

# FIL Newsletter Issue 25

## GROUNDWORK FOR GHANA

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On Sunday 17th May I found myself at a Little Chef with six librarians, recently arrived from Ghana, and Sara Gould of IFLA (International Federation of Library Associations). The pub I originally chose had turned out not to serve lunch on Sunday, so eventually we settled for a meal at the Little Chef and hoped that the week ahead would improve after the rather inauspicious start! Sara and I had exchanged phone calls and emails and met to discuss suitable training for our visitors. The idea was simple.

### **Interlending in Ghana**

Ghana has no formalized interlending agreements, relying on personal contact; so far as it goes, this is fine. But Ghanaian university libraries are expanding. We think we have trouble keeping up with demand, but in a country where university's holdings average less than 10,000 items per library, and where the thirst for knowledge is growing, the need for document delivery can, without hyperbole, be said to be dire. Western-sponsored projects have helped and, for instance, a three-year provision of free documents is not to be sniffed at. However, it is to be wondered whether, ultimately, such schemes are of any real benefit: where funds are subsequently withdrawn, analogies with the temporary relief of famine are not entirely out of place.

### **The task ahead**

Sustainability was therefore the key word arising from our introductory meeting on Sunday. This was more than a little daunting, but we hoped that the week would convey at least an idea of the basic procedures necessary to operate an effective, and therefore sustainable, national interlending scheme.

Rather earlier than I am wont to rise, Monday morning saw me making my way to the hotel, from where we all travelled to Manchester Piccadilly to catch the 8:50 to York. I had of course read the background documents; but whilst CVs and minutes of meetings are well enough, to find that Kwame (one of the librarians) was a fellow newly-wed did rather more to bridge the cultural differences.

### **A day at Boston Spa**

The visit to BLDSC was useful. Those of us who use ARTTel or ARTemail can so easily become blasé about it: they reduce the time our readers have to wait by a day or two. Multiply this by five, and you have some idea of the practical benefits ARTemail will bring to Ghana for requests made to the British Library. After a packed few hours, our visitors decided to return to Manchester direct, whilst I enjoyed a couple of hours in York. And so it was that, whilst sampling the delights of down-town Manchester, six Ghanaians experienced their first Mancunian downpour. Drought? What drought?

Tuesday morning, at a rather more civilized 10am, found us crowding into the offices of NWRLS at Manchester Central Library. A brief history lesson took us back to the

English libraries of the 1930s and the practicalities of setting up and maintaining a union catalogue. There was also an introduction to the regional transport scheme which provided food for thought. Unity was demonstrated, and reckoned to be the sort of thing Ghana could benefit from: networked systems are fine, but in areas where networks are not as reliable as in the UK (and problems are hardly unknown here!), a stand-alone system is ideal. If nothing else, the visit provided a useful vision for the future.

A visit to the local Waterstone's at lunchtime was apparently appreciated. I say apparently, because your reporter holed himself up in the equivalent of the Ale and Arty with a pint and a note-pad, all the better to make last-minute amendments to the following days' teaching sessions.

If the morning session had taken us back to the 1930s, the afternoon took us back to the late nineteenth-century, Manchester's heyday, as we visited the original or 'real,' as I prefer to call it, John Rylands Library. Bearing in mind that the building resembles more a temple of books than the anonymous warmth of modern libraries and that Ghana enjoys rather less inclement weather than Manchester, it was probably inadvisable to have turned the heating off. Still, a cup of coffee in the fellows' room did much to warm the body. As for warming the spirit, a selection of items were presented for our enjoyment, from the oldest fragment of the New Testament through to a volume owned and inscribed by Henry VIII. Even Oscar Wilde might have considered this an excess of pleasure.

The final three days were to be the substance of the week, and were based in the Committee Room of the (main) John Rylands University Library. Sara and I were joined by Stephen Prowse (King's College, London) who led one of the sessions on Wednesday, and between us we managed to cover the programme. Doubtless, some of it was already familiar to our guests, but what were of greatest value were the discussion sessions: it was in these that our fellow interlenders were able to refer to the particularities and to discuss the nitty gritty of the proposed Ghanaian interlending co-operative.

An anticipated hour's Internet experience on Thursday extended to two hours, during which Mr Martey, librarian at Ghana's Balme Library, used BLDSC's newly-launched OPAC97 to locate a copy of a first edition his library requires. He would, he advised us, try to buy a photographic reproduction for addition to stock.

Readers will be pleased to learn that there was great interest in FIL (possibly a couple of new subscriptions on their way, Ms Membership Secretary!) as a model on which to base a more formalized discussion and exchange-of-experience group. The value of such an organization is not perhaps as apparent to those of us who take it for granted, as it is to those who do not have such a forum. As a general rule, we were told, chief librarians in Ghana value interlending as an integral part of their services; but where an organizational, rather than individual voice is likely to have greater impact in persuading universities to provide realistic moral and financial support, it is to be hoped that a version of FIL would prove to be a valuable asset.

Having covered most of the elements of borrowing and lending, we devoted our final morning to discussing IFLA's Model National Interlibrary Lending Code. To be frank, if I had seen this before, I certainly hadn't considered it in any depth. Preparing for the session, however, I found it to be extremely valuable. And, since the six visitors represented the entire Ghanaian interlending fraternity, the code was amended to reflect ideas practicable in Ghana, and will form the basis of a nationally agreed

interlending protocol.

FIL's raison d'être is to facilitate interlending and co-operation. In this instance, co-operation between IFLA and FIL resulted in a memorable week for all concerned. More important are the views of our Ghanaian friends: 'The course has been very useful'; 'We truly had a lot of ideas from the discussions which would help us to tailor our ILL system to suit our local needs'; and 'on the whole, the entire arrangement was perfect.' Perhaps most gratifying was the following comment: 'We shall, when we go back, be called upon to design a training programme on document delivery and interlending for other libraries. We shall just pass on, with few modifications, all that we have been taught on this course.' Those of us involved in the course eagerly await news of future developments in Ghana.