

The Future of the Map Library and Map Librarian

Report on the 16th Conference of the
LIBER Groupe des Cartothécaires,
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John N. Moore

Collections Officer/Subject Librarian, Physical Sciences Faculties Support
Team, Glasgow University Library, Hillhead Street, Glasgow G12 8QE, UK,
J.Moore@lib.gla.ac.uk

Abstract

Interest in maps and cartography is on the rise, partly spurred by new technologies such as Google Earth and Google Maps. But the new users, welcome as they are, do bring new challenges in terms of ease of use and speed of delivery. Therefore, LIBER's Groupe des Cartothécaires devoted its biennial conference to state-of-the-art technologies and concepts such as new retrieval techniques, Web 2.0 content, links with geospatial databases and FRBRisation to investigate their potential for and impact on map libraries and map librarians — whilst concluding that the particular expertise of a map librarian is as indispensable as ever. John Moore, the Group's Secretary, reports on the conference.

Key Words: Groupe des Cartothécaires; map curatorship; map libraries/archives

In what turned out to be an innovative and stimulating programme, the Dutch organising committee of the 16th Conference of the Groupe des Cartothécaires had moved the timing of the congress to the beginning of the summer. Although this denied most delegates the opportunity of a break from their duties before attending the conference, the level of participation, discussion and interaction did not indicate that this was a problem. In fact, this was one of

the most successful conferences of recent years and the organisers impressed many by the impact created by certain changes made to the usual pattern, the choice of papers presented and the overall arrangements for the week.

Our hosts in the Netherlands were the Amsterdam City Archives (SAA), supported by the libraries of the University of Amsterdam (UvA), the Vrije Universiteit (VU University), Wageningen University and Research Centre (WUR) and the Royal Tropical Institute (KIT). Members of the organising committee represented the host institutions, thereby ensuring a wide spread of interest and relevance.

As in past conferences, the high number of delegates (over sixty) from twenty European countries reflected a variety of backgrounds in libraries (national, university, public), archives (national, regional), national survey bodies and research institutions. On this occasion, a welcome return was made by representatives from Iceland, Ireland, Italy and Portugal. While the programme contained the usual mix of presentations on developments within particular areas of specialisation, the organising committee had put much thought into structuring a programme which introduced notable changes from past conferences. In particular, the various national reports on cartographic activity and organisation within thirteen of the countries represented were reorganised into part of a broader poster session in the Special Collections Department of Amsterdam University Library, thereby allowing individuals the opportunity to discuss presentations with presenters.

On this occasion, the conference theme was: 'The future of the map library and the map librarian', reflecting the concerns of many in the profession of the impact which significant technological change in methods of cartographic production and delivery is having on access, collections and expertise.

Prior to the beginning of the conference proper, some delegates enjoyed a very interesting historical cartographical tour of the centre of Amsterdam under the expert tutelage of Jan Werner from Amsterdam University Library and Secretary to the organising committee. Jan's infectious enthusiasm for the strong tradition of map-making within the city and his intimate knowledge of the close social and geographical inter-relationships between many of the key figures in the golden age of Dutch cartography reminded those fortunate enough to accompany him of the rich history of map-making in the Netherlands.

The conference began in the recently refurbished Film Theatre of Amsterdam City Archives and delegates were welcomed formally by Marc Hameleers, President of the organising committee to his home institution and the city. Marc stressed that this was the second visit by the Group to the Netherlands, having previously enjoyed a conference in The Hague in 1984. He also highlighted some of the changes introduced to the present congress, including the creation of discussion groups. Following on from this, a thought-provoking and relevant keynote address to the conference entitled 'Mapping out map libraries' was delivered by Ferjan Ormeling (Utrecht University). His paper considered maps as models of reality and, as his first illustration was the famous map illustrating Robert Louis Stevenson's 'Treasure Island', he had the interest of the audience from the outset. He reminded us that curators have the experience and knowledge of the reality within our collections to be able to utilise them and provide the metadata necessary for proper and wider disclosure. Such expertise is even more important in an age when the availability of cartographic material is affected by the price of files and the complexity of geospatial information packages. The future will require us to help users bridge the information gap, developing into a more consultative and educational role as interest in geographical data continues to grow. Curators are uniquely placed to blend the skills of treasure hunting and GIS knowledge, combined with an awareness of both data content and reader requirements into a package which is highly relevant to many in the map using community.

Following on from this vision, the conference turned to more practical and local experiences with presentations from three different backgrounds. Peter Korsgaard (National Survey and Cadastre, Denmark) reflected on what has happened in his own institution over the last two years where all new maps are digital and the archive is being digitised for Internet availability. Nonetheless, the knowledge of the map curator is essential in providing the relevant metadata for cataloguing systems and the user with information on the most appropriate maps, regardless of source. Chris Fleet then offered the audience a critical evaluation of some of the trends in new geographic retrieval technologies based on his own experience at the National Library of Scotland in retrieving historical online mapping. As ever, Chris's paper provided a reasoned and well considered reflection on tools for access and our unique position in being able to utilise these for the benefit of our users. There is no one answer to our users' variant needs and different situations

will require different types of graphic. Nonetheless, certain trends are becoming more defined and with a prescient allusion to the papers delivered on the Friday of the conference, Chris referred to dynamic zoomable maps as an essential tool to the basic core of order and arrangement, and yet most users seem to prefer textual lists, emphasising the importance of a mix of information. Whatever develops in the near to distant future, map curators remain the best placed experts to fill the niche between the web as the sole information channel for libraries and the technological focus on the user. Embracing such as priorities will be a key future skill to provide a broader role. To conclude the morning session, Arnold Bregt (Wageningen University and Research Centre) based his paper on the user's point of view, looking at the role maps and map collections play in e-government. The widening of the 'spatially aware' readership and a more demanding clientele, combined with the un-stated expectation of staff becoming guardians of the future, will result in a supportive and interpretative role for map room staff. Arnold stressed a constant theme of the conference that we need to become part of the spatial data infrastructure. A challenging but brighter future than many may have viewed before attending the conference.

Having a chance to reflect on this future over lunch, delegates were then challenged by Greetje de Jong, a professional facilitator, to participate in four discussion groups considering variant alternative futures. We were encouraged to look at future developments and what driving forces lay behind change, resulting in a breakdown of possible future scenarios based on the impact of technology and centralisation and our management of these forces. This was a new approach to encouraging delegates to contribute to the general discussion and, in certain groups, it stimulated much more debate than usual! Having cudgelled our brains into some better vision of what lies ahead, we then dispersed for dinner and a more reflective consideration of what we seek to do.

The second working session, Modern map-use in education, took place on Wednesday morning in the Vrije Universiteit Library. This followed an introductory visit to the Zuidas Information Centre which put in perspective the development of this new urban centre in south Amsterdam — an urban planner or sociologist's vision. Three papers formed the content of the morning session, chaired by the Group Secretary in (almost) full national costume — Martijn Storms (Leiden University Library) on 'Teaching a map collection', Nick Millea (Bodleian Library, Oxford University) on 'The Gough Map, the

map library and the research community' and Wybren Verstegen (Faculty of Arts, Vrije Universiteit) on 'The Nature Scenery Act in the Netherlands and the reconstruction of past landed estates'. Once again, the papers seemed to dovetail together very well, despite a last minute change in the programme. As ever, Nick presented a polished exposition of pivotal work being done by the library on encouraging new research into the earliest surviving modern map of Britain. His illustration of the potential role for map librarians in identifying material for future research is one illustration of how institutions can realise the full potential of collections. Martijn gave the conference an overview of a master course he had run in the Book and Digital Media Studies programme at Leiden based on the Bodel Nijenhuis collection. He reminded us that Leiden does not have a department of geography and of the difficulties faced by introducing such material to students not necessarily as conversant with the concept of space as many of our more traditional users. Looking at collections from a researcher's point of view, Wybren provided the background and provenance to a collection of maps relating to a significant piece of environmental legislation in the Netherlands.

Delegates were then offered a choice of visits to the University Map Collection, the MediaXperience and demonstration map table and to the roof of the building where they could enjoy a view to the north over the city, reminding several of us of the Paris conference and the view from the Tolbiac building. Once again, our hosts treated us to lunch before braving a heavy downpour of rain on the return to the Special Collections of Amsterdam University Library for the afternoon session. This gave delegates the opportunity to view the national reports and other poster sessions, which included strong representation from both Poland and Russia on the provision of cartographic information in both countries, as well as updates from Wolfgang Crom (Berlin State Library) on *Bibliographica Cartographica Online* and Annick Anceau (University of Liège) on her work first presented in Paris two years ago. This continuity is a most valuable development in the programme arrangement for it allows delegates to keep abreast of the continuity of major projects and provides a pattern of information input which can be used in the individual situation. In addition to the posters, delegates could view the major exhibition of Blaeu's 'Atlas Maior', again underlining the immense wealth of historical Dutch cartography. Several expressed their envy of the generous exhibition space in the newly refurbished library. As well as the exhibitions, the party were offered tours of the Special Collections and map room, where there were demonstrations of

new digitising and printing equipment, access to the holdings of the Royal Tropical Institute and Delft Technical University's Geodesk.

Those who still had an appetite to view paper maps and atlases to be fed were well nourished by a market display by rare book sellers, conservators and cartographic interest groups. While few curators are likely to be in the fortunate position of having funds to purchase many of the treasures on display, it is a timely reminder of two key elements in this area of interest — the invaluable bibliographic knowledge many dealers have of maps and atlases and the high market value of many of the treasures under our care. The day was well rounded by an enjoyable and relaxing canal cruise generously provided by the Municipality of Amsterdam.

'New methods for the version of geographic and cartographic data' was the title of the third working session held on the Thursday morning in the Forum Library of Wageningen University and Research Centre. This was ably chaired by Nick Millea (Bodleian Library, Oxford) and consisted of three papers by Marco van Egmond (Utrecht University Library), Ruth Kalf (Université catholique de Louvain) and Anda Zalite (National Library of Latvia). With some reference to the work he first introduced to the congress in Paris, Marco considered the challenging issues of archiving and access to digital cartographic data, in particular the difficulties of data migration and the need for rigorous cataloguing as well as metadata provision for the digital document. Once more, feeding into a general trend of the conference, Marco suggested that there was a place for international cooperation in providing high quality records by participating institutions — yet another example of the changing role of the map librarian to one of information manager.

Ruth then introduced a possible cataloguing solution in her paper 'FRBR: an opportunity for map collections and map users?' Functional requirements for bibliographic records is an IFLA 'entity-relationship' model for a more complex but richer catalogue, grouping collections by work as an intellectual creation. While still in the development stage, this has the potential for a revolutionary approach to open up our collections to new possibilities and user groups. It is to be hoped that Ruth will have the opportunity to keep the Group updated on the progress of this new concept. Anda's paper, with the eye-catching title of 'The way to the castle of light' discussed the role of the Department of Cartographic Materials at the National Library in the dissemination of geodata. In her quiet but effective way, she detailed the rapid technical developments

in Latvia and their impact on the work of the map librarian, particularly in the planning of the new National Library building. Here is an excellent example of how we must look to trends to identify what kind of future there might be for such specialised collections and the support/promotional role that staff can play should not be underestimated.

During the lunch interval, the Group Board met for a lively discussion on progressing many of the ideas beginning to crystallise into more definite trends and, as Secretary, it was heartening to see such enthusiasm being expressed. The afternoon session was handed over to our hosts at Wageningen who provided us with updates on the work taking place there. Frans Rip introduced his audience to GeoDesk and its symbiotic relationship with the map library. Both use metadata and provide services to their users suggesting a sharing of knowledge as one potential development of the thorny problem faced in institutions where experience of GIS software is limited to the few. By combining expertise from both areas, there are opportunities to open up collections to provide far wider access. Henk Kramer's presentation concentrated on historical maps and GIS databases with particular reference to land-use. His overview of the work in extracting such information from the available topographic series gave an illustration of the facilities now available for investigating a time-series of documents with examples relevant to both the Netherlands and Europe in general.

The remainder of the visit to this innovative institution was dedicated to group tours of the Library's Special Collections enthusiastically led by Liesbeth Missel and members of her staff. The tour included displays of the collections of aerial photography from the Second World War, a unique garden architecture archive and a maps exhibition entitled 'Wageningen: op de kaart, een typologie van kaarten'. In addition, delegates were offered a series of short demonstrations relating to the Alterra Map Database, ISRIC World soil library and maps, TopoXplorer and Map Table. It was rather like an Ideal Home exhibition for the would-be GIS/map librarian of tomorrow but again underlined the rapid and divergent technological changes impacting on the profession, in particular the facilities offered for better disclosure and wider access.

Somewhat sated by the variety of presentations which gave the congress much to consider, the delegates travelled to the Veluwe area for the conference dinner where the inner person was nourished in what was a converted barn. There was ample opportunity to discuss many of the issues raised

before the journey back to Amsterdam. Re-vitalised by this, the fourth working session 'Visual access to map information' took place on Friday morning in the Koningszaal of the Amsterdam City Archives. Henrik Dupont (Royal Library, Copenhagen) chaired what turned out to be a grand finale to our week of deliberations with a series of four highly relevant papers discussing tools to access cartographic resources. Peter Levi (Royal Tropical Institute, Amsterdam and conference webmaster) introduced the work done to digitise the 12,000 maps from the cultural heritage collection covering the period 1850–1950. Peter provided some very practical guidance on organising such a project but stressed how such work opens up new possibilities for collections and map library staff. Following from this, and with echoes of ideas which had drifted around at the previous conference, Wolfgang Crom (Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin) reported on his progress with a project to develop a web-based graphic cataloguing and search system for maps at the German Research Foundation (GOKaRT). Taking a cooperative approach as a means to combat problems faced by understaffed collections, the scheme has a value and implications well beyond the national boundary, particularly if sufficient funding can be found for free international use.

A French contribution to a similar method of providing access to collections was the subject of the presentation by Jean-Luc Arnaud (CNRS-MMSH, Aix-en-Provence). CartoMundi is being developed as a website for cartographic resources based on an open network of members. Jean-Luc emphasised one of the major stumbling blocks for many a researcher — abundant production but poor recording of multi-sheet series. The solution which we appear to be heading towards suggests cooperative work on accessible graphic indexes, central to disclosing our disparate collections. In effect, the issue of such web available tools struck some attendees as a natural progression from such cooperative catalogues as WorldCat or COPAC but dealing more effectively with the difficulties arising from multiple sheets in sets. The final presentation of the conference was given by Jose Borbinha (Instituto Superior Tecnico, Lisbon) and introduced the work being done in the DIGMAP project within the European Commission's eContentplus programme which seeks to enhance visual access to historic collections. While several national libraries are involved, the work has a much wider relevance to the promotion of all research/heritage collections, based on a specialised service using the libraries' own metadata.

There was much to think about in these four presentations, particularly as they seemed to dovetail into and build on earlier schemes to open up our collections (e.g. Toporama). It is this author's opinion that the present convergence of so much thinking and work on these projects gives the Groupe des Cartothécaires an ideal opportunity to engage with the key players and contribute effectively to co-ordinating activity for the greater benefit of all. A debate on the issues involved and some clear thinking on a way forward would be welcomed by the many.

With so much to think about, the official conference closed with the Friday afternoon session as a series of reports back from the brainstorming groups created earlier in the week. The groups each presented their vision of a future which would be influenced by the driving forces of centralisation/decentralisation and the variants between paper and digital collections. Each group had catchwords for their scenario, namely 'Maps come to you', 'Big and powerful', 'Paper is alive' and 'Human face of maps'. In truth, some of the presenters were caught out by this requirement to provide a reasoned report and this author must record his indebtedness to his Swiss collaborator for saving the day. Whatever else this session did, it threw up two significant features — that there is a very strong thread of the theatrical amongst the British contingent who took on their roles with gusto and, more importantly, we are passionate about the importance of map curators to the full promotion and development of the collections under our care.

With the more cerebral part of the proceedings over, many delegates enjoyed a visit to Amsterdam's Westerkerk on the Friday evening before a post-conference tour to West Friesland and the Markermeer area on the Saturday. Our guide for the morning, Jan Beenakker (University of Amsterdam) provided us with a geographical commentary of the area. We eventually halted at Enkhuizen, once a major port but now thriving as a tourist honey trap on the west coast of the IJsselmeer. We were taken on a walking tour of the medieval town, along its fortifications, around the harbour, and never far from the Enkhuizen coat-of-arms — the three herrings. Our organisers (Jan Beenakker and Jan Werner) excelled themselves by leading us to a café, and instructing us to sit next to a cake of our choice — amply proportioned gateaux abounded, and so we were presented with an opportunity to escape the hot sun for some well-earned refreshments.

Back on the bus, we headed west to Hoorn, where we were welcomed at the Westfries Museum and given a presentation by Onno Zaman, director of Pictura Imaginis BV, on the Frederick de Wit wall map digital restoration project. Enkhuizen town council owns five 17th-century de Wit maps, comprising an unusually complete set covering the whole world. Subsequent damage after a fire rendered the maps no longer fit for display, so a digital restoration project was set up. The Pictura team has managed to remove cracks and bring back faded colours, much of the background information coming from a second, less complete set of the series held at Amsterdam University Library.

An online presentation followed, enabling us to compare the original imagery with Pictura's recent efforts, and the results were most impressive.

More refreshments in the walled garden behind the museum set us up for a tantalisingly short stroll through the town to the harbour, where our arrival coincided with that of the *Nieuwe Liefde*, and we were welcomed on board for lunch and a sailing trip into the Markermeer. In glorious conditions, we plied south towards Volendam, dining on deck, and generally enjoying the wind in our hair (if not the ship's sails).

The *Nieuwe Liefde* was too large to land on the former island of Marken, so we were able to moor at Volendam, walk around the harbour, and take a launch across the water to Marken itself, now connected to the mainland, although the causeway is a considerable distance from Volendam, hence the need to travel by boat. Once on the 'island' two walking parties, escorted by the Werners, witnessed this strange land, much of it below sea level, with houses clustered together in 'werfs', best described as raised mounds of earth.

The weather closed in, so our return to the *Nieuwe Liefde* was taken below deck on the launch, then involved a quick sprint around the harbour to reach the dry of our ship's bar. Buffet dinner and drinks were served (above deck for those who profess a maritime tradition, down below for the majority), but as Amsterdam neared, the skies cleared, and we made our way under a tilting bridge and through a lock, and back into the River IJ. Unfortunately, on our return to Sumatrakade, another sailing ship flying the skull and crossbones had eased into our berth, so our skipper docked alongside the *Soeverein*, and a gangplank was fixed to enable us to make safe passage to shore.

The most difficult moment of the whole conference had been reached — when goodbyes had to be said to people who had become friends. However, we hope it is more a case of ‘au revoir’ and, while two years may seem very long, the organising team from Estonia will certainly find it passing very quickly. Those non-sailors in the party gradually made their way into the city, whilst the residents stayed put to toast an excellently organised and very successful conference.

An extensive [website for the conference](#), with related abstracts, power point presentations, national progress reports, posters, programme and photographs has been maintained by Peter Levi.

Acknowledgement

The author is much indebted to Nick Millea (Bodleian Library) and Ruth Kalf (Université catholique de Louvain) for their contributions to this report and to all who attended the conference for making it such a success.

Websites Referred to in the Text

Conference website, <http://liber.gdc.2008.googlepages.com/home>

Frederick de Wit maps at the Westfries Museum, http://www.wfm.nl/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=221&Itemid=99