Sharing Information: Report on the LIBER Library Security Network (LSN) Since 2002

Erland Kolding Nielsen

Director General, Royal Library, Denmark,
P.O. Box 2149, DK-1016 København K, ekn@kb.dk

Abstract

On 2 July 2002, the Executive Board of LIBER, in line with the Copenhagen Principles of 14 May 2002, endorsed the establishment of a Library Security Network to facilitate the exchange of confidential security information among European national, university and other important research libraries with valuable collections. The Network came into being at the end of 2002. It has now been running for more than five years. The objective was, and is, to create a safe information and communication network, based on e-mail, for European library directors and security managers. This paper aims to review the experience: Has the system worked? Has it helped in terms of preventing crime, in solving crimes, in raising security awareness among the member institutions? Furthermore, the aim is to contribute to a revision in the broader perspective of a European context: Is it enough? Should it work otherwise? Are there other channels of information? Should the Network be expanded?

Key Words: Theft; library crime; library security; missing books; LIBER Library Security Network

Introduction

On the 14th of May 2008, the following message from the Royal Library in Copenhagen was sent out through the closed information and communication network of the LIBER Library Security Network (LSN):

'Sentencing of Peter Josef Bellwood

Yesterday at 2:30 p.m. the City Court of Copenhagen passed sentence on Peter Josef Bellwood. The decision concerned 11 maps, which he had cut from four books on January 29 and 30, 2001 in the reading rooms of the map collection and manuscript department of the Royal Library. In addition, he was held liable to pay damages of DKK 392,000 [c. GBP40,000] in replacement for the maps which he had cut out and sold. The court did not pass judgement on the library's claim for damages for the four mutilated books.

This conviction brings to an end a case which started in January–February of 2001. The sentence was one year in prison and expulsion from Denmark for a period of five years. The case rested on the confession of Bellwood, and the judge chose to follow the recommendation of the prosecutor. The counsel for the defence had attempted to obtain a lighter sentence for his client with reference to the long process to which his client had been subjected. The prosecutor easily refuted these arguments with reference to the fact that the Danish authorities already in February of 2001 had committed him for trial in absentia before a magistrate, but Scotland Yard did not succeed in catching the culprit at that time. What led to his capture in Great Britain was the BBC programme Crime Watch which was allowed by the library and the Danish police authorities to show the decisive video films from Royal Library's reading rooms. The result was that Bellwood turned himself in to the British police. Bellwood was sentenced in 2004 to four and a half years' imprisonment in Great Britain for his crimes against the National Library in Wales. When he had finished his sentence for these crimes on December 22, 2007, he was delivered to the Danish courts on the same day.

Under cross examination yesterday in court Peter Bellwood confessed that he had sold the 11 maps to antiquarian and map dealer David Bannister in London for GBP3,500. This is new information for us, since Peter Bellwood has hitherto not been willing to reveal the identity of the buyer. We intend to follow up on this, and insofar as any member of the LSN has advice or information on this aspect of the case we would appreciate receiving it.

> In addition, it has been of interest to us that the case ended with a confession and that the sentence followed the prosecutor's argument unequivocally. This indicates that the library's security and surveillance system has functioned effectively enough, and that our CCTV system provided the necessary evidence to convict. As far as we know, none of Bellwood's earlier criminal cases in England have been decided on the basis of confessions.'

This is an example of the type of information that is circulated through the LIBER Library Security Network. But this message in particular is a little more than that. In several ways the sentence has gained almost symbolic importance for the Royal Library and — in a wider context — for LIBER.

Peter Bellwood was the British map thief who visited the Royal Library in February 2001 and who caused the alarm to go off that led to the First LIBER Conference on Library Security Management in May 2002. The conference was held at the Royal Library in Copenhagen and fifty chief executives, deputies, chief security officers, and special collection heads from twenty European countries and the USA were in attendance. Eventually, LIBER passed a set of recommendations called 'The Copenhagen Principles for a new LIBER Security Network of 2002', published together with the proceedings of the conference in *LIBER Quarterly*.[1] This was probably the first occasion at which major European national and university libraries revealed some of their security problems, and the Conference, the Principles, and the papers set a new standard of confidential openness, co-operation, and handling of security matters among research libraries in Europe.

Peter Bellwood is also an example of the fact that it pays off to co-operate and share information, including information about the handling of police and press. Peter Bellwood was originally sentenced for crimes against the British Library in the 1990s, our alarm in 2002 revealed that he had also been at work in the National Library of Wales. After having served his sentence for that crime, he was brought to trial in Copenhagen. The alarm also revealed that another British gentleman, James Perry, had attempted to cut out maps in the reading rooms of the national libraries of The Netherlands, Sweden, and Finland. While Bellwood was identified by the Royal Library, Perry was identified by the Helsinki University Library, Finland, and he was later sentenced

to imprisonment there. While Helsinki got half of its four stolen maps back, the Royal Library has never again seen any of its eleven. Based information provided by the Network and following up on it with the police in several countries, we have reason to believe that both gentlemen were working together on commission for a British map dealer.

The new ways of sharing information established after 2001 have been of great importance to us in recent years, and therefore the time has come to review the experience, evaluate the system and answer the questions: How has it worked out? Has it helped in terms of preventing crime, in solving crimes, in raising security awareness among the member institutions?

The Original Outcome

The outcome of the original initiative and the First Conference was the creation of a new working tool for co-operation and information sharing on security matters. On 2 July 2002, the Executive Board of LIBER, in line with the Copenhagen Principles of 14 May 2002, endorsed the establishment of a Library Security Network to facilitate the exchange of confidential security information among European national, university and other important research libraries with valuable collections. LIBER asked The Royal Library in Copenhagen to establish and operate the Network. The Network came into being in December 2002, when detailed information on the necessary procedures and authorisation, as well as application forms were mounted on the LIBER website. The Network has now been in operation for more than five years.

Objectives and Membership

The objective was, and is, to create a safe information and communication network, based on e-mail, for European library directors and security managers.

Membership was and still is to be open only to institutions that are members of LIBER, and is limited to authorised representatives of European research libraries, mostly library directors and/or security managers authorised by their directors.

Participation in the Network must be justified on the basis of the importance or value of an individual institution's collections. The maximum number of members was set at 200 institutions.

We are still far from reaching that limit. As of 1 May 2008, nineteen institutional members have joined. They include twelve national libraries — those of Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Scotland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom (two of which are university libraries as well), six university libraries — those of Cambridge, Ghent, Gothenburg, Luzern, Leuven, and Aarhus, and one national archive — that of the United Kingdom.

Since the Second Conference in Paris no further libraries have joined the LSN, [2] but this autumn the European branch of the International Council on Archives (ICA) is scheduled to consider participation more or less collectively.

Use of the Network

Only authorised users, i.e., those authorised by the participating institutions, have access to the Network and the right to communicate through it to all members. From the nineteen member institutions, twenty-seven representatives have so far been authorised to communicate through the Network. The procedure for authorisation seems to have worked satisfactorily.

Network Content

Information conveyed through the Network should focus on:

- warnings of presumed crimes (thefts, mutilations etc.) committed or believed to have been committed;
- reports on incidents of relevance or interest;
- enquiries received, for example, from police and other authorities;
- notices of losses from collections;
- information on the development of security systems.

The amount of traffic on the Network has always been modest. In 2007 there were nine messages:

- reports of thefts and/or warnings against library thieves: 6.
- assistance in matters of security or crime prevention: 3.

The network manager has received messages from four libraries. The use of the Network is increasing slightly; it should be noted especially that the network was used as a forum for discussion of security matters such as access control and CCTV in 2007.

Administration

From the very beginning, the Royal Library of Copenhagen has operated the Network. This involves:

- maintaining the Network;
- checking that unauthorised persons do not access the Network, and issuing appropriate warnings should this be attempted;
- maintaining a current e-mail address list of authorised members.

Evaluation

Has the system worked? Has it helped in terms of preventing crime, in solving crimes, in raising security awareness among the member institutions?

Based upon five years of experience one may wonder whether the modest amount of traffic is a sign of success or failure. The answer depends, of course, on the underlying reasons: if it reflects a situation of low or even fallen criminal activity, it is a success, but if the Network does not reflect the real situation, it is quite the opposite.

The Board of LIBER and the Network administrator have discussed the question whether the level of activity should be raised. It is always time-consuming and involves effort to create information and pass it on to members, even if it is useful information. On the one hand, the Network should always be ready to operate when necessary, even if it is not active every week or month; on the other hand, the Network is at risk of decline if it is not being used. Most of us are drowning in electronic information, so there is no need to add to that, but I feel the Network should be kept running in case of need. Also, the initiative of the British Library to organise this conference on behalf of LIBER is a welcome contribution to raising our awareness of our security situation.

It would really be desirable if more European libraries joined the LSN. The stronger the Network is, the more effective it would be in helping us defend our rare collections against still growing international criminal activities which are threatening our institutions. There is certainly no reason to believe that this threat will disappear or diminish. I especially wonder why there are no German or East European libraries in the Network. From other sources I know that the crime level there is as high — if not higher — than in Western libraries.

Through the Museum Security Network I recently learned of a case in Montana (USA) whereby a search warrant which allowed a search in a suspected house in Great Falls Montana led to the discovery of some 1,000 books and more than 20,000 individual pages or maps and other documents stolen from at least 100 university libraries in the United States. The stolen property was tracked by a librarian who used a special feature on eBay that alerted him whenever an item that contained certain key words was offered for sale. Forty such terms were entered into the database, and as various stolen pages contained them, they appeared on the screen. In this way it was discovered that an eBay seller from Montana was offering many pages similar to those missing. I think the LSN could consider developing a similar system to trace stolen or missing books.

Information about and Means to Prevent or Detect Crime – New Developments

I have already mentioned the Museum Security Network (MSN), which is a broader network dealing with information on crimes and with a wider range of cultural heritage problems besides thefts, such as disasters, smuggling, claims of and debate about repatriation. This is a closed network as well, run by Ton Cremers from the Netherlands. However, it is not quite as confidential as the LSN. The MSN covers archives, museums and libraries, and it offers a lot of information from newspapers as well as reports on incidents and debates. More confidential or internal information is not passed on by the mailing list. Since 2003 access has been password protected, and at the present time the service has been split up into two news lists, the one mentioned above and the Cultural Property Protection Mailing List. An e-mail with 1 to 25 messages is sent out to subscribers every day, six or seven days a week, and it is often quite comprehensive. In my view it gives a very good overview and understanding of the actual situation of cultural crimes (including art) and public and political discussions within the field.

As chair of the Danish Commission on Export of Cultural Assets, the body that manages and regulates the traffic of cultural objects and goods crossing the Danish border and out of the EU from Denmark, I read the MSN messages almost on a daily basis; after sifting I pass on the most important information once a week to the Ministry of Culture and three groups of colleagues:

- the members of the Danish Commission on Export of Cultural Assets who are the directors of the National Gallery of Arts, the National Museum, the Museum of Fine Arts, and the National Archivist;
- the Nordic national librarians and three university library directors, especially those with special collections;
- relevant internal staff.

Since the First Security Conference in Copenhagen the library world has become more willing to share confidential information, but we are not yet open enough.

A whole series of reports on incidents, resolving criminal cases etc. has been published. These are very good and interesting from a chief executive's point of view, especially for benchmarking purposes within one's own library. I should especially like to mention the article by my own chief security advisor Jesper Düring Jørgensen from 2007,[3] which, apart from reviewing the case that was detected in 2003–04,[4] also refers to new means developed by the Royal Library to identify books, including missing books from different times, collections, and stacks.[5] On its website the Royal Library has now published a comprehensive list of books and related material still missing, information on how to contact the library about missing books that might turn up through book dealers, auction houses or in other libraries, and a survey in pictures and words of identification marks — owners' marks, shelfmarks etc. — found in the older books in the collections of the Royal Library.[6] Finally, background information is provided on the list of missing books, including the official report on the detection of the thefts that took place before 1978.

Furthermore, in late 2003 The International League of Antiquarian Booksellers (ILAB) established a database of stolen books with the purpose, among other things, to prevent antiquarians from getting involved in buying or selling stolen books. This is a closed network as well, but libraries can get access. The Antiquarians Booksellers' Association of America made a similar database available on the internet in 2003.

Conclusions

As pointed out previously, it is difficult to draw conclusions as to how to develop and proceed. The LIBER Executive Board is currently reviewing the structure and activities of the organisation. The Library Security Network and related activities are of course part of this review. I especially see the need to discuss the activity level in terms of well defined success criteria and the present limitations with regard to membership. I also see a need for closer relations and more activities at the operational level as an important supplement to co-operation at the institutional and political level. Several important examples of the latter have already been developed. In this respect it is noteworthy to mention that the Royal Library has acted as a consultant in security matters for several libraries in Northern Europe and Scandinavia and a wide range of archives and museums in Denmark.

Closer collaboration between Europe and North American national and university libraries would also make sense. Crime is an international phenomenon, and we have seen several examples of library crime cases with connections across the Atlantic.[7]

Appendix: Members of the Library Security Network as of 1 July 2008

Royal Library of Denmark, Copenhagen

British Library, London

Biblioteca Nacional de Espana, Madrid

Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris

Cambridge University Library, Cambridge

Ghent University Library, Ghent

Gothenburg University Library, Göteborg

Helsinki University Library, Helsinki

Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, The Library

Koninklijke Bibliotheek, The Hague

National Archives of United Kingdom, London

National Library of Ireland, Dublin

National Library of Norway, Oslo

National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh

Royal Library of Sweden, Stockholm

Schweizerische Nationalbibliothek, Bern

Zentral- und Hochschulbibliothek, Luzern

State and University Library, Aarhus

Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Wien

Websites Referred to in the Text

Antiquarians Booksellers' Association of America, database of stolen books, http://www.abaa.org/books/abaa/databases/stolen_search.html

ICA, International Council on Archives, http://www.ica.org/

ILAB, The International League of Antiquarian Booksellers, http://www.ilab.org/index.php

LIBER Library Security Network, http://www.libereurope.eu/node/161.

MSN, Museum Security Network, http://www.museum-security.org/.

Notes

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1 *LIBER Quarterly* 12(2002)4.

2 During the discussions at the London conference several libraries asked for membership or declared that they now will take the initiative to join.

3 'The Anatomy of a Crime Discovery after 25 Years: A Notable Case of Book Theft and its Detection', *LIBER Quarterly* 17(2007)1, http://liber.library.uu.nl/publish/articles/000194/article.pdf (with further references).

4 Cf. for the development of the case my state-of-the-art report: 'Library Security Management: The Responsibility of the Chief Executive', *LIBER Quarterly,* 12(2002)4, 296–302.

5 Cf. http://www2.kb.dk/kb/missingbooks//index-en.htm.

6 Structured as follows: A. Marks of the Royal Library: Royal monograms – Danish national coats of arms – Shelf marks and ownership marks – Bindings made for the Royal Library; B. Private marks and bindings intended as a guide only: Private ownership marks on the binding – Private ownership marks inside the book – Collectors' bindings, see http://www2.kb.dk/kb/missingbooks//marks/index.htm.

7 At its meeting in Istanbul on July 1, 2008, the Executive Board of LIBER decided to invite a group of North American libraries, including the Library of Congress, to become members of the Library Security Network on the same terms as European members of LIBER.