

# **The British Library's Collection and Collecting Policy**

**Presentation to the Forum for Interlending (FIL) Day**

**Boston Spa, 14 March 2008**

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# Contents of this presentation

- History, growth and scale of collections
- Current scale, intake and spend
- Past and present collection development aims
- The Content Strategy consultation 2006
- Developments since then

# Arguably the world's greatest research library

- In terms of collection size one of the world's top 5 libraries – along with the Library of Congress, Bibliothèque de France, Russian State Library and National Library of China
- In diversity of formats and collections more or less the equal of any of these
- But the uniqueness of the BL is the sheer *quality in depth* of its collections – across 2½ centuries of unbroken collecting / and across time and space, cultures and languages
- Collections range in date from 1200 BC to today – from Chinese oracle bones to web-sites

# Historic growth of the collections

- In 18<sup>th</sup> century a comparatively modest collection: about 50,000 printed books (when opened to the public in 1759)
- In 19<sup>th</sup> century enormous growth: between 3-4 million printed items added – especially in 2<sup>nd</sup> half of century as UK (and colonial) legal deposit rigorously enforced for the first time
- 1900-1970: even more spectacular growth: between 15-16 million printed items added as UK and world publishing output continued to accelerate
- In 1970 BL said to have about 20 million printed items i.e. in just over 200 years the collection had grown 400-fold

# Current size of BL's collections – over 102 million items and rising

- Printed books 13.8 m / Serial and newspaper titles 0.9m
- Manuscripts and government archives 0.7 m / Philatelic 8.2 m
- Patents 60.6 m / Microforms and theses 10.4 m
- Music, sound and video recordings 3.3 m
- Graphic materials (maps, photographs, prints, drawings) 4.6 m
- Electronic materials (other than sound recordings) 0.1 m ??

# BL's past collection development aims

- Building as completely as possible the UK national published archive to provide the nation with its documentary heritage
- Taking in the 'imperial archive' (through colonial legal deposit, etc.) to illuminate the British historical experience in the world and the global spread of both the English language and English literature
- Providing for researchers the best resource *outside* the country of origin for other regions/languages (with particular emphasis on Europe)
- The 1<sup>st</sup> aim is still core to the BL's CD; the 2<sup>nd</sup> still influential; the 3<sup>rd</sup> no longer viable (not least financially)

# Broad aims of BL's current collection development

- Building as completely as possible the UK national published archive – current and retrospective ‘gap-filling’ – print and electronic – including the harvesting of UK web-sites (through the UK Web Archiving Consortium)
- Collecting research-level English-language material published world-wide in the humanities, social sciences and STM – still on a very significant scale (USA, India, etc.)
- Buying foreign-language printed material selectively and in consultation with HE and other research libraries in the UK
- Acquiring non-print items very selectively, mainly UK heritage material, in consultation with other archives in the UK
- Supporting interlending and remote supply services for researchers unable to visit the reading rooms

# How do we acquire material?

- Legal deposit – over 90% of UK published monographs, serials and newspapers – excluding e.g. internal reports, examination papers, local transport timetables, posters, wall and desk calendars
- Voluntary deposit from UK publishers – of e-journals, sound and other off-line electronic publications (necessary because regulations for implementing Legal Deposit Libraries Act 2003 not yet in place)
- Purchase – principally English books and serials published overseas and foreign-language printed materials (as well as duplicate current UK publications to support interlending and remote supply) – and the licensing of digital publications
- Donation – especially in the field of manuscripts and private papers
- Exchange – from countries where no effective alternative mode of supply (e.g. for university publications from Japan)



# Current intake and spend

- Annual collection shelf-growth of 12 km per year (of which 2.5 km = UK legal deposit materials)
- In 2006/07 BL acquired overall: 196K monographs / 105K serial titles / 167K newspapers issues / 2.27 m patents / 66K special materials / 32K electronic items
- Annual acquisitions spend = approx. £19m [+ £13m worth of legal deposit]
- The hybrid library of print and electronic will continue for the foreseeable future – publication in both formats will go on increasing

# Latest review of BL's collection development policy

- In April 2006 the BL published a public consultation paper 'The British Library's Content Strategy – Meeting the Knowledge Needs of the Nation' – this set out proposals for what information resources we should collect in the future (outside our legal deposit remit)
- The key word in the title was 'Content' - recognizing that in future the BL would not be able to collect and *hold* everything but need to *connect*, provide access to content held by other institutions, with whom the BL would act more in partnership i.e. moving from 'collection development' to 'content provision'
- As part of the strategy we published – for the first time – detailed descriptions of the BL's holdings and collecting levels by discipline in 38 templates using the arts and humanities and social sciences research categories from HE's Research Assessment Exercise (RAE)

## Main points for change / action

- Take forward the *connecting* element of the content strategy by determining criteria for selecting partners, developing existing partnerships and establishing new relationships in support of collaborative collecting, access and preservation
- Plan the transition from collecting print only or print and electronic formats in parallel, to collecting digital copies only for purchased UK journals that duplicate print copies held under legal deposit, and purchased overseas journals
- Adjust our collecting to reflect changes in scholarship, world publishing, geo-politics, etc. – e. g. consider increasing our intake from China or Latin America
- Develop management information to enable new intake and acquisitions budgets to be mapped onto research disciplines – likewise demand for services by discipline

# BUT Many aspects of the BL's policy will not change

- UK legal deposit will continue to be the core of our collecting – print and ultimately electronic
- We will continue to collect across all disciplines, certainly for arts and humanities and social sciences – in STM we may focus in particular areas such as bio-medical sciences
- Our collecting will continue to be format- and language-neutral, but in some subjects English-language material will continue to take priority
- While the emphasis will be on current collecting, the BL will continue to devote funding to retrospective purchasing (print and non-print)
- We will continue to collect for present and future generations

# Latest pieces of work on content strategy

- We have commissioned an external study on the growth in research-level publishing in China and India
- We have revised the research discipline templates published as part of the Content Strategy – these will be mounted on the web in the next month or so
- We have commissioned a study into the use of datasets by researchers in the arts and humanities and social sciences
- We are planning the implementation of the print to e switch in certain journal subscriptions
- We have undertaken a study of the management information options for monitoring intake and spend by research discipline

# Conclusion

- the BL's content strategy will continue to evolve – it will not stay static – it will require regular review
- In particular, e-publishing will continue to increase, and the BL will need to respond to new digital formats as they emerge
- The BL will monitor the relative rise in interest (or decline) in individual research disciplines, the emergence of new disciplines, and the growth of interdisciplinary approaches
- The BL will continue to explore new and effective mechanisms for maintaining an ongoing dialogue with researchers to validate the development of its content strategy in the future