

36th CONFERENCE OF DIRECTORS OF NATIONAL LIBRARIES, 2009

Name of Country: United Kingdom

Name of Library: The British Library

Name of Chief Executive: Dame Lynne Brindley

ANNUAL REPORT TO CDNL 2009

Over the past year, the British Library has continued to enhance its services, and find new ways of making our collection more widely available. We presented a ground-breaking exhibition in the shape of *Taking Liberties*, made significant inroads in digitising parts of our collection, and enhanced our research collection through extensive acquisition of new material.

The British Library published its corporate strategy for the three-year period 2008-2011. This describes the rapidly-evolving research and information landscape, and outlines how we will develop the Library's existing strengths and seize new opportunities to enhance our proposition to researchers and business. We have now initiated a process of strategy development that will see us articulate the Library's operating environment and develop a vision for the year 2020/25.

The UK Government's *Digital Britain*¹ report provided the British Library with an opportunity to reinforce our critical role in the UK's knowledge economy and in support of research and the creative sector. The digitisation of our collections increasingly provides an inspirational resource which enriches education, transforms research processes and provides bedrock for authors, entrepreneurs, musicians, television producers and many more. Working with government we must grow faster our role as custodian of Britain's collective digital memory to avoid a 'digital black hole' of the 21st century and we have a key role to play in equipping people to take best advantage of available knowledge, whether in digital or physical form.

There is enormous public and educational interest in the digitisation of our historic newspapers and we end the year with some three million digitised and fully searchable pages available online. We are now poised to work with a commercial partner to significantly scale up this effort over the coming years. This year we have also completed the digitisation of around 70,000 books and some 12,000 sound recordings.

¹ www.culture.gov.uk/what_we_do/broadcasting/5631.aspx

The construction of a large storage facility at our Boston Spa site for our ever-growing physical collection nears completion. This will provide 262 linear kilometres of high density, preservation standard storage, with fully automated retrieval systems.

The Library is working with partner organisations across a range of initiatives. The UK Research Reserve² is a great example of a truly beneficial national shared service. Invested in by the BL and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), it provides higher education libraries with a secure solution to storing and preserving lower use print research journals, freeing up campus space whilst guaranteeing long term onsite and online access to the material.

Our plans for a Digital Research Centre are shaping up, with the involvement of leading researchers and with the support of Research Councils under their knowledge economy programme. We see this development as an opportunity for partnership working to enrich access to and interaction with multi-media material in ways that will shape both our physical and digital service developments over the next few years.

We have taken significant steps forward in services to support the scientific research community this year. *TalkScience*³ events have proved popular: our science collections are supporting a wealth of research - from interpreting our recordings of frog calls and investigating volcanic activity in the 18th century to using our contemporary and rare biomedical journals to inform a study on lactose intolerance. *UK PubMed Central*⁴ is rapidly growing as an open-access database service with new facilities being added regularly.

It has been another year of distinctive exhibitions. *Taking Liberties: the struggle for Britain's freedoms and rights* was a particular highlight. Opened by the Prime Minister, it attracted some 100,000 visitors to see treasures including the Magna Carta, the Death Warrant of Charles I, and the prison diary of suffragette Olive Wharry. The exhibition was accompanied by an award winning education programme, and enhanced by rich interactive displays which placed visitors, whether online and in the gallery, at the heart of current debates around rights and freedoms, devolved government and free speech.

It has also been a very strong year for 'heritage' acquisitions. Highlights include The Dering Role, the oldest extant English roll of arms, the Macclesfield Alphabet Book, a rare medieval 'pattern' book, and the archive of the Poet Laureate Ted Hughes. The latter comprises over 220 files and boxes of manuscripts, letters, journals, personal diaries and ephemera, and offers an invaluable resource for researchers of Hughes's prolific career which spanned over forty years.

The British Library is committed to serious international engagement at all levels and this year our Chairman, Sir Colin Lucas, travelled to Tehran to sign a Memorandum of Understanding with the National Library and Archives of the Islamic Republic of Iran. During the year we have also continued to play an active role in the World Collections Programme in partnership with five other UK national cultural institutions. An exhibition of historic photographs from digital copies in Kabul Museum and a sound archive

² www.ukrr.ac.uk

³ www.bl.uk/science/

⁴ <http://ukpmc.ac.uk/>

workshop in Kenya are examples of Library initiatives that received World Collections Programme support during the year.

The British Library is looking forward to taking forward work on these and other projects over the coming months, and on commencing new and exciting developments.

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