

THE BRITISH LIBRARY

ANNUAL REPORT TO THE CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN NATIONAL LIBRARIANS 1996/7

INTRODUCTION

The British Library management and staff have addressed four major challenges this year - the move to the new national library building at St Pancras, minimising the impact of substantial government funding cutbacks, restructuring to make the most of St Pancras and capitalising on technology developments.

FUNDING

The Library again faced severe funding difficulties during the period under review. Its previous budgetary settlement in 1995 (for the period 1996/97 - 1999/2000) had required very substantial reductions in planned expenditure, and in planning for the four-year period significant operational efficiencies and economies, challenging revenue targets, and cuts in the Library's core programmes of acquisitions, conservation and research grants had been needed. However, the Library's budgetary settlement in 1996 (for the period 1997/98 - 2000/01) reduced the Library's Grant-in-aid from the indicative figures issued to the Library for planning purposes in the previous planning round still further. And meantime a number of additional unavoidable and previously-unbudgeted expenditure commitments had arisen which required funding. In order to meet the costs of those additional commitments while sustaining progress on a small number of critically important developments, such as its Corporate Bibliographic Programme, its Digital Library Development Programme, and the Inside service, further economies in 1997/98 beyond those imposed last year have had to be introduced. In addition further cuts in the Library's acquisitions budget for non-current materials and in the conservation budget have been required.

NEW BUILDING AT ST PANCRAS

Considerable progress was made during the year towards completion of the new building at St Pancras. The first staff moves into the new building took place on 26 November 1977, and the Library began, what is thought to be the largest library book move in history, on schedule on 2 December 1997. At the time of writing 26km of material had been transferred to the 340km of shelving in the new building.

Forthcoming key occupation dates are as follows:

July 1997 - main staff occupation begins
24 November 1997 - First reading room (General Humanities) opens
24 March 1998 - Rare Books Reading Room opens
April 1998 - Public facilities open

The phased occupation programme will be completed, and the building fully operational, in May 1999.

LEGISLATION

The British Library, with the support of the other UK legal deposit libraries, submitted a proposal to the UK Government in January 1996 for the extension of legal deposit legislation to non-print publications.

A review of the Library's policies towards the legal deposit arrangements for printed materials was subsequently undertaken by JM Smethurst, the Library's former Deputy Chief Executive. The review looked at establishing the six UK legal deposit collections more formally as a national published archive, and at establishing a distributed National Bibliographic Resource. It proposed greater collaboration between the British Library's Legal Deposit Office and the Copyright Libraries Agent; a greater measure of selectivity at the point of receipt of legal deposit material by the British Library; and the establishment of clear disposal policies.

In February 1997, the UK Government published "Legal deposit of publications: a consultation paper" seeking respondents' views on a number of specific questions relating to legal deposit. The Consultation Paper stated that:

"The Government's view is that it is essential to the United Kingdom's continuing pre-eminence in the field of information provision that some means should be found of providing for comprehensive deposit in our national published archive of material published in forms other than print".

The Library is hopeful that it will be possible to enact the necessary legislation notwithstanding the forthcoming UK General Election.

ACQUISITIONS AND EXHIBITIONS

The Library spent a total of £13.4million on acquisitions during the year under review. Intake included: 140,000 books, 97,000 serial titles, 4,483 cartographic items 1437 items of printed music.

Important manuscripts acquired this year ranged from a 7th century leaf from St Martin in Tours written in Merovingian miniscule (the only major script previously unrepresented in the Library) to the correspondence, business and personal papers of Margaret (Peggy) Ramsay (d 1991) leading play agent, complementing important literary and theatrical material already held in the BL, including the Harold Pinter loan and the Rattigan and Tynan archives.

The Library also acquired *The Mercator Atlas* c 1572. Probably put together by Gerard Mercator himself, the atlas contains the only surviving copy of his 1554 wall-map of Europe, the only copy in the UK of his 1564 wall-map of the British Isles, two sections of his 1560 wall-map of the world, and two MS maps.

The Library's main summer exhibition of 1996 was The Mythical Quest. Exhibits ranged in date from the second millennium BC to the present, from Babylonian clay tablets to the most recent computer games. A major exhibition 'Heirs of Rome: the Shaping of Britain AD 400-900', was mounted jointly with the British Museum as part of the European Science Foundation Research Programme.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

During the year, the Library progressed its Digital Library Development Project. The Library is seeking partnership arrangements, under the UK Government's Private Finance Initiative, to provide the capabilities it needs to develop and manage digital collections to meet its statutory obligations in return for allowing the private sector to exploit the market opportunities to be obtained from content-based digital services and products.

BLAISE-LINE, the Library's priced information retrieval service, was made available on the World Wide Web in May 1996. At the end of the year, work was continuing on plans to make the Library's OPAC available over the Internet from May 1997.

INSIDE - a new and innovative integrated current awareness and document delivery service containing bibliographic information of the 20,000 most requested journals from the British Library Document Supply Centre including 14,000 in the STM field as well as 15,000 conferences has been successfully launched. The database can be browsed to article level using interfaces designed with end-users in mind, appreciating the varying levels of searching experience and expertise possessed by members of the user community. Documents delivery includes a range of fax options depending on customer urgency and budget as well as by courier and post.

The success of this system owes much to its flexibility and comprehensiveness but most importantly because it gives publishers a revenue stream. For every item supplied this way the publisher of that item will receive a royalty, in other words it is a copyright paid service. To this end Elsevier Science signed an agreement with the British Library on the use of electronic versions of STM material. The agreement will allow the British Library to incorporate bibliographic data into INSIDE and on an experimental basis to use the electronic full text of some of these journals as a source of satisfying document delivery requests.

RE-STRUCTURING

During the year the Library implemented a further phase of management re-structuring as part of a continuing process begun in 1995. The new structure is based on function and incorporates all the major changes needed for effective development and management of the Library for the longer term. In particular, provision has been made for the necessary structural changes identified in the Library's major strategic initiatives on Collection Development, Collection Management, Access Improvement and User Satisfaction, and a senior focus for Digital Library Developments has also been established.

INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION

The Library is a major player in a number of projects under the European Commission's Telematics for Libraries programme. The Commission has helped to set up the COBRA (Computerised Bibliographic Record Actions) concerted action; the CoBRA Forum consists of the National librarians of eight European Countries and is chaired by The British Library's Chief Executive, Dr Brian Lang. CoBRA's life has recently been extended and is now known as CoBRA+; the Forum has been responsible for proposing a number of projects for which the Commission has provided funding. Those in which the British Library is or has been a partner include: AUTHOR, on the networking of the national name authority files; BIBLINK, linking publishers and national bibliographic services for electronic publications; CHASE,

which has been looking into standardisation of character sets; DELICAT, for automatic error detection in bibliographic records; and FLEX, on file labelling.