The History Data Service

This repository, sponsored and housed by the University of Essex, focuses on historical datasets from the UK and British Isles. Major strengths include a lot of easy-to-comprehend background information and a good abstract and metadata associated with each dataset. These metadata pages also follow a set pattern, which seems like it would be useful for serious researchers trying to find the right dataset. It also contains a lot of datasets, covering a wide array of subjects and formats.

Weaknesses include an amount of website unfriendliness; it’s not easy to figure out how to search the catalogue, and when you do find a link, it doesn’t work. It’s also not obvious how to download/order a dataset, or what format it’s currently in: are they all electronic or are some only on paper? The History Data Service is also embedded in a preexisting catalogue, which does not seem to facilitate the process for the casual researcher or non-University of Essex researcher.

What we can learn from this repository:

Positives:

* Add good metadata according to set template
* Include background information

Negatives:

* Browse and search tools should be placed in obvious locations
* Don’t get too complicated; the goal is to facilitate research and data finding, not prove how clever we are