinct account of the University's development. Further, they demonstrate a remarkable independence and a peculiar sophistication, untainted by institutional demands since they were neither commissioned by the university nor modified for publication. As drafts the manuscripts contain some typographical and factual errors (as did the published book).

More importantly, however, they record and interpret the history of the University and the local community, while also yielding insights about how local history was written at the time.

These manuscripts are anchored in historical sources and also display interesting narrative, interpretive and theoretical features. The narrative structure of the manuscripts was straightforward: Greig explored foundations, L. Scott studied 1900–20, and Addison 1920–29. Each section took a thematic rather than narrative approach. Themes included development, progress and organisation, academics and officers, entrance requirements, undergraduate life and external relationships with government, country and benefactors. Despite their merit, the Melbourne Manuscripts had little influence on the published book. E. Scott employed his own approach, which proved unpopular. The book
sold worse than expected, and there was scant public interest. While E. Scott received no public criticism at the time, after his retirement Professor Kenneth Bailey – a former pupil of E. Scott – campaigned at University Council meetings for changes in the way history was studied at the University. Since then, the book has been subject to critique by Geoffrey Blainey, Stuart Macintyre, R.J. Selleck and others. An unsatisfied Greig continued work on the Melbourne Manuscripts into the 1940s; though his comprehensive works had few admirers, so it is unlikely the Melbourne Manuscripts would have been received any more positively had they been published.

In addition to the Manuscripts and the binder note that triggered my research, the volumes at UMA hold records relevant to both the published and unpublished histories. The volumes were assembled by Greig and L. Scott to assist E. Scott with his research. Before returning the volumes, E. Scott added to them some documents from his research. Greig added more documents to the volume, the last of which is dated 1942. The volumes were ultimately deposited into UMA in 1968 by the then retiring registrar.

James P. Lesh

James Lesh recently completed a Bachelor of Arts with Honours from the University of Melbourne, which incorporated a thesis on nineteenth-century Melbourne and its Cremorne Pleasure Gardens. That project followed on from his award of the A.G.L. Shaw Summer Fellowship from the State Library of Victoria. James will be undertaking postgraduate study in cities and urban cultures in the U.K. from September 2013.

The Department of Fine Arts Collection

The Department of Fine Arts at the University of Melbourne was established in 1946, when Professor Joseph Terence Burke (1912–1992) was appointed the inaugural Herald Chair of Fine Arts. Conceived of by Sir Daryl Lindsay, the Chair was designed, in the words of the financier Keith Murdoch, “for teaching the understanding and appreciation of the fine arts and the application of their principles and practice to the life of the community”. Beyond being a role confined to the University of Melbourne, the Herald Chair occupied by Burke from 1946, through to his retirement in late 1978, was fundamental in developing art education and appreciation in Melbourne and more broadly in Australia.

The Collection itself consists of several consignments dating from 1978 until the most recent deposit in 1992. Spanning the period of Burke’s term as Chair, the Collection contains committee papers, records, lecture notes, correspondence and photographs. The scope of the Collection is as broad as Burke’s legacy to the evolving academic and developing nature of Australian society in the years post World War Two. The papers highlight the evolution of art education at the University of Melbourne, from the courses offered, the academics involved, to the financial concerns and establishment of international scholarships. Beyond being a historical record of the accomplishments and timeline of the Department of Fine Art, this Collection shows the great contribution the holder of the Chair made to Australian society.

The papers and documents within this collection show Burke to be an intelligent, witty and charismatic individual, whose expertise was drawn upon regularly, on all matters from education to the establishment of various state and national schemes, societies and government building projects. Far from being a dry series of documents, the Collection provides an insight into the life and the mind of arguably one of the most influential figures in Australian art education in the latter half of the twentieth century.

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Hannah Gwyther

Hannah is a student volunteer creating an online finding aid for the Joseph Burke collection.
Images of the Past

Figure. 1. Glass Plate Negative ‘C’ size/265 [GPNC/265] Original scan, 2013.0062, University of Melbourne Archives.

Figure. 2. Glass Plate Negative ‘C’ size/265 [GPNC/265] Retouched, 2013.0062, University of Melbourne Archives.
In many ways, this photograph, reproduced digitally from a nineteenth-century full size glass plate negative, represents all that is significant, challenging and fascinating about archives and the practice of collecting and preserving evidence of past experience.

The image is of Bourke Street, Melbourne, facing east towards Spring Street, taken from a location that is somewhere near Queen Street. Not only does it provide useful documentary evidence of a given time in the history of Melbourne’s development and its built environment, it also informs our interpretation of key elements in contemporary archival practice.

The first of these relates to preservation and conservation. Modern technology now enables enhanced and more reliable preservation as well as access to material that was previously too fragile. UMA holds photographic images in a variety of formats, including daguerreotype, ambrotype and glass plate negatives. Each photographic format is housed separately ensuring that each is preserved and packaged as carefully as possible, and that individual items can be handled safely by researchers and UMA staff. This system of storage also enables UMA to monitor preservation conditions and deal with conservation issues as they arise.

Glass plate negatives are extremely fragile, comprised of very thin glass, approximately 1–2 mm in thickness, on which the negative image is captured in emulsion. While undertaking work to re-house some photographic material at risk of damage and deterioration, a packet containing three full-size glass plate negatives was found in UMA’s repository. The packet bore no identification and included the full plate negative from which these images have been reproduced. (Two others were images of Parliament House taken from the northern Spring Street corner.) The negative is 1 mm thick and is shattered into nine pieces, probably from some point of pressure with which it had come into contact. It has, however, remained stable in this state and the emulsion has not yet been damaged by scratches from the broken edges.

Before the negative itself was securely re-housed according to preservation standards, it was scanned in its original condition (Figure 1). As part of archival conservation practice, original photographic images in all formats are often digitised to facilitate access and preserve the original. Archival conservation policy is not to interfere with images in this process but to represent them as accurately as possible to their original condition. However, in some instances manipulation that actually ‘repairs’ damage is considered reasonable so that the digitised image can be explored thoroughly and its use and interest to researchers maximised. In this case, Photoshop was used to fill data in the cracks and allowing us to see the image as it would have appeared when it was first captured (Figure 2).

Preventive conservation methods such as re-housing ensure safe storage of our collections. However access to our collections, as in this instance, is often only made possible by new and emerging technology. The discovery, care, recreation and repair of this nineteenth-century image reflect the importance of UMA’s policies and practices. The image also demonstrates the extent to which UMA, as part of the archival and collection sector, has contributed to the continued development of technological solutions to preserve and conserve historical documents and objects.

From our own collection of Mahlstedts Vic Pty Ltd fire insurance plans (Reference No: 1961.0017) we have been able to identify many of the buildings and estimate the date of the photograph to 1890–1895. The advertising signs of different businesses and city industries, modes of transport and dress, as well as infrastructure all hold clues to the era. In collaboration with colleagues from other institutions we have been able to identify the grand, domed structure to the upper right of the photograph as The Opera House at 249 Bourke Street. In this theatre in 1896, American Carl Hertz conducted the first demonstration in Australia of the moving image1. The photograph contributes greatly to our understanding about life in Melbourne in the late nineteenth century.

The image of Bourke Street exemplifies the continuing value and relevance of archival material, and our responsibility both to preserve it and make it accessible. The early buildings it depicts are of relevance today to a variety of researchers – heritage practitioners, curators, historians, and genealogists – who are on a continual quest for evidence of change and development in Melbourne’s ever-changing streetscape.

Kim Burrell, Project Archivist
Denise Driver, Co-ordinator Collection Management

Notes
The Polar Lantern Slides of Sir Raymond Priestley

UMA holds the University of Melbourne’s Department of Geology Collection (Reference No: 1980.0030) which comprises several thousand glass plate negatives as well as an extensive collection of teaching lantern slide sets and lantern slides. Within this collection there is a discrete set of 1,339 lantern slides which were used by the geologist, polar explorer and first salaried Vice-Chancellor, Sir Raymond Edward Priestley (1886–1974), during his Australian lectures on polar exploration. Priestley participated in two Antarctic expeditions: the British Antarctic ‘Nimrod’ Expedition (1907–1909) led by Sir Ernest Shackleton, where he served as a geologist working in association with Tannatt Edgeworth David and Douglas Mawson; and the British Antarctic ‘Terra Nova’ Expedition (1910–1913) led by Robert Falcon Scott where Priestley served as a meteorologist. Besides the expeditions in which Priestly participated, the set also includes photographs from the Imperial Trans-Antarctic ‘Endurance’ Expedition (1914–1916) led by Ernest Shackleton, and the British Arctic Air Route Expedition (1930–1931) led by H.G. Watson.

The slides complement the existing Raymond Edward Priestley collection held by UMA, which includes his Australian Diary. According to the diary, Priestley travelled with three sets of slides for use in his lectures, which were predominantly public talks within Melbourne and regional Victoria. Topics included: general Antarctica, Scott’s expedition, Shackleton’s expedition, polar ice, polar animal life, psychological aspects of polar exploration, and Australian involvement in the Antarctic.

Some of the photographs are from Priestley’s own camera as well as those by photographers Frank Hurley and Herbert George Ponting, surgeon George Murray Levick, geologist Frank Debenham, physicist Charles Seymour Wright, pilot and photographer Henry Cozens, surveyor and ornithologist Frederick Chapman, chief surveyor Alfred Stephenson, meteorologist Quintin Riley, and Chief of scientific staff and biologist Edward Adrian Wilson. Additional photographs within the set were sourced by Priestley via illustrations, geographical maps and geological specimens from publications. Originals are located across many other institutions:

In back numbers of the ‘Illustrated London News’ today I saw a good photograph of pancake ice on the Canadian Thames, and also some very amusing pictures of a Scott episode from a Jubilee film. I should like some time to get copies of these. The first would make an excellent addition to my lantern slides.

15 July 1935
Priestley annotated his slides by hand using a numbered sequence on the paper frame (there are also several which are printed or not numbered). While the slides are numbered up to 4066, the UMA collection is incomplete, comprising a total of only 1339 slides. An entry in *Australian Diary* sheds some light on what happened to the remainder of his original set:

I found some time this afternoon, however, to start on the ‘weeding’ of my lantern slide collection. I shall never give historical lectures again so I have determined to hand over the majority of the slides to the Geology department here and only take back one small cabinet full from which, with the others in my lecture boxes, I can make up half a dozen different lectures of general interest.

1 November 1937
*Australian Diary* [Volume] 10

Christine Elias and Emily Jane Lochowicz
Project Archivists

Project Archivists funded by a grant from the Cultural Collections Advisory Group

Find polar lantern slides online: http://go.unimelb.edu.au/hz6n

The Zwar, the acting President made a little speech of welcome and I gave my general Antarctic lantern lecture. The lecture, though I say it myself, was good, and was very well received. I find that with less slides – and I only showed 50 – and after not having given it for some months, it comes fresher and easier, besides which I had made some changes in the slides which also altered the narrative.

3 May 1935
In February 2010, I began a project at UMA with the rather imposing title of “Collection Management – Identification of Access and Ownership”. I agreed to undertake the project because of my interest and expertise in copyright issues (I had been the Australian Library and Information Association’s Copyright Officer for two years.) As it happens, my expertise has never been called for, but “an aptitude for interpreting ambiguous documentation ...” – as stated in the position description – certainly has!

To explain briefly, for the last three years I have been reading through the UMA correspondence files looking for clues to the conditions under which UMA acquired collections. This may sound dull, but it is far from it. In the process of reading and annotating these files, I have developed an eclectic knowledge of parts of the collection and also of the first archivist, Frank Strahan, who worked there from 1960–1995. Strahan was directly responsible for UMA becoming not only a repository for the records of the University, but a major business history archive of world importance. In 1981 he was described in a letter from the University of Sydney archivist, Ken Smith, as the “...entrepreneurial archivist par excellence”.

The filing system used for the correspondence is somewhat haphazard; for example, the letters relating to the acquisition of the Youth Hostel Association of Victoria material is filed under Tasmania, because that was where one of the founders had moved. The letters themselves offer little in the way of clues to the donors’ intentions. Can we infer from the phrase “I wish to give my papers to the Archives” that UMA now owns the collection? These are the puzzles that I have been dealing with in the past three years.

Strahan was a prolific correspondent and his letters were never brief, nor businesslike. Reading them is a reminder of how much incidental, but fascinating, information has been lost with the modern use of email. Although most of the letters are concerned with requests that material be lodged with UMA, in the process of making such requests he touched on other issues, such as the National Trust (he was a very early supporter) and Australian Rules Football (he barracked...
for Carlton). News of his family – wife Lynne and their three sons – also feature in the letters. There are intriguing details such as the time he visited the Shepparton Art Gallery for the opening of an exhibition based on material from the archives. While there, he stayed in Room 28 at the Victoria Hotel and left his dressing gown behind. A letter describes it as “reddish, with a paisley pattern”. There is, however, no mention that he ever got it back. Similarly, there is a series of letters he wrote to a Warrnambool council parking officer, after he received a fine there in 1963. The letters ask that the fine (£1) be waived. Whether or not he succeeded in this request remains a mystery.

Strahan travelled the length and breadth of Victoria in search of records, visiting pastoral properties and newspaper offices, country haberdashers and old mining sites. The files contain letters setting up meetings and arranging accommodation.

His correspondents included not only owners of the collections he hoped to acquire, but archivists in Australia and throughout the world. He was friendly with the first archivist of the University of Sydney, David S. MacMillan, with whom he seemed to share a dislike of the then-recently appointed National Librarian, Harold White (appointed 1960). Their correspondence contains many references to White’s perceived ambition to “corner the market” for business archives. In addition, the letters make (doubtless unwarranted) remarks about White’s inferior taste in wine!

Collecting business archives would seem to be a surprisingly cut-throat business. In a letter to the University of Tasmania Librarian, Strahan refers to the “…continuing truculent opposition from the State Library here”.

Another correspondent was the director of the University of Michigan Historical Collections, Robert M Warner, who went on to become the Sixth Archivist of the United States. Strahan commiserated with Warner about his battles with the Reagan administration over the independence of the National Archivist position.

Strahan’s determination to vigorously pursue historic business records was, in many cases, justified. In the case of the Castlemaine Woollen Mills he was unsuccessful in acquiring the records before many of them were damaged in a disastrous fire in 1981.

Reading the files can be quite nerve-racking at times. I am constantly thinking: will he get the collection or won’t he? Will the State Library make a better offer? Alas, Strahan was not very methodical about documenting the conditions under which collections were acquired and indeed seems almost to have lost interest in them once they were safely in UMA. A later exchange between Trevor Hart (CRA Archivist) and Boris Schedvin in 2001, after Frank retired, refers to the Collection as being “…astounding in its breadth. Unfortunately it is under-processed and consequently underused.” I hope the project that I am currently undertaking will assist in addressing some of the issues of ownership.

Moyra McAllister

Before retirement, Moyra worked in Academic, Parliamentary and Law libraries in the UK, Canada and Australia. She has an interest in Copyright and in the application of Information Technology in libraries.

Digitisation of Wages Books

UMA has completed a joint project with the Castlemaine Historical Society to digitise the wages records of Thompsons of Castlemaine (Reference No: 1977.0133). The twelve volumes and over 400 apprenticeship indentures date back to 1880. The Historical Society’s volunteers will in future index the digital copies, providing a wonderful family history resource.

Katie Wood

Archivist, Access and Outreach and Curator, Malcolm Fraser Collection

UMA Bulletin, No. 33, September 2013

Wages book, July 1890 – August 1893, Thompsons-Byron Jackson, 1977.0133, University of Melbourne Archives.
The Australian Attitude to Business: John Storey at Repco 1945-1955

When he died in 1955 at the early age of 58, John Stanley Storey was widely regarded as the foremost Australian industrialist of his age. Storey had a keen sense of social responsibility, which he inherited from his father (the first Labor Premier of New South Wales). Like his father, he felt a duty to build a strong Australia that could provide higher living standards for all.

Graduating in engineering from Sydney University in 1917, Storey never lost touch with his working class origins in Sydney’s Balmain where his father and uncles began as boilermakers, fitters and welders. He initially enlisted as an officer in the army, but his father advised that learning how to give orders depended first on learning how to take them. He went to the Flanders trenches as a private.

After the First World War, Storey trained as a machinist, eventually setting up his own supply parts business National Motor Springs. As the first president of the Motor Trades Association of NSW he worked hard to strengthen government tariff policy to support the car industry. These efforts continued when he became Director of Manufacturing for General Motors Holden (GMH) in 1935. Storey was responsible for building Holden’s car assembly plants at Pagewood (NSW) and Fishermans Bend (Victoria). He made the Australian manufacturing operations of GMH among the most profitable in GM’s global network, but his achievements were not just based on slavish introduction of American methods. He influenced GM’s US management towards the manufacture of a fully Australian produced car, and also rejected the implementation of US employment methods such as incentive systems, which he did not believe to be appropriate to Australian conditions.

When the Second World War broke out in 1939, Storey’s prestige as an industrialist was such that he was chosen to direct the largest manufacturing project undertaken in Australia – the manufacture of 700 Beaufort bombers for the RAAF, earning him an almost heroic status and the nickname ‘Beaufort’ Storey. In 1945, with war production winding down, Storey was restless for new challenges and was persuaded to take over the role of Chairman and Managing Director of Repco, replacing R.G. (Geoff) Russell (founder of the car parts manufacturer and distributor in 1922), who was retiring, gravely ill with cancer. Storey was chairman of Repco
from 1945 until his death in 1955.


The files reveal Storey was not only a shrewd negotiator, but also a manager who was guided by broader policy considerations. His greatest priority was building a strong Australian-owned components sector, which would ensure the growth of the post-war car industry to benefit Australia, not just foreign investors. All of his takeovers were cooperative rather than aggressive, and were largely funded through the issue of Repco shares in order to avoid government capital restrictions and to conserve operational funds.

The files reveal how Storey’s strategy meant that as large US component suppliers like Lockheed and Borg-Warner began to enter the Australian market in the 1950s, they were required to negotiate with Repco. For example correspondence between Storey and the Vice President of Borg-Warner, J.W. DeLind, reveals how Storey’s strategic move into the manufacturing and development of universal joints, gave him important leverage in negotiating licensing arrangements with the US giant. Similarly his correspondence with R. Butler of the English company Kirkstall over the development of a drop forging joint venture at Clayton reveals Storey was always a social policy driven business strategist, who first took a position on what was best in terms of the national interest and then worked at making it profitable and operationally effective.

The files reveal not just Storey’s sense of the national service obligations of business but also the nature of his ‘Australian’ management style. Storey was not just a visionary, but a working manager. While Repco’s founder, Geoff Russell, always needed to know minor details of the business, Storey was able to effectively manage a much larger business through the extensive use of management delegation. Storey was renowned among his workers and managers not just for his operational knowledge, but also for his willingness to train and give young men responsibility.

Storey worked tirelessly to create a culture of management cooperation and critical interaction. He believed that management failings and poor industrial relations arose chiefly from what Australian workers resented most – the arbitrary use of authority. At Repco, he introduced an ‘overlapping policy’ whereby managers were prevented from making hiring or firing decisions without consultation. His favorite managers at Repco were irreverent larrikins like Jack Pearce and Jack Watts. His long time manager at National Motor Springs was a former activist of Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), who had a police record.

Storey was an effective Australian manager because he remained a ‘stirrer’ at heart. He admired and encouraged critical attitudes to formality and status in his staff. Although Storey was knighted in 1950 and loved golf, he refused to join the Royal Melbourne Club, one of the most prestigious golf clubs in the country. One of his managers, Peter Russell, relates Storey saying at a dinner party that one of his favorite past times was to “go down to the Royal Melbourne with these stuffed shirts and prick their bubble”. According to his boss at GMH, Laurence Harnett, “Storey taught me the Australian attitude to business. Indeed he taught me to be an Australian.”

Denis Nettle

Denis Nettle is a senior lecturer in Business at Victoria University and is currently researching a biography of John Storey 1896–1955

Upcoming Exhibitions

Creativity & Correspondence: The George Paton Gallery Archive 1970–1990

Date: 11–27 September 2013
Venue: George Paton Gallery
Second Floor, Union House
University of Melbourne
Parkville Campus

“The Need for Change”: Malcolm Fraser Public and Private

Date: 2 September–10 November 2013
Venue: Victorian Archives Centre
99 Shiel Street
North Melbourne
On 29 May 2013 the Baillieu Library hosted an exhibition of student research on retail archives. Drawing on the rich collections documenting early Melbourne and Victorian retail history held at UMA, history honours students developed projects to describe aspects of historical experience in the first decades of the twentieth century. Students transcribed documents, reproduced series of correspondence and created material in both digital and poster form in creative and imaginative ways to explore topics such as changes in fashion, the availability and cost of goods in World War One and the Depression, Melbourne retail family experiences in Europe and Australia, gender in retail employment, trade in Asia, and reflections on advertising and poverty during the Depression. One student displayed an Edwardian dress in the style of Foy & Gibson catalogues from the period. Other collections included firms such as Myer Emporium, Crofts Stores, O. Gilpin and Ball and Welch. Students and staff from the School of Historical and Philosophical Studies attended the exhibition. Professor Antonia Finnane, who ran the program, explained that UMA is a rich resource for supporting student learning and research training and thanked the UMA staff for their support. The activity contributed towards student assessment and followed a visit and research experience at UMA earlier in the year.

Katrina Dean
University Archivist
Library Digitised Collections

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University of Melbourne Archives

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http://hdl.handle.net/11343/116384