

THE BRITISH LIBRARY

ANNUAL REPORT TO THE CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN NATIONAL LIBRARIANS 1998-9

This report describes a historic period for the British Library, one in which the new building at St Pancras finally became operational. The first reading room services began in November 1997 and by spring 1998 demand was at record levels. In late April 1998 the public spaces - the exhibition galleries, bookshop, conference centre, restaurant and cafes opened and in June over a thousand guests celebrated the formal opening of the new building by Her Majesty the Queen. By the end of the period the book move into St Pancras was near completion with over 11 million items being placed in their new home, one of the biggest moves of books and library services the world has seen. The successful opening of St Pancras has been the most important priority of recent years. The completion of this has meant that the Library is able to move to focusing on the real issues of a national library, that of acquiring, cataloguing and storing information, and to make it available where and when it is required.

FUNDING

CENL Members will be aware from previous annual reports of the severe funding difficulties faced by the Library during the transitional period of its occupation of the new Library building. In its 1997 planning submission to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport for the period 1998/99 - 2000/01 the Library had sought additional funds amounting to some £8million per annum in order to restore the funding of its acquisitions and conservation programmes to appropriate levels. In the event the Library's financial settlement for 1998/99 was reduced by £2.25million from previous indicative levels and the Library's request for additional acquisitions and conservation funding was not met. However in December 1998, the UK Government announced a significant improvement in the Library's Grant-in-Aid for the year 1999/2000. While the Library was then able to plan for the future on the basis of higher levels of Government support than it had previously been told to expect, its grant is nevertheless still insufficient to enable to fund all its ambitious programmes.

STRATEGIC REVIEW

The Library responded to its difficult financial situation by undertaking during the Summer 1998, a strategic review (of which a zero-base budget review formed a part) with the objective of re-focusing its resources against its key priorities. The challenge for the Library was to provide within the new setting of St Pancras the services and facilities that the people would like from their national library. The Strategic Review invited comment from a wide cross-section of our users and a paper was sent to over 8,000 of the Library's stakeholders, who were given the opportunity to state which of the Library's activities they considered to be the most important. Over 1,200 responses were received and these have assisted the Library in re-prioritising its activities. Services to support scholarship, research and innovation were considered to be the most important British Library activities. Services to support broader interests were regarded as being in a second tier. The broad view of the Library's stakeholders was that in a period of financial constraint the Library should give higher priority to maintaining and developing its collection rather than to providing services. The Library will accordingly give highest priority to collection development, collection management and preservation in 1999 and beyond. Second highest priority will be given to the provision of documents through reading rooms and remote supply. Those activities all ranked higher than

the provision of information services, exhibitions, publishing, education or support services. Significant opposition was expressed to the option of introducing reading room charges. These views helped the Library Board in deciding to maintain free reading room services for the foreseeable future.

LEGAL DEPOSIT

The British Library, with the support of other UK legal deposit libraries, submitted a proposal to the UK Government last year for the extension of legal deposit to non-print publications. In 1997 a consultative paper was produced by Government, following which the British Library was asked to set up a working group under Sir Anthony Kenny to consider how a voluntary scheme might operate. This group reported that it did not consider a voluntary scheme to be viable and in December 1998 a statement was made in Parliament which contained a firm undertaking to move towards legislation for the legal deposit of non-print publications. This legislation is expected in 2000-2001.

ACQUISITIONS

The British Library spent a total of £12.3million on acquisitions which represented a reduction on previous years. 82,591 books, 78,463 serial titles, 23,500 newspaper issues, 20,000 maps were amongst the acquisitions purchase from the budget.

The Library also acquired some 91,139 books, 243,668 serial parts, 190,400 newspaper issues, 3,439 maps and 2,463 items of printed music through the UK legal deposit system. Significant historical manuscripts acquired during the year included: some important early 17th-century tracts and account books; the parliamentary notebook of Sir Robert Walpole, father of the prime minister; an account book relating to the upbringing of George III; some additional papers of John Burns the labour statesman; papers of Norman Collins, broadcaster, and founder of ATV; and papers relating to the animal rights movement from 1969 to the present. The Library also acquired during the year the great treasure of English medieval art, the Sherborne Missal (for which an appeal is in progress for the outstanding sums yet to be paid).

Significant literary manuscripts acquired during the past year included poems and sketches by William Morris; letters from D.H. Lawrence to his agent, J.B. Pinker; letters of T.S. Eliot, Stephen Spender and others to Eric Alport; letters of Ezra Pound to Graham Hutchison; letters from Ted Hughes and others to Ann Skea and the literary papers of Andrew Motion. The Oriental and India Office Collections acquired letters dated 1821-28 from the orientalist August Wilhelm von Schlegel, and a letterbook of Sir William Macnaghten, envoy to Afghanistan, 1838-41. Notable music acquisitions included some 1200 items from the collection of the scholar Alan Tyson, and some important manuscripts of Vaughan Williams and Michael Tippett.

PRESERVATION

The Library's new building at St Pancras now provides the Library with more stable environmental storage conditions than it has had before. The preservation spend in the period remained at the level of the previous year. The total expenditure in this area was just over £5million compared with £6.2million at its peak in 1994/5. However, it was expected that in the year 1999-2000 this would rise to £6million reflecting the priorities indicated by the Strategic Review. This would allow the Library to tackle the backlog of fragile and often unique material, to make these available to users.

EXHIBITIONS and PUBLICATIONS

The new St Pancras exhibition gallery opened in April 1998, which gave wider public access to the rich and varied collection that the Library cares for. Exhibitions open to the public this year included: the John Ritblat Gallery of Treasures of the British Library, the Pearson Gallery of Living Words, the Workshop of Words Sound and Images, a special exhibition celebrating the work of the children's authors, Janet and Allan Ahlberg and an exhibition looking at designer bookbinders.

The British Library has a flourishing and expanding publishing programme, with over 600 titles in print. Titles are published both under the Library's own imprint and in association with other publishers. Bibliographies and reference works are available on CD-ROM, microform and paper media, as well as online. There is also an expanding list of general and illustrated books, based primarily on the Library's extensive historic collections. Highlights of this year's programme included the CD-ROM, *100 Treasures of the British Library*, a book written by the architect of the new British Library building, Colin St John Wilson, *The Design and Construction of the British Library* and from the Writer's Life series, illustrated biographies of *Joseph Conrad*, *William Shakespeare*, *Jane Austin* and *Charlotte Bronte*. In the science technology and business area *Evidence Based Medicine* and *News Information* were among the best sellers.

DIGITAL LIBRARY

The British Library's digital library developments aim to enhance the current collection and services and improve access to them. They include an ambitious vision for the digital library encompassing four main areas of digital activity of document supply, patent services, picture library service and heritage multimedia publishing. In order to harness the innovation, enterprise and investment required to realise this vision the Library hoped to exploit the UK Government's Private Finance Initiative to develop the project through partnership with the private sector. However, in December 1998 it became clear during negotiations that it would not be possible to reconcile the British Library's public service obligations and aspirations with the commercial imperatives of the private sector, and consequently negotiations were terminated on an amicable basis. The Library by the end of the period was exploring alternative sources of capital investment in digital library infrastructure with the support of the UK Government.

INFORMATION SYSTEMS DEVELOPMENTS IN 1998-99

Information systems are now pervasive in the British Library in developing, managing, preserving, and providing access to the Library's collection, in internal and external communication, and in much other day-to-day work. Increasingly, the primary commodity (a bibliographic record, or even a collection item) is in machine-readable form. Work on the Digital Library is at the frontier of this revolution, but there were many other examples during 1998-99 of the growing importance of IT in the Library's activities.

In particular, information systems underpinned the opening and operation of further reading room services in the Library's new building at St Pancras. Access for readers to the Library's collection is principally via the St Pancras integrated system, which is made up of three components. The Reader Admissions System now holds information on 100,000 users. The Online Catalogue was expanded during the year as each new reading room opened and now gives readers access at over 140 terminals to more than 8 million records for items they can consult. The Automated Book Request System, which allows readers to order the stock they want to see, now more than to 2,000 book requests a day.

Members of the public visiting the galleries at St Pancras are welcomed by an electronic information system, and they can search the Online Catalogue for themselves. Visitors can pursue their interests using various multimedia tools, including Turning the Pages, an award winning system which allows them to browse through Library treasures.

Meanwhile, more than three quarters of the requests for remote access to the Library's collection handled by the Document Supply Centre at Boston Spa (ie 3 million a year) are now sent electronically. Automated requesting is increasing following the launch in 1997 of the World Wide Web version of *inside*, the Library's electronic current awareness and document ordering service. A new version of the *inside* software was implemented in 1998-99. Customers reacted favourably to the improved interface.

The Library's main Website now handles up to three million transactions a month. OPAC 97, the Internet version of the St Pancras online catalogue, records a million 'hits' a month.

Work continued throughout 1998-99 on the new Corporate Bibliographic System, which will integrate and underpin the Library's cataloguing, bibliographic, and information systems.

When fully implemented it will have the capability to support up to two thousand concurrent users and handle up to thirty million records. The benefits of the system will be fully realised through the Access Development Programme, which was initiated by the Library during the year to improve access by staff, users, and partners to its catalogues and collection. A series of projects over the next two years will integrate existing automated catalogues and convert catalogues not yet in machine readable form.

CO-OPERATION AND PARTNERSHIP

Another major recommendation from the Strategic Review consultation exercise was that the Library should increasingly work in partnership with other libraries. Five functions were identified where partnership would be beneficial - collection development, record creation, preservation, access and the national bibliography - although this does not mean that a programme of co-operation should be limited only to those activities. Collection retention policies also provide a basis for co-operation and lead naturally to preservation responsibilities. The digital age is likely to facilitate a distributed approach to the provision of access to material. All aspects of digital development must be undertaken in the spirit of co-operation in order to ensure that there is no wasteful duplication of effort.

There is no expectation among members of the UK library and information sector of major savings from collaboration. The benefits should be improved knowledge and awareness of the major research collections and improved value for money across the publicly funded UK library system as a whole resulting from a reduction in unnecessary duplication of provision and an extension of provision in areas previously not covered.

Internationally, the British Library continued to chair [CoBRA+](#) which carried on the work of CoBRA, which was responsible for initiating a number of valuable projects, such as AUTHOR, BIBLINK and NEDLIB. The CoBRA+ contract with the European Commission although extended came to an end late 1998. However, the group continues as a technical subcommittee of CENL with the British Library providing the administrative support.

Further information about the British Library's collections, services and publications along with access to the catalogues can be found on the [British Library Web site](#)