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## Public Digital Multimedia Services in a Small Country

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## Abstract

*This Paper describes a range of dynamic services which have been established by Public Libraries in Scotland, building on audio and visual materials. These were digitised under three major initiatives: RLS, Am Baile, and SCRAN. SCRAN in particular also developed tools to select, enrich and aggregate these resources and tailor them to the needs of particular user groups.*

*Thanks to the government-funded licensing of SCRAN to every local library authority in the country, Scottish public libraries have been able to build up a body of good practice in exploiting the available digital resources to provide innovative end-user services to their communities.*

## Digital Multimedia in Scotland

With a population of little more than 5 million, less than half that of the city of Seoul, Scotland is a relatively small country. The birthplace of Andrew Carnegie nevertheless has a long and rich history of public libraries, going back to the seventeenth century<sup>1</sup>. Scotland was also quite an early adopter in the creation of multimedia objects, including digital imagery, virtual reality objects, and sound and movie clips, from cultural audio and visual materials<sup>2</sup>.

Many of these materials have until recently been held safe, but not particularly accessible, within the special collections of Scottish public libraries. Others have been hidden in the collections of other sectors (national, special and university libraries) or domains (archives and museums) within Scotland, while some had to be digitally repatriated from other countries. For the first time ever, it has been possible to make all these materials available to members of the general public, through the means of digitisation.

## Major Digitisation Initiatives

These digitisation projects have been undertaken under the aegis of three major initiatives:

- SCRAN (the Scottish Cultural Resources Access Network)

[www.scran.ac.uk](http://www.scran.ac.uk)

- Am Baile (The Village)

[www.ambaile.org.uk](http://www.ambaile.org.uk) and

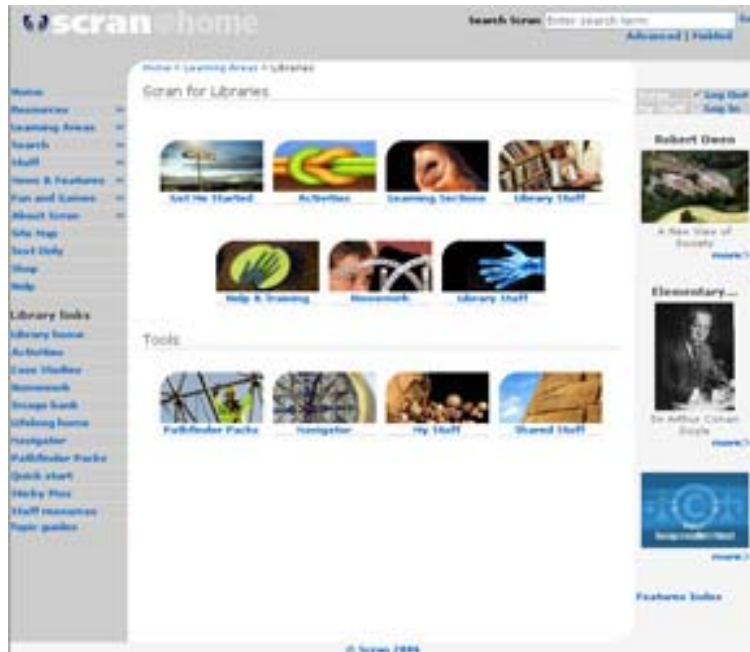
- RLS (Resources for Learning in Scotland)

[www.rls.org.uk](http://www.rls.org.uk)

### ***The Scottish Cultural Resources Access Network***

SCRAN was initially a Millennium project, set up in 1996 with funding from the new National Lottery, and a budget of £15 million Sterling to build a networked multimedia resource base for the study and celebration of human history and material culture in Scotland. Although based on the libraries, archives, museums and built heritage of Scotland, SCRAN's prime concern has not been with conservation, nor with documentation, but with educational access.

SCRAN was set up as an independent, not-for-profit, limited company to manage the digital intellectual property rights of its members<sup>3</sup>. In effect, SCRAN offered grant aid for the digitization of cultural treasures, in exchange for a non-exclusive licence for their educational use. Contributing institutions gained a new digital asset, which they were entitled to exploit commercially if they wished, while at the same time teachers, students, librarians



and general readers at institutions in membership of SCRAN were enabled to download images, movies and sound clips, copyright cleared and ready to use.

### ***NOF Digitisation Fund***

In part as a result of the success of SCRAN in Scotland, the Department of Culture, Media and Sport mandated its Library and Information Commission to consider how public library services throughout the United Kingdom might be rejuvenated by the use of Information Technology. The resulting Report<sup>4</sup> recommended a very substantial investment in ICT infrastructure, training, and digitisation, and in 1999 the "People's Network" initiative was launched, massively funded with National Lottery money through the New Opportunities Fund (NOF), including £100 million for infrastructure, £20 million for ICT training of all 40,000 UK public library staff, and £50 million earmarked for digitisation<sup>5</sup>.

## Am Baile

“Am Baile” means “the village” in Gaelic, the language of the Scottish Highlands, and the Am Baile website uses digitised multimedia to present the language, culture and heritage of the Scottish Highlands, in both Gaelic and English. The Am Baile consortium was led by Highland Libraries and received an award of £108,000 from the NOF Digitisation Fund in July 2001.



## Resources for Learning in Scotland



While Am Baile received relatively modest grant aid, by far the largest NOF Digitisation grant (£4 million) went to another Project in Scotland. RLS, led by the National Library of Scotland, involved the majority of public library authorities in Scotland, and other cultural institutions, in 173 digitisation projects, and yielded 107,000 multimedia objects, 650 resource packs and 26 related websites.

## From Resource Creation to Service Provision

These and other digitisation projects had led to hundreds of thousands of multimedia resources being potentially available to users in public libraries. And since the vast majority of them had been created using the SCRAN rights management model, it was possible to make them available through a single portal and membership subscription.

However, the SCRAN team were particularly interested in creating additional ways for people to use the resources once they found them. Digital multimedia assets are great but folk needed something else to do with them on the site other than just look at them. The team has therefore also developed a range of tools to select, enrich and aggregate digitised audiovisual resources and tailor them to the needs of particular user groups.

In 2004, a pilot programme was launched, fully funded by central government in Scotland (the Scottish Executive), which licensed these materials and tools to every local library authority in the country. Thanks to this, Scottish public libraries have been able to build up a body of good practice in exploiting the available digital resources to provide innovative end-user services to their communities.



Fig 1 The "Sticky Pix" Tool – for Childrens' Activity Workshops

### ***Tools for Service Providers***

A Library Education Officer was employed to support the use of SCRAN among all public libraries in Scotland, and she arranged extensive training and devised quizzes and ideas on using the resources in libraries. Perhaps more importantly, she was the driving force for the development of a range of tools for building a service for public library users:

- My Stuff - simple online Albums for staff and interested readers to use for creating collections of materials
- Institutional Collections of Albums - necessary for libraries to create their own library collections
- Create - enables anyone to use a selected image to make (for example) a poster in 3 simple steps - no ICT skills needed.
- Multiple Image Create - lets users select several images to be used together to create something to keep - a variety of templates are available to create quizzes and scavenger hunts, print out full collections on one page, print out Albums to create displays, create impressive calendars with lots of images etc
- Booklet Create – enables the creation of multiple page illustrated publications without the need for IT skills - very necessary in a library environment for both staff and users - there was a lot of interest in this for local history hobbyists and for school homework.
- Sticky Pixs – drag-and-drop picture-building for activity workshops with children – very popular among all age groups
- Local History Network - Toward the end of the Pilot, work was under way on a facility to link interested users into a Local History Network across all the public libraries in Scotland. This was similar to the Institutional Collections facility but could link any licensed users together across institutional boundaries. Enthusiasm among local history librarians was beginning to grow, when the Scottish Executive decided not to renew the pilot global subscription.

### ***End of the Pilot, and a Future Direction***

The government-funded Pilot came to an end in December 2005, and with it the funding for the Library Education Officer. Without the prospect of continuing support from this key person, it seemed unlikely that Local Library Authorities would renew their subscription. From the feedback SCRAN had received, it appeared certain that a service funded into the future would have become embedded in

Libraries after a relatively short time but unlikely that this would happen in just one year.

The team were therefore extremely disappointed, after putting so much effort into developing and promoting SCRAN, that it didn't receive further central support. They also felt quite guilty at the amount of time, money and effort the individual libraries had put into facilitating the training sessions and supporting the roll out of the pilot (every public library authority in Scotland had arranged training sessions during the roll out of the service).

In fact, after the first shock of having to find money to pay for SCRAN access from their own budgets, library authorities have gradually come to realise the value of the resources and services available, and some 60% of them have already renewed their subscriptions. It is beginning to appear that dynamic services based on digital multimedia are becoming embedded in the public library offering.

## References

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<sup>1</sup> Innerpeffray - The Oldest Free Lending Library - 1680 - Crieff, Perthshire, Scotland  
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<sup>2</sup> Royan, B. SCRAN: A taste of Scotland and food for thought. ARIADNE, Issue 7, January 1997  
<http://www.ariadne.ac.uk/issue7/scrان/>  
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<sup>3</sup> Royan B. Content Creation and Rights Management. Program 34:2, April 2000

<sup>4</sup> United Kingdom, The Library and Information Commission. New Library: The People's Network. London, LIC, 1997  
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<sup>5</sup> Woodhouse, S. Creating content for learning in its broadest sense: the NOF-digi initiative in the UK. Proc 68<sup>th</sup> IFLA General Conference, Glasgow 2002  
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