

ANLTC Library Assistant Bursary 2007

Report on a visit to the British Library  
Digital Object Management Programme

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## **Introduction**

The proposal was to visit the British Library to learn more about their digitisation programme. Before writing up the proposal I visited the British Library website to establish whom I needed to contact regarding their programme and the possibility of a visit. I emailed the Digital Object Management Programme Officer. I received a very positive reply from Roderic Parker, Communications Officer, Digital Object Management Programme at the British Library. The British Library were happy to facilitate a visit should I be successful with the proposal. Roderic also provided some background information on the Digital Object Management (DOM) Programme.

## **The Bursary**

The proposal was submitted to the ANLTC in July 2007. I was awarded the fifteen hundred euro bursary in August 2007. As I was starting a Masters in Library and Information Studies (MLIS) at the School of Information and Library Studies at UCD in September 2007, I did not contact Roderic Parker until January 2008 to begin making arrangements to visit the British Library. After many emails back and forth my visit was arranged for March 12th to March 14th 2008 inclusive.

## **The British Library**

The British Library is located at two major sites, one in central London at St. Pancras, and the other near Boston Spa in West Yorkshire. The British Library also has a newspaper reading room in north London.

The British Library describes itself as follows:

*“The British Library is the national library of the United Kingdom and one of the world's greatest research libraries. It provides world class information services to the academic, business, research and scientific communities and offers unparalleled access to the world's largest and most comprehensive research collection. The Library's collection has developed over 250 years and exceeds 150 million separate items representing every age of written civilisation. It includes: books, journals, manuscripts, maps, stamps, music, patents, newspapers and sound recordings in all written and spoken languages [www.bl.uk](http://www.bl.uk).”*

Source: <http://www.bl.uk/news/2009/pressrelease20090521.html>

## **The Digital Object Management Programme at the British Library**

The Digital Object Management (DOM) Programme is part of the British Libraries development of digital library services. According to the British Library, for a variety of reasons, the digital library work is divided roughly as follows:

- The DOM Programme is run from Boston Spa, staffed mainly by IT development staff.
- The digitisation programme, including the Microsoft Digitisation Project, is run from St. Pancras.
- The Digital Preservation Office is split between both sites.

- The Web Archiving Programme is split between both sites, with more of the IT work at Boston Spa and more of the curatorial work in St. Pancras.
- Metadata development work is based at Boston Spa.
- The work on the voluntary deposit of electronic materials is largely done at Boston Spa (which handles printed legal deposit materials).

## **The Visit**

The programme for my visit in March 2008, took place over three days. Two days at the British Library at Boston Spa, West Yorkshire and one day at the British Library, St. Pancras, London.

## **Boston Spa**

At Boston Spa I met with staff working on digital preservation, digital storage, web archiving and the ingest of digital objects. The projects included the PLANETS Project, the LIFE Project and ongoing work regarding the legal deposit of material in electronic format. This part of my visit focused mostly on material that could be described as “born digital” i.e. materials that were never available in hard copy.

The PLANETS (Preservation and Long-term Access through NETworked Services) is a four year project which began in June 2006 and is due to be completed in 2010. It is designed to deliver a sustainable framework to enable long-term preservation of digital content which will increase Europe's ability to ensure ongoing access to its digital information. The project covers digital preservation, preservation planning, preservation actions, characterisation, interoperability framework, dissemination and outreach. I was given a demonstration of the PLANETS Testbed which was being used to test developments in the project.

The LIFE (Lifecycle Information for E-Literature). This project involved developing a methodology to model the digital lifecycle and calculate the costs of preserving digital information for the next 5, 10 or 100 years.

These are both very large projects and the British Library is working and has worked at a national, european and international level with partners on both of these projects. I found both projects very interesting and knowing about them proved very useful during my studies for the MLIS.

The British Library is a legal deposit library. In addition to printed copies of items, the British Library also receives digital materials in a variety of formats. These have to be acquired, preserved, stored and made available to the public in perpetuity. It should be noted that at the time of my visit the deposit of electronic publications and e-journals was not a legal requirement and is still a voluntary scheme. Together with the other Legal Deposit Libraries, the British Library was reviewing its processes for acquiring categories of material not covered by existing legislation. As more and more materials such as government reports become available exclusively in digital form, issues around storing preserving and making them available will become more and more pressing. For further information visit: <http://www.bl.uk/aboutus/stratpolprog/legaldep/#elec>

As an introduction to the issues and approaches involved in the ingest, storage and preservation of digital objects the two days proved very informative and interesting.

## **St. Pancras**

At St. Pancras I met with staff working on the digitisation of the Codex Sinaiticus manuscript, web archiving and on the digitisation of content from out of copyright printed books. The out of copyright books were mostly 19th century material in the Library's collection and were being digitised through a partnership with Microsoft.

[http://www.bl.uk/about/annual/2007to2008/ar0708\\_final.pdf](http://www.bl.uk/about/annual/2007to2008/ar0708_final.pdf)

The highlight of this part of my visit and of my whole visit was viewing the Codex Sinaiticus manuscript on display in the exhibition room at the British Library and meeting the Codex Sinaiticus, Project Curator, Juan Garces.

One of the core undertakings of the project was to capture each page of Codex Sinaiticus as a high-quality digital image. The digitisation of the Codex Sinaiticus planned to provide a life-like view of the pages and allow worldwide access to the manuscript. This project brought together the entire Codex together in digital form.

The digitisation was and is a complex technical and curatorial project. Adding to the complexity of the project, was the fact that while the bulk of the manuscript leaves were bound and held by the British Library, a smaller number of leaves were held at Leipzig University Library, Germany, St. Catherine's Monastery, Sinai and The National Library of Russia, St Petersburg. As the various parts could not travel for digitisation, the technical standards applied during digitisation had to be replicated in each location.

The Codex Sinaiticus website (which went live in July 2008) allows users to interact with the electronic version of the codex. Amongst the features of the website are the option to zoom in and out on the manuscript text, view transcriptions and translations of the text. It is well worth visiting the Codex Sinaiticus website to see the ongoing work of the project.

<http://www.codexsinaiticus.org/en/>

Since 2004, the British Library has been selectively archiving websites from the UK domain(.co.uk) which have research value and those that are representative of British social history and cultural heritage. This involves developing policies and procedures in the area of Web Archiving (Collection Development policy, permission/licensing and other curatorial issues). <http://www.bl.uk/aboutus/stratpolprog/digi/webarch/>

## **Outcomes and benefits of the bursary**

- The opportunity to visit to the British Library as described above.
- Attendance at the **Joint UK-Ireland Digitisation Workshop**, held at the Ulster Folk & Transport Museum, 20th May 2008. This workshop on digitisation was organised by An

Chomhairle Leabharlanna (The Library Council), MLA and the National Museum of Ireland, with funding provided by Minerva EC, the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government and the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism. <http://www.askaboutireland.ie/resources/digitisation/Report.pdf>

- INULS Conference held at DCU in June 2008. I gave a short presentation on the ANLTC Library Assistant Bursary and its impact on me.
- Presentation to the staff at the Library, National University of Ireland Maynooth. In the presentation I gave an overview of my visit to the British Library. I also spoke about the impact of the bursary and offered some advice and tips to encourage others to participate in the bursary.
- As part of my studies for the Masters in Library and Information Studies (MLIS), I undertook modules entitled Digital Libraries, and Rare Book Curatorship. My visit to the British Library provided information which supported the content of these modules.
- For the thesis requirement of the MLIS, I chose to describe and give an overview of developments in the Digital Humanities in Ireland currently. Issues such as the preservation and long term accessibility of the digital resources created by digital humanities projects were considered. The information I learned from my visit to the British Library and in particular the LIFE and PLANETS projects proved useful in the research and writing of the thesis

## **Thank you**

In advance of my visit I checked the British Library Catalogue to ensure they did not hold copies of the following books:

- **Kildare - visions of Cill Dara** text by Con Costello, paintings by Rosemary Burns (ISBN 1 900935 48).
- **Leixlip, County Kildare** by John Colgan (ISBN 9780950748917).

As they did not hold copies, I donated a copy of each book as a thank you.

## **Acknowledgements**

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Thank you to all my colleagues at the Library, National University of Ireland Maynooth for their support and encouragement. Most particularly my colleagues in the Cataloguing Department where I worked at the time I submitted my proposal.

Thank you to Roderic Parker and his colleagues at the British Library for arranging a comprehensive, interesting and informative programme for my visit. A particular thank you to them for their hospitality and attention to detail.

Thank you to the ANLTC for organising the Library Assistant Bursary and providing the opportunity to staff at library assistant and equivalent grades.

Finally, thank you the ANLTC for awarding me the 2007 Library Assistant Bursary.

## **Useful links**

### **ANLTC - Academic and National Library Training Co-operative**

<http://www.anltc.ie/>

### **British Library**

[www.bl.uk](http://www.bl.uk)

### **British Library, Digital Library Programme**

<http://www.bl.uk/aboutus/stratpolprog/digi/dom/>

### **British Library 19th Century Book Digitisation Project**

<http://www.bl.uk/news/2008/pressrelease20080528.html>

<http://www.infotoday.com/it/nov07/Ashling.shtml>

### **Codex Sinaiticus**

<http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/sacredtexts/codexsinai.html>

<http://www.codexsinaiticus.org/en/>

### **INULS 2008**

<http://www.dcu.ie/~library/inuls2008/programme.htm>

### **LIFE Project**

<http://www.bl.uk/aboutus/stratpolprog/ccare/projects/life/>

<http://www.life.ac.uk/>

### **National University of Ireland Maynooth, Library**

<http://library.nuim.ie/>

### **PLANETS project**

<http://www.bl.uk/aboutus/stratpolprog/ccare/projects/planets/>

<http://www.planets-project.eu/>

### **Joint UK-Ireland Digitisation Workshop**

<http://www.askaboutireland.ie/resources/digitisation/Report.pdf>