



FishNet Post #3: The Long Winding Road to the Database

In October 2021, I was hired by the Scottish Fisheries Museum to deliver an exciting new project: the creation of [an online database for a Recognised as Nationally Significant Collection](#). This is the story of many months of hard work spent developing said database.

A little personal background: I did not enter this project as a complete beginner. In 2017, I volunteered as a keyworder, cataloguing and tagging images in the collection. Though I left due to finding paid work, I never forgot the Museum. When I saw this project advertised, I leapt at the chance to work with the photographs again, especially since by then I had started on a career in working in museums. It was a delight and an honour to have been chosen for this post.

The First Step: Finding the Right People

Upon starting the job, I had to hit the ground running. On my first day, I was given the project specifications: we needed a database that could do the following:

- Store 16,000 images
- Display those images and their information, including the keywords that had been so carefully inputted earlier by myself and other volunteers.
- Enable us to modify the keywords as we require.
- Transfer all the data from the old database to the new.
- Be able to search using the keywords, either by themselves or combined with either other keywords or a text search.
- Enable the creation of accounts to facilitate remote volunteers.
- Allow people to comment and give feedback.
- Make the photos available for sale.
- AND on top of all that, keep within our budget.

Quite a list of requirements! I immediately (quite literally: it was my first day) set about comparing the products available on the surprisingly large collections and digital asset management software market to find out which best suited our needs. Some had been those the museum scouted out, others I found myself.

After a lot of complex spreadsheets and many hours spent analysing various sites already out there, I narrowed it down to five companies who looked the most promising. Out of those, I had three meetings, one for each company, to see their software in action and judge whether it was right for us. At the end of the day, the choice was obvious. Only one company could provide us with what we are looking for and within our budget.

We hired iBase.

Part 2: Development

They were happy to take on the contract. From there, it was a matter of giving them our specifications and signing off on the work. When all the agreements had been made, we waited.

And waited. I am familiar with many software developers, and they tell me that a project always takes far longer than you expect. In the meantime, I worked on the exhibition "[Snapshots of Memory](#)" and made plans for migrating our data.

In March 2022, the first draft of the database came in. We had two free change requests, and while what we received was good, it was not perfect, lacking in the functionality that we needed and required a few cosmetic changes. So, we sent it back along with new specs. Another month passed, and the database returned, looking much better but still requiring some polish. Along with the iBase guys, we kept tweaking it. It was around this time that we noticed a fairly critical lack of functionality that we needed. Although by then we had used our free changes, since this was important, the guys at iBase agreed to do it for free.

Thank you, Matt and Glynn! Your work made it possible, and I am grateful to you for putting up with our many, many requests!

Part 3: Populating the Database

With the software in place, it was time to fill it up with photos! I began by uploading everything I knew was complete from having volunteered on the project. About 5,000 fully described, fully keyworded, fully optimised images were exported from our old system and loaded into the shiny new database. Call me strange, but this was the best part of the process for me. I got a lot of satisfaction from uploading the files and sorting them into folders, then selecting images to represent those folders.

Eventually, these were all finished, and these are the images that you will be able to see. Behind the scenes are all the other images. These are incomplete, either lacking keywords or descriptions or both. Many are newly digitised, having only been scanned in 2020. I am working hard to finish them and make them available for viewing.

It is here that our remote volunteer programme comes in. I have been recruiting volunteers to help in this enormous task of keywording and describing the rest of the images. So far, we have a small team, but we can always use more! If you are interested, click [here](#) for the full description and instructions on how to apply.

Either way, the rest of the staff at the Scottish Fisheries Museum and I hope that the database will serve the Museum and the public for many years to come. It is wonderful to finally have the collection be accessible to enthusiasts, researchers, and the general audience alike. We hope you enjoy exploring it as much as we enjoyed putting it together! [Check it out!](#)