



Paper Assets in the Digital Age

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**Speech given at the opening of the underground stacks west at the Swiss National Library
Bern, 20 August 2009**

It was a great honour for me to be invited to speak at the opening of the National Library of Switzerland's second underground stack. It is a privilege and pleasure to be here with you today in Berne on this important occasion.

National Libraries are important treasure-houses of the history and cultures of nations. Our institutions contain the 'memory of the nation'. Together we hold the DNA of civilisation - we organise, interpret and preserve the cultural and intellectual output of humanity. Our memory institutions join us to our ancestors and are our legacy to future generations.

The environment in which we national libraries operate is changing rapidly, driven by technological developments. We are currently on the cusp of the digital age. Information is ubiquitous: 500 million web pages are just a keystroke away. The way people can, and expect to, access information is being revolutionised. Our challenge as leaders of national libraries is to determine how we should be connecting to the global digital space based on the Web and how we might best realise the opportunities for actively exploiting our collections and expertise within that rich, interactive digital environment and opening it up to the world.

This change is gradually transforming traditional scholarly dependence on the physical library as a major source for meeting research needs. Across disciplines there remain widely differing expectations of the role of the library – but research increasingly functions in a world of e-resources, virtual tools and collaborative communities.

Today - against this background - I want to make two important points:

First, that our paper 'asset base' is an incredible national asset which in the digital age can for the first time be fully opened up and enhanced for access by multiple audiences both nationally and globally, particularly the richness of our special collections and unique materials.

Some examples of how the value that can be drawn from the raw material held within the British Library's collections might include:

- Stef Penney, a young English author and agrophobic who won the Costa Book of the Year award for her debut novel *The Tenderness of Wolves* - a murder mystery set in the snowy landscapes of Canada. She has never visited Canada and researched *The Tenderness of Wolves* entirely at The British Library.
- Sir Neville Marriner, the conductor, was able to hear Elgar's own performances at the British Library while preparing his own interpretation for a recording of Elgar pieces.
- The young British pianist, Danny Driver, listened to a 1937 recording of the obscure British composer-pianist York Bowen, playing his fourth piano concerto. More than two years later,

Driver has just recorded as his debut CD of Bowen's third and fourth piano concertos, for release in 2008.

- Study of the 17th-19th Century Ship's logs from the archives of the East India Company have provided unique insight into climate change

Second, and following from my first point, that our responsibility for exercising good stewardship over our legacy paper / physical collections, to store and preserve them for future generations of researchers and for humanity generally, is a core and continuing responsibility for national libraries, of enduring importance in the digital age.

For national libraries therefore the physical and the digital are not alternatives for us to choose between. Instead, our obligation to future generations means that we need to look to both the documentary sources of the past and the electronic sources of the future.

It is also the case that notwithstanding the new and exciting digital publishing formats, we in the UK are in fact seeing continuing growth and no diminution in traditional publishing outputs. So notwithstanding the high importance we assign to securing e-legal deposit regulations to avoid what I am calling a 'digital black hole' in our collective memory, our legal deposit intake for all traditional publications in 2008/09 was up by 2.5% on the previous year and up 17% on the decade. [Monographs were up by 60% over the decade; serial issues up by 23%; newspaper issues down by 13%].

At the British Library we too are currently investing heavily in modern fit-for purpose physical collection storage capacity. The construction of the Library's Additional Storage Building at our Boston Spa site is now complete. This facility will be one of the largest and most technologically advanced library repositories in the world. It will provide additional storage capacity in environmentally-controlled conditions for ca 10 million items, including low- and medium-use items currently held in leased storage under sub-optimal conditions in London. It is a fully-automated (robotic retrieval/replacement), high-density, low-oxygen store with equivalent capacity to 262 km of linear shelving. The loading of the storage facility with empty storage containers is currently under way prior to the loading of the building with relocated collection items. This will be the largest programme of book moves undertaken by the BL since the opening of St Pancras in 1998. In all, 38.7% of our total collection will be migrated into this new storage building (collection moves will continue until Quarter 1 of 2012) and it will provide growth space for the BL's collections beyond 2020. Our planning is also well-advanced for a Newspaper Storage Building also at Boston Spa and using similar technologies to provide appropriate conditions for the long-term archival storage of our existing newspaper collections and also 25 years' growth space. We are hopeful that the Government will provide the necessary capital funding to permit this project to commence. With the completion of these projects, over 70% of the British Library's collections will be held in the best environmental conditions – an increase from 42% at the outset – and a major re-balancing of the disposition of the Library's estate will have been effected with a reversal of the current ratio of storage located in London to that located in Yorkshire, from the current 65:35 to 35:65.

Our investment to ensure the best possible long-term stewardship of our legacy physical collections is not limited to storage. We have also recently completed and opened in 2007 a new state-of-the-art Centre for Conservation as an addition to our building at St Pancras in London. It is a world-class facility for all aspects of book conservation including education and training, as well as state-of-the-art technical facilities for the nation's Sound Archive, enabling unrivalled standards of care for the Library's priceless collections.

Our experience at the British Library is when we have digitised unique material and the riches of our special collections to open up these previously un-mined collections this has significantly generated increased interest in the original material. Let me share with you two current British Library examples.

First, the Codex Sinaiticus Project - an ambitious international project to make the distributed parts of Codex Sinaiticus available to scholars and the public through innovative digital and web-based technology. Codex Sinaiticus is the world's oldest Bible and the most important Biblical manuscript. It was written by hand in the mid-fourth century around the time of Constantine the Great. Codex

Sinaiticus is named after the Monastery of St Catherine in Sinai, Egypt. St Catherine's is one of the oldest, continuously active, Christian monastic communities in the world and traces its origins back to the fourth century.

The Project is based on a partnership between the institutions which now hold parts of the Codex: St Catherine's Monastery in Sinai; the British Library; Leipzig University Library; and the National Library of Russia in St Petersburg. The principal product of the Project - the Codex Sinaiticus Project website [<http://www.codexsinaiticus.org/en/>] – brings together the conservation assessment, digitisation, transcription and additional resources for scholars and the general public. The completed project - comprising all 800 surviving pages - was launched on 6 July 2009. To coincide with the launch, the British Library hosted an academic conference on 6-7 July 2009 entitled 'Codex Sinaiticus: text, Bible, book' at which a number of leading experts gave presentations on the history, text, conservation, palaeography and codicology of the manuscript. The launch generated over the two days of the conference an incredible 96.4 million page hits [850,000 visits, 700,000 visitors] and even more interest in the original physical document which is displayed in our Treasures Gallery¹. There is some evidence generally that digitisation re-invigorates interest in materiality, the artefact itself in this case.

My second example is the 19th century British Library Newspaper website, the public platform of which was launched recently with two million online digitised pages of 19th century newspaper now online [<http://newspapers.bl.uk/blcs>]. Chosen by leading experts and academics to present a cross section of 19th century society, this represents an unparalleled resource for education and research, including the reporting of the French Revolution, the South Sea Bubble, and a wealth of political and social insights. Users are now able to read first-hand factual reporting of the Battle of Trafalgar in the Examiner and the gory details of the 'Jack the Ripper' Whitechapel murders in the melodramatic Illustrated Police News. At the launch, contemporary journalists were amazed to see that the preoccupations of British Newspapers well over 100 years ago were broadly the same as today: banking collapses, corrupt Members of Parliament, violent crime, problem drinking, British troops in Afghanistan. Again the launch of this research resource caught the public imagination. In the first ten days after the launch, over 56,000 people visited the website and checked out 515,000 articles. [Newspapers are a key focus of the BL's digitisation plans due to the multiple audiences (research, learners, public) for this material and the inherent fragility of newsprint. I know that the Swiss National Library has also achieved good progress in newspaper digitisation with its agreement with *Press Suisse*].

At the British Library our digitisation projects are currently delivering:

- 25 million pages or 100,000 19th Century books,
- 3m pages 19th Century newspapers, and
- 4,000 hours of archival sound recordings, all from British Library collections.

But even taken all together, this massive effort is but a drop in the ocean - about 1% of our total collections - and it is inevitably opportunistic in funding and approach, and sustainability is a major challenge. We are pro-active in securing commercial and other partnerships, and delivering imaginative new, shared business models. [I chaired a group which looked at Public Private Partnerships as part of Commissioner Reding's i2010 European Digital Libraries initiative which concluded that: *"Public - Private partnerships have an important role in helping achieve the European Commission's strategy for digitisation, online accessibility and digital preservation of Europe's collective memory. Whilst libraries, archives, museums and galleries have preserved this collective memory and have experience of resource discovery and user requirements, private partners can bring to the table funding, technology, software and expertise required for large-scale digitisation. By working together public access can be enhanced"*].

¹ To mark the online launch of the reunited Codex, the British Library is staging an exhibition, **From Parchment to Pixel: The Virtual reunification of Codex Sinaiticus**, which runs from Monday 6 July until Monday 7 September, 2009 in the Folio Society Gallery at the Library's St Pancras building. Visitors are able to view a range of historic items and artefacts that tell the story of the Codex and its virtual reunification, along with spectacular interactive representations of the manuscript and a digital reconstruction of the changes to a specific page over the centuries. In addition, they will see on display in the Treasures Gallery, for the very first time, both volumes of Codex Sinaiticus held at the British Library.

In the case of the BL's 19th Century newspapers project, the service is available free of charge to Higher Education and Further Education institutions. There is also a separate paid for service for individuals, and a commercial, subscription-based service for non-UK markets. The service is available free of charge in the Reading Rooms at the British Library's own sites. This mix of 'free and fee' access models allows both the Library to receive royalties which can be ploughed back into Library activities, including future digitisation. This service has already transformed online access to newspapers, and the chosen hybrid business model demonstrates the benefits of a public/ private partnership for large-scale digitisation. And we are currently aiming to increase massively our newspaper digitisation. Using an innovative form of EU tendering called competitive dialogue, the Library has now selected its Digitisation Partner for the digitisation of up to 40 million newspaper pages over a ten-year period. This will result in one of the World's largest digitised historic collections which will be available free in reading rooms and on a pay-per-view basis online, or through commercial site licences.

But ultimately – as I have argued to the UK Government in the context of its recent Digital Britain report - public investment is imperative if we are to achieve the scale of educational and economic returns that a content and media rich digital society demands.

In the European context, we are seeing a similar opening up of the marvellous un-mined cultural assets held by our European National Library partners in membership of CENL (the Conference of European National Librarians). TEL - The European Library is a free service that offers access to the resources of the 48 national libraries of Europe in 35 languages. Resources can be both digital (books, posters, maps, sound recordings, videos, etc.) and bibliographical. Here I must pay special particular tribute to the contribution of the Swiss to TEL (The European National Library) particularly in terms of support for the TEL-ME-MOR project and also of your championing of multilingualism.

And we are seeing a similar burgeoning of public interest too. The launch of Europeana, Europe's multimedia online library, in November last year generated such overwhelming interest (@10 million hits per hour) it crashed only to be restored in a more robust version. At www.europeana.eu, Internet users around the world can now access more than two million books, maps, recordings, photographs, archival documents, paintings and films from national libraries and cultural institutions of the EU's 27 Member States. And this is – as you know - just the beginning. It is very significant I think in political terms that José Manuel Barroso himself attended the launch; he said: "Europeans will now be able to access the incredible resources of our great collections quickly and easily in a single space. Europeana is much more than a library, it is a veritable dynamo to inspire 21st century Europeans to emulate the creativity of innovative forbears like the drivers of the Renaissance. Just imagine the possibilities it offers students, art-lovers or scholars to access, combine and search the cultural treasures of all Member States online. This is a strong demonstration of the fact that culture is at the heart of European integration."

To conclude, I am very pleased to be here at the formal inauguration of the new underground stacks which will enable the printed collection of the Swiss National Library to be stored in optimal conditions. Our responsibility as national librarians is precisely to exercise good stewardship over our legacy paper collections to preserve them for future generations of researchers and for humanity generally. By preserve I mean both for their own sake and also to ensure they remain in a fit condition for a wide variety of future access and use, and also exploitation in the digital environment as exemplified throughout this speech. This is I contend a core and continuing responsibility of national libraries, of enduring importance in the digital age.