

Julia Rodwell and Rosalind Smith, “*Beyond the Book: Creating a Digital Exhibition of the Emmerson Collection at State Library Victoria*”

<http://Beyondthebook.slv.vic.gov.au>

The *Beyond the Book* digital exhibition was launched at State Library Victoria in August 2023, celebrating the 2015 bequest of over 5000 early modern rare books and manuscripts by Australia’s foremost twentieth-century book collector, John Emmerson SC. Over his lifetime, Emmerson assembled an astonishing collection of rare books with distinctive interests in the regicide of Charles I and the English Civil War, in royal association copies, in multiple copies and complete runs of editions, and in seventeenth-century poetry. The collection as a whole is an extremely rare archival resource, new to the world and unique to Australia, and has been the subject of four years of research as part of an ARC Linkage project *Transforming the Early Modern Archive: the Emmerson Collection at SLV* (LP180100704). Restrictions associated with the original bequest prevented the wholesale digitisation of the collection, and physical access to the collection is also constrained owing to the fragile nature of these centuries-old materials. These circumstances had the potential to consign this collection to permanent neglect: unseen, unknown and unused, save by a handful of specialist scholars. The *Beyond the Book* digital exhibition was designed to arrest this potential for neglect, and to provide pathways into the collection for a broad range of users.

The exhibition is organised around seven stories that guide the user through John Emmerson’s collection. They deal with Emmerson himself as a collector, the processes through which books were made in the early modern period, and how they were read, owned, and exchanged by book users, from kings and queens to

ordinary people with limited literacy. Other stories trace some of the key political events of the period, from the regicide of Charles I, the troubled reigns of queens, and the experiences of plague, war and fire that were reported through the news. Each story is built around stunning, high resolution images of elements of books, highlighted by zoom, moving today's readers through the pages and drawing their attention to the wealth of information available in the distinct material parts of these books - from bookplates, to bindings, to holes and smudges - as well as to key passages and images of interest. Three-dimensional photogrammetry has been applied to the embroidered bindings in the collection, allowing intimate encounters with the book as object as viewers can rotate the book to view it from all angles and zoom in on details. Our visualisations in the exhibition allow a more intimate encounter with the book as object than that permitted in the rare book reading room, and provides kinds of access to these objects that are usually only available to early modern scholars to everyone able to view the digital exhibition.

Behind these stories is a web of relationships, captured in data. From inception to interface, data played a crucial role in the development of the exhibition. Through the practice of modelling and visualising data, the many 'entities' – people, places, events, etc. – that contribute to a book's journey through time and space became apparent. The outcome of our experiment with this methodology is the 'Linked Data' index – a key component of the exhibition that invites viewers to explore these entities and how they relate to the Emmerson Collection and beyond.