,IN PLACE': Making the British Library's Collections ,Local' as well as ,National'

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,In Place' is the name of a government-funded digitisation project currently underway at the British Library which when completed in 2004 will be the premier web-showcase for the Library's collections. It focuses particularly on the Library's holdings relating to the United Kingdom itself, and is targeted specifically at ,lifelong learners', although many of the items being digitised for the first time will equally be of interest to the Library's core academic clientele.

,LOCAL' VISIBILITY OF A ,NATIONAL' LIBRARY

One of the perennial problems for libraries, archives, museums and galleries that are *national* is making their assets truly accessible *nationwide*. The British Library as a national cultural institution is located primarily in the capital London, at its new ,flagship' building next to St Pancras railway station and its newspaper Library at Colindale in North London. In the United Kingdom's case, the capital city is not situated at all centrally to the nation but in the extreme southeastern corner. By contrast, the Library's northern centre at Boston Spa in Yorkshire *is* centrally sited, deliberately so for ease of remote document delivery through the conventional mail system (ironically a rationale now diminishing as document supply goes electronic). Our collections are most accessible to those in London and the immediate vicinity, or those further away with the time and means to travel to them. But we have a responsibility and obligation towards *all* the nation to make our collections as accessible as possible. That is why the British Library is also beginning to work across library sectors, principally with higher education but also with the public library system, and to seek to widen its audiences beyond ,professional' academia to life-long learners, from schoolchildren to adult independent learners. Being visible ,beyond our own four walls' is particularly important in an era of increasing regionalism that demands not only political but

also cultural devolution. That such pressures cannot be ignored may be gauged by the recent debate over the future of the Lindisfarne Gospels, perhaps the Library's single most famous *national* treasure of all, with a campaign having been mounted in the North-East of England for its return to the region of its origin.

How to Address This Problem of Visibility?

Libraries have long been pioneers in using IT for the dissemination of information about their resources (through catalogues, collection level descriptions, etc.). The ‚single Web-gateway' concept is very familiar, if not so easy to achieve in practice. Now, just as ‚born-digital' publications are expanding, there is an increasing demand for unique, rare, historic or otherwise interesting items from library collections to be digitised and put on the Web. That pressure is being felt primarily from our core academic clientele as the Library works more closely with the Higher Education sector in exploring opportunities of mutual benefit. But not exclusively with that sector as, for instance, schools are requesting greater virtual access to our collections, particularly as the National Curriculum places more emphasis on the use of primary source materials.

Digitisation is One Answer to Lack of ‚National Visibility'

Digitisation and mounting images on the Web are key to the Library's response. Web-access overcomes the problems of distance, travelling time, expenses incurred, restrictions of opening hours, limits on the number of items that may be consulted/day, restrictions of physical space on-site for receiving schoolchildren, and a host of other practical difficulties. Through digitisation the Library edges nearer to the ideal of 24/7 access, and can appeal directly to those not used to entering an academic or national library environment, all too easily feeling alienated from what can appear an exclusive or ‚elitist' preserve, both in terms of ‚bricks and mortar' and procedures. It must also be remarked that digitisation by its very nature is bringing more attention and importance to the *graphic/visual* as well as *textual* riches of library collections - maps, photographs, prints, drawings, etc. Digitisation helps to reveal that any great national library, with an historical depth of collecting such as the British Library, is also a ‚hidden' museum of images. The great conundrum is: how to prioritise what should be digitised from a huge national collection? - In the

British Library's case, there are potentially over 150 million items to choose from.

STRATEGY VS. OPPORTUNITY: IMPLEMENTING DIGITISATION IN PRACTICE

Ideally a national library - any library - should start by devising a digitisation strategy. This should be based principally on user demand - improving access or creating new research resources - as well as more ‚internal' reasons such as conservation. Only once a strategy has been articulated and agreed does the formulation of a programme of implementation commence. But, like many other institutions, the British Library has to date of necessity been *opportunistic* rather than *strategic* in digitisation, seizing external funding opportunities as and when they arise. This has been particularly the case when the amount of funding that can be assigned to digitisation from the annual grant from government (Grant-in-Aid) has been limited, due to other budgetary pressures. At the same time, we seek and need to work in partnership with other institutions and to pool information - nationally and internationally - concerning digital activities. This is vital above all if we are to avoid duplication of effort and the resulting waste of resources (as was seen previously with preservation microfilming). On a more positive note, this is equally important if we are to get onto the Web a ‚critical mass' of material relating to a particular subject, language, region. If that is difficult, then each institution should at least be seeking ‚critical representation' for its collection strengths on the Web.

MOST SIGNIFICANT OPPORTUNITY TO DATE IN THE UK: NOF-DIGITISE

In July 2001 the UK Government's New Opportunities Fund (NOF) announced grants totalling £50 million to more than 150 UK national and local organisations under its *NOF-digitise* programme. This is the largest single co-ordinated digitisation funding initiative yet launched in the United Kingdom. These awards were made for the express purpose of creating a ‚communities bank' of Internet learning resources which would document a wealth of UK achievement and heritage in the fields of the sciences, culture and social diversity. These Internet learning resources were to be targeted specifically at ‚lifelong learners', interpreted as covering all age groups from schoolchildren to the retired. The British Library's participation in *NOF-digitise* is perfectly in tune with its strategic vision to make its collections more widely accessible *on everyone's virtual bookshelf* and an excellent project to begin making that

vision a reality. This is the very first time that the Library has specifically targetted a project beyond its core clienteles of national and international academia and business/commerce i.e. at ‚lifelong learners'. For the record, the British Library's award of £3.2 million makes it one of the largest grant holders within the *NOF-digitise* programme.

THE BRITISH LIBRARY'S NOF PROJECT: ‚IN PLACE'

The project is called ‚In Place' and will present a rich variety of images, sounds and texts in a virtual library of collections for the lifelong learner. It has a deliberate geographical focus that embraces not only England but the whole of the United Kingdom, concentrating on materials - many of them rare or unique - relating to specific localities or regions right across Britain. There are many examples of items in the BL's collections which can be said to have a dual significance. They are at the same time treasures of ‚national' cultural importance but also emblematic of a strong ‚regional' or ‚local' identity. For instance, from the North-East of England the Lindisfarne Gospels, from the Isle of Man the Manx Chronicle, from the South-West of England The Bodmin Gospels and the Sherborne Missal, from Wales the Bangor Pontifical and the Works of Gerald of Wales, from Northern Ireland the Armagh Gospels, from the South-East of England the Abingdon Apocalypse and Chaucer's ‚Canterbury Tales', and so on. NB This is not to downplay the role and collections of our ‚sister institutions', the National Libraries of Scotland & Wales, but to supplement them by revealing to a wider audience the total UK span of the collections housed in London.

WHAT DOES ‚IN PLACE' CONSIST OF?

For ‚In Place', the British Library will be creating some 98,000 digital images with accompanying metadata and delivering them via a Content Management System to the Web where they will be available free of charge for a minimum of six years. The choice of items to be digitised, within the primary UK geographical criterion, cuts like an archaeological cross-section through all the formats represented in the Library's collections: manuscripts, illustrated books, newspapers, sheet music, maps, original drawings, prints, photographs, and - last but not least - sound recordings. The project is made up of 19 individual ‚strands', each devised and managed by one of the Library's collections specialists (curators). These ‚strands' have been grouped together under three

main themes: *Your Place in the Nation, Britain in Sight and Sound,* and *Beyond Britain.* Each of these themes deserves a brief explanation.

‚YOUR PLACE IN THE NATION'

This will comprise a collection of geographical and topographical learning resources relating to specific places throughout the UK. The nine projects in this cluster include: ‚The Unveiling of Britain', 350 of the earliest maps and views created in Britain c. 1000 - 1600 AD; ‚The Image of Regency England', 350 of the original drawings for the first Ordnance Survey of England which include much more detail than is found in the printed maps; 3,000 original topographical drawings of the 18th and 19th centuries from King George the Third's private collection; 3,000 images of British life, landscape, industry and buildings from 19th-century photographically illustrated books; and 1,000 maps of London and its vicinity from 1570 - 1860 collected by a 19th-century ‚Commissioner of Sewers'. This last strand will complement, but not duplicate, the material to be found on the Guildhall Library, London's *Collage* web-site - an example of how ‚In Place' aims wherever possible to work towards achieving a ‚critical mass' of material on a particular theme across projects and institutions.

‚BRITAIN IN SIGHT AND SOUND'

This will present digital resources reflecting diverse aspects of British culture, history and identity. The six projects clustered here include: 300 ancient and illuminated manuscripts, including some relating to Ireland; 3,000 examples of 19th-century printed ephemera from the collection of the conjuror Henry Evans Evanion (circus and music hall posters, trade cards, catalogues, decorated paper bags, etc.); 1,000 Victorian popular songs from London, Northern England and Scotland, including the decorative covers as well as the musical texts themselves; ‚The Way We Speak', 650 recordings of English dialects and accents (which also convey memories of work, village and family life in the late 19th and 20th centuries); and 3,350 sound recordings of British wildlife, both animals and birds.

,BEYOND BRITAIN'

This last theme interprets ,In Place' in a wider geographical sense to reflect the UK's cultural diversity. It will consist of material on British Commonwealth countries and comprise four projects: ,Home from Home', 10,000 drawings, prints and photographs of South Asia concentrating on those areas from which the major immigrant communities have come (Bangladesh, Gujarat, etc.); 1,000 maps and views of former British colonies from King George the Third's topographical collection; 3,200 ethnographic wax cylinders of music recorded in former British colonies between 1898 and 1940, including Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Kenya, as well as India; and ,Home Triangle' - 1,000 pages from 18th- and 19th-century accounts of slaves and ex-slaves in Africa and the Caribbean showing how their notion of ,home' was modulated by their personal histories.

WHO ARE THE ,LIFELONG LEARNERS' OF NOF'S SPECIFIC TARGET AUDIENCE?

The term ,lifelong learners' seems to have come into common use without being clearly defined, and some now prefer the term ,adult independent learners'. In planning the ,In Place' project and in particular its web-site we have been very conscious of the need to create a variety of content with as wide an appeal as possible across all ages, levels of learning, and purposes of research. In practice we envisage essentially three types of use: the general or casual user - the Web-surfer, the Net-browser; learners both in and out of formal education - the private researcher, the ,enthusiastic amateur', as well as schoolchildren; and academic researchers, both students and faculty. It is worth stating that, although ,In Place' is being targeted especially at lifelong learners, the higher education sector could equally benefit enormously by having digital access to a range of teaching resources previously completely unavailable. It is another aim of the ,In Place' project to demonstrate the potential of digitisation for ,multipurposing' across sectors and audiences.

,WEB-APPEAL' FOR LIFELONG LEARNERS

One of the particular challenges of this project is to create a web-site that will not look or feel like a traditional library site. It is important that the ,In Place' web-site attracts and re-attracts a wide variety of users under the ,lifelong learning' banner. There are three main aspects to achieving this:

- *Look and feel* - the web-site must look clean and uncluttered, feel simple, unambiguous and ‚intuitive' to the user, and - most difficult to achieve - be above all enticing and inspiring;

- *Tone and voice* - the web-site must have a sympathetic and encouraging voice, be friendly in tone without being patronising, make the user feel ‚comfortable' and ‚at home';

- *Editorial style* - the language used must be vernacular but without being vulgar; we must avoid an academic writing style, banishing long sentences and jargon, be plain and informative while maintaining interest and momentum for the next clickable page.

These issues are currently being addressed in collaboration with a professional web-site design company.

DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS OF THE WEB-SITE

In the interests of clarity and to facilitate straightforward navigation, the web-site will have a very simple structure. There will be no more than four levels between the welcome page and any item in the virtual ‚In Place' library. In view of the different types of use anticipated, there will be two main ‚pathways' through the site: a Collections pathway and a Journeys pathway. The more motivated or informed user will be expected to travel the Collections pathway and be presented with more ‚orthodox' search strategies. The more casual learner will probably travel the Journeys pathway and be presented with various options designed to stimulate curiosity both about themes and about the collections.

COLLECTIONS PATHWAY

This will be the more conventional - but equally attractive - side of the web-site. There will be a ‚home-page' for each of the 19 collections strands that make up ‚In Place', giving an overview of the content and how it fits into the overall theme. There will be a search function so that any particular item will be no more than three clicks of the mouse away. For each collection there will be a ‚Curator's Choice, containing a text or possibly video description of five of the curator's favourite objects with appropriate links to the database. There will be a rotating ‚Virtual Gallery' of up to 30 objects linked by a single theme.

The ideas for these ‚temporary exhibits' will be sparked off by current events, anniversaries, and so on.

JOURNEYS PATHWAY

This is designed to provide a learning ‚experience' of a specific theme illustrated through the Library's collections. Each such experience will be simple and easy to navigate and be kept fairly short - no more than six pages. As an example, in honour of ‚East Enders' being the UK's favourite television soap-opera, we have been considering taking as a theme: ‚The *Real* East Enders'. To illustrate this theme, ‚In Place' can call on historic maps of East London, contemporary reports on the murders of Jack The Ripper from the *Penny Illustrated Paper,* Victorian music hall songs, sound recordings of Cockney accents, and so on. Other themes currently being explored include ‚The Cocoa Trail', showing how cocoa is grown, harvested, imported, and distributed, and ‚The Great Divide', looking at depictions of the English Channel and the historic rivalries across it. Apart from being fascinating experiences in themselves, these learning journeys are meant to stimulate users to search the collection to illustrate themes of their own devising, relating to their own locality or region or to some aspect of British social or political history of their own particular interest.

WHAT ARE THE END RESULTS BEING AIMED AT?

‚In Place' will provide the first opportunity for people nation-wide to access in their own homes and schools a web showcase of the British Library's collections in all their richness and diversity across British geography and history. The web-site will link to the People's Network (through the Public Libraries) and to the National Grid For Learning, both as part of the Library's push for more cross-domain collaboration. The project will link with a variety of other digital projects currently underway to provide a ‚critical mass' of material on British history, topography and culture on the Internet. From the Library's own internal perspective, the project is providing very valuable experience in large-scale digital project management. ‚In Place' is by far the biggest collections digitisation project the Library has ever undertaken, and the lessons learned will be very valuable in planning and managing its future digitisation programme. But most importantly of all, we must deliver a Web-site that will attract *and re-attract* a wide range of ‚lifelong learners' - schoolchildren, amateur researchers and others - who have exhausted the resources

of their local public library reference collections and county archive offices but who are currently unaware of the British Library's potential to carry their interests forward. Through ‚In Place', they will hopefully discover a whole new and ‚unknown' array of primary materials to enrich their study of local and family history, or simply to enliven their leisure with images of our ‚national' but at the same time very ‚local' treasures.