

Partnership and Co-operation in Preservation at the British Library

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1 Introduction

I would like to thank the conference organisers for inviting me to speak to you at this most interesting meeting. I do not think the subject of collaboration and co-operation, in whatever sphere, could be discussed at a more appropriate time.

In this paper, I will describe the experience of developing and promoting partnership and collaboration at the British Library, from a regional, international and institutional level. I will briefly introduce the British Library and its Preservation functions and the political reasons for co-operation. I will describe the areas in which the BL is actively collaborating in preservation, from the strategic to practical conservation to research using new technologies. I will conclude with some observations based on experience at the BL, on why some initiatives flourish and which subjects seem particularly conducive to collaboration.

2 The British Library

The British Library is the national library of the United Kingdom and aims to be the world's leading resource for scholarship, research, and innovation. It provides internationally important reading room services, mainly from its new headquarters building at St Pancras in London, and the world's leading document supply services, mainly from its northern site at Boston Spa in Yorkshire. It provides essential support services for the UK library community, a range of services for the general public, and attracts substantial usage by customers from overseas. The Library's services are based on its outstanding collection, developed over two hundred and fifty years, of more than one hundred and fifty million books, manuscripts, newspapers, maps, sound recordings, photographs, digital items, and works in other formats, representing every age of written civilisation, every written language, and every aspect of human thought. The core of the Library's collection is the comprehensive record of British publishing collected through legal deposit. Its treasures include Magna Carta and the Lindisfarne Gospels, on display in the Exhibition Galleries. The Library is a keystone of the UK academic infrastructure and an important resource for business and industry. It underpins developments in the environment, health, defence, and it enriches Britain's cultural life. It will be a powerhouse of the new 'knowledge society', and the vision is for the BL to be on everyone's 'virtual bookshelf', whether in the home, at work or in a library. Millions of people access the Library's collection every year, either on-site in the reading rooms (there are 400,000 reader visits per year, consulting 4.2 million items in the reading rooms) and to the St Pancras galleries, or off-site in their universities, workplaces, laboratories, or local libraries (the BL website received 9.4 million hits this year). The Library's work is supported by the expertise of over two thousand staff and by links with other organisations world-wide.

The collections are housed on [360 miles] 579 kilometres of shelving, about half being in the new building at St Pancras, which was fully operational about 2 years ago. The British Library is one of six legal deposit libraries in the UK, and is the only one, which by law everything published in the UK has to be deposited. Approximately 150,000 books and journals per year are received into the collections in this way.

One of the key strategic directions for the BL is collaboration, in order to underpin the effectiveness and efficiency of the national network of libraries in the UK. It is forging new partnerships with other institutions, particularly in the higher education sector, in recognition of the increased need to work closely together to provide complementary collections and services and to minimise duplication. The Library has established a Co-operation and Partnership Programme to develop and co-ordinate its partnership activities, with a budget of £0.5m/ 21.5 million roubles per year to award to projects, of which, in the spirit of altruism, the BL cannot itself be the lead partner.

Preservation is a core activity for the British Library and has about 7% of the total budget (£6.2 million/ 267million roubles). Collection Care embraces preservation, conservation, storage, collection security and surrogacy. Preservation encompasses environmental monitoring and control, handling, emergency planning, prevention and salvage preparedness; the creation of surrogates or substitutes, whether

preservation quality microform or digital images. These planned preservation programmes and collection care policies will be linked to whole-life cycle management and whole-life cycle costing, and will link to collection development policies and retention policies.

About half the Preservation budget is spent on external binding and preservation microfilming contracts; about 135 preservation and conservation staff account for the rest. The range of internal BL activity ranges from preventive measures such as environmental monitoring and pest management, disaster preparedness, to interventive conservation, ranging from simple refurbishment and box-making to printed book conservation to prints, drawings and photographic conservation, from Japanese and Chinese scroll mounting, through to the new area of digital preservation. We are responsible for the care of the collections, whatever the format, reflecting the truly hybrid library.

Partnerships and collaborations are currently very much the political *zeitgeist* in the UK. From schools to hospitals, from trains to the Underground, partnerships between the public and private sectors is the political flavour. In the Department of Culture, the movement is similarly towards convergence between the different types of cultural institution, for example, a recent development has been the establishment of a Council for Museums, Libraries and Archives. This Council is currently finalising a Collection Management Strategy for the entire cultural heritage sector in the UK, which has the idea of a distributed national collection at its heart.

Specifically in the area of libraries and archives in the UK, there is the National Preservation Office, which is housed in the British Library and it will be working in partnership with the Council for Museums, Libraries and Archives. Its remit is to provide an advisory and information service for all libraries and archives in the country, to promote good practice through education and training; to co-ordinate and initiate research and to contribute elements to the development of a national preservation strategy.

The BL is the major funder of the National Preservation Office (NPO) for libraries and archives in the UK and Ireland. One of the main initiatives of the NPO is a "preservation needs assessment", which is a statistical survey method for assessing what are the preservation requirements for any library or archive. The findings are also put into a national database that is leading to a map of the preservation requirements throughout the UK, as a step towards a national preservation strategy. This is aimed at quantifying the scale of the preservation problem in libraries and archives in the UK and Ireland, for political reasons to prove the case for support and funding on a national level.

The BL helped to develop this survey method and is itself using a version of this method to assess the condition of all its collections in order to objectively prioritise preservation work, and is thereby also helping to validate the survey method for national use.

3 Co-operation in Preservation at the BL

The British Library is about to take a leading national role in collaborative collection development. This is a pragmatic recognition that no one institution can pretend to be encyclopaedic in its collecting any more. The logical consequence of collaborative collection development is collaborative collection management. There is a project (SCOLD-Pres) to look at sharing the preservation responsibility for material acquired under legal deposit, between the six copyright libraries in the UK. The concept is to give primary preservation responsibility to one of the six copyright libraries. There are many decisions needing to be taken and many practicalities need to be sorted out before this becomes a reality, but it is indicative of the types of collaboration being explored by the national libraries in the UK.

The BL's Co-operation and Partnership Programme was established to distribute £0.5million/21.5 million roubles to all sectors of the library world. In the area of Preservation, the Programme funded work on a survey of the conservation treatments of Asian collections in the UK, using the survey methodology mentioned a moment ago. It has funded work into the feasibility of co-ordinated mass deacidification for the UK and Ireland. This project is looking objectively to quantify the amount of material suitable for deacidification in UK libraries and archives and whether a UK facility is feasible. This project includes the national archive as well as the British Library, and it is noticeable that successful bulk deacidification programmes in Canada and the Netherlands, involved both the national archives and the national libraries, and I think these national institutions have a major role to play in reinforcing these partnership projects – sometimes it is a leading role, sometimes a minor role, but involvement is essential.

This possible joint deacidification project in the UK, together with the potential collaborative preservation between the six copyright libraries, are the first steps towards shared preservation responsibilities becoming a part of the BL's own preservation programme of its collections.

A major newspaper microfilming project in the UK is "NEWSPLAN" which is a national programme for the microfilming and preservation of local newspapers to make them accessible to users begun in 1986. It involves public libraries, record offices, national libraries and the newspaper industry. Initially led by the BL, with local input "in kind" and a contribution to filming, NEWSPLAN has now achieved a local and regional momentum which resulted in a successful bid in 1999 to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) the major source of funding in the UK for heritage conservation, of £5million/ 215.5 million roubles. In this case the collaborative approach enabled the development of a more powerful voice for fundraising than could have been achieved by institutions and organisations acting alone. An earlier preservation microfilming programme, funded by the Mellon Foundation, that resulted in the establishment of preservation microfilming standards in the UK, which is a very helpful result of this collaborative preservation programmes.

At the international level is the Blue Shield initiative, the cultural equivalent of the Red Cross. The Blue Shield is the symbol specified in the 1954 Hague Convention for marking cultural sites to give them protection from attack in the event of armed conflict and the International Committee of the Blue Shield (ICBS) exists to work to protect the world's cultural heritage threatened by wars and natural disasters. The United Kingdom and Ireland Blue Shield Organisation covering libraries, archives and museums was launched in March 2001 by the NPO to support the international initiative and to raise national awareness of the threats to the cultural heritage. A Netherlands Blue Shield was set up in June 2000 and initiatives are also underway in Canada, France and Belgium. There is a risk that Blue Shield could be over-ambitious and resource intensive, but the UK initiative has set a realistic and achievable five-year programme of work which includes the development of a funding strategy.

4 Digital Preservation

A growing area of experience is digital preservation and this new subject in particular lends itself to a collaborative approach. The BL already has 24 terabytes of digital material in the widest range of formats, and is working towards the legal deposit of electronic material; since voluntary deposit of electronic material was enacted in January 2001, 3000 titles have been voluntarily deposited by publishers.

A characteristic of digital preservation is its collaborative nature. No one type of institution, let alone any one institution, claims to have the answer to the long term preservation and access of electronic material, whether 'digitised' or 'born digital'. Not only are libraries and archives coming together openly to solve this; not only are curators, librarians, archivists, computer scientists and conservators coming together openly; but other industries, from the toxic waste industry to oil exploration to space exploration to banking are facing the same issues.

The BL contributed to a Digital Preservation Workbook, which is being produced now under the Co-operation and Partnership Programme. It is a very practical, very useful manual for anyone engaging in the preservation of electronic material, and will be kept up to date on the web by the Digital Preservation Coalition and I highly recommend it you.

CURL, the body for Research Libraries, has already taken a lead in digital archiving through its

CEDARS project, set up in 1998, which is addressing the strategic, methodological and practical issues of digital preservation and providing guidance for all libraries in best practice. Here the major academic research libraries are together addressing a complex issue that will help both the digital preservation policy of institutions in all sectors and the national strategy. The BL is a contributor to CEDARS, is a demonstrator site, and has used the metadata developed by the project for its own digital store. Other current collaborations are with LOCKSS of Stanford University (Lots of Copies Keeps Stuff Safe).

A major co-operative initiatives which the BL is involved with, is the Digital Preservation Coalition (of which it is a founding member). This is being established to develop a national digital preservation agenda within an international context. A collaborative approach is being taken because it is recognised that the issue of digital preservation is greater than any one institution or sector. The Coalition will

operate on four levels: co-ordinated projects undertaken individually by member institutions; core activities of common interest and benefit to all members, such as maybe web archiving, collaborative projects and programmes with project funding from a variety of sources; and the development of a national digital archiving infrastructure in the UK. The Coalition is being established during 2001 by a small group of key partners, of which the BL is one, with a manifesto, constitution, timetable and programme of activities.

At the institutional level, the BL is engaging in different, cross-disciplinary projects across the Library with elements of digital preservation. These range from working with literary authors on archiving e-manuscripts and e-correspondence, to a pilot project to archive selected web sites.

The "Digital Library System" is a major project to keep the BL's growing digital collection. Working with IBM we are working to create a store to preserve the entire British Library's digital material, whether created by the BL, acquired or deposited under (voluntary) legal deposit. At the heart of this Digital Library System is the storage of electronic data. The project includes a number of different aspects of collaborative working. For example the conceptual model being used is OAIS (Open Archival Information System), which was originally developed by NASA, the American Space Agency as it was addressing the storage of data from satellites and Viking space missions. Secondly the preservation metadata has been developed with other projects, such as CEDARs previously mentioned, and all the metadata is being reviewed externally by other institutions and by publishers; and thirdly, the BL is participating in a digital preservation research project with the Royal Library in the Hague, which has a parallel Digital Library System project, into the scalability of emulation and the feasibility of alternative digital preservation strategies, such as the 'Universal Virtual Computer'.

5 Practical preservation and conservation examples

In this section, I will describe some collaborative examples of practical conservation and preservation of traditional material that the BL is doing, using new technology and developing materials.

New technology is being used to answer curatorial questions about the collections and to help make decisions about their treatment.

Examination and analytical techniques are particularly conducive to collaboration with university research departments. Use of Ramen laser spectroscopy at University College London to identify pigments and inks in medieval manuscripts at the BL and in Indian Mughal albums at the Victoria and Albert Museum represents the drawing together of several strands. A cultural and an academic institution; conservators; history, art and science. The university research department not only has advanced analytical equipment and the skilled technical staff to use it, but also students seeking innovative research projects.

Similarly, the application of National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)-developed imaging technology by the University of Kentucky to the fire-damaged Beowulf manuscript at the BL to reveal text concealed by previous restoration or obscured by burn damage and erasures. This used ultra-violet, infrared and three-dimensional imaging techniques to reveal the text.

A third example is the use of digital manipulation by the University of Washington to recreate and read fragments of early Buddhist manuscripts at the BL. These Kharoshdi fragments are extremely fragile birchbark and entail very specialist conservation to unroll them; the text is only understood by a handful of people throughout the world; the fragments are digitised once stable and are then manipulated and reassembled to produce previously unseen text.

These projects using the novel application of new technology have been successful because the academic institutions have the techniques and the equipment for addressing questions posed by the collections.

The International Dunhuang Project (IDP) illustrates co-operation between different countries with different conservation and preservation cultures. The IDP is part of the Electronic Cultural Atlas Initiative (ECAI) led from the University of California, Berkeley. Its aim is to bring together, electronically, all the manuscripts and printed documents from Chinese Central Asia dating from the fifth to the tenth centuries, in particular the 40,000 Buddhist manuscripts found in Cave 17 in Dunhuang, Gansu Province, China. These are now housed in four major institutions: the National Library of China, the BL, the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, and the Institute of Oriental Studies, St Petersburg, with smaller holdings

elsewhere. None of those institutions can offer full access to its collections for various reasons: the poor condition of the manuscripts, the lack of a complete finding list or the policy of the institution.

The project also aims to develop new techniques for the preservation of the original documents through close collaboration with research chemists and paper technologists; to promote common standards of preservation methods and documentation; to store the documents in the best possible environment and reduce handling to a minimum; to stimulate scholarly research and to increase access through the production of surrogate forms, facsimile publication, microfiche, and computer stored images, so that the images are available to scholars wherever they are.

Photographs form a category of material particularly well suited to collaborative activity. Not only are they to be found in many different types of institutions and collections, including commercial picture libraries, but, as a genre, they also particularly lend themselves to digital technology, and have very specific preservation requirements. In 1999, the European Commission on Preservation and Access (ECPA), with European Union (EU) funding under the Culture 2000 programme, initiated a project to investigate the long-term preservation of all kinds of photographic materials and define the role of new technology in collection management. The Safeguarding European Photographic Images for Access (SEPIA) project brought together a variety of institutions, including the BL, holding collections of photographs and encompassed a survey of conservation and digitisation of photographic collections, expert meetings and workshops, guidelines on best practice and use of standards, an open conference and a website. A three year follow-up programme has been funded in the latest Call for Proposals of Culture 2000. High administrative overheads militated against any one institution taking the lead, which is a characteristic of such funding, and the ECPA took on that overhead for all.

Studies into the ageing of leathers and the development of a standard method for artificial ageing is another interesting cross-disciplinary collaboration which, in this case, has brought together leather technologists, tanners and bookbinders from across Europe. This began in 1991 with a collaborative EEC-funded study under the Science and Technology for Environmental Protection (STEP) Initiative, led by the Leather Conservation Centre in England, into the deterioration of leather. It was subsequently continued by the European ENVIRONMENT Leather project 'Deterioration and Conservation of Vegetable Tanned Leather' (1997). The project has developed an archival quality, very usable, bookbinding leather – the key role the BL played was to provide expert bookbinders to use the leather whilst scientists observed and produced terminology to describe the physical characteristics required of a leather.

The environmental conditions of collections, from the growing uses of anoxic (oxygen-free) environments for storage and deinfestation (and even display, and salvage) to the preservation index datalogger, are a particularly fruitful area of collaboration.

6 Conclusions and observations

I will finish with some personal observations about collaboration based on experience of co-operation in preservation at the British Library.

Collaboration is usually seen generally as a 'good thing', but there are reasons for its not always working successfully. Firstly, collaboration costs. Whilst often undertaken with the aim of sharing resources and reducing costs and reducing duplication, it has its own direct, and indirect costs. Secondly, collaboration can stifle individual initiative – when many organisations or groups see something needs to be done, there can be a tendency for no-one to actually do anything. Thirdly, if the aims are too diverse it may stall because of the size of the remit and the inter-dependence of too many elements. Therefore, focussed projects tend to succeed, whereas collaboration to carry out core preservation activities is less easy.

For all the political expediency and institutional strategy, successful collaboration it often seems to come down to the will power, determination and vision of one or two key individuals.

There are some subjects in preservation which seem more conducive than others, for example disaster preparedness; digital preservation and surveys of the preservation requirements of libraries and archives.

Collaboration has worked well for some geographical areas of the UK in disaster preparedness, such as the M25 Group in South England, because the activity is not constant: resources are pooled and held

pending a need which cannot be predicted, but which, when it occurs, requires an immediate response. Collaborative digital preservation works well because everyone is involved in the digital revolution, the technology is constantly changing and advancing and no one yet knows the answers. The NPO-led Preservation Assessment Survey has been taken up because individuals and institutions can see the benefits of assessing their collections and developing their own preservation and funding strategies, while also contributing to the picture of national preservation needs.

I look forward to hearing more aspects of collaborative preservation over the next two days, and I hope I have given you a taste of what we are doing in the UK at the British Library.

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