The British Library
Newspaper Collections

Development and Future Access

IFLA Newspapers Seminar, Shanghai
Library 30 March 2004
The Buildings

- BL Newspapers Facts/ History See:
  - http://www.bl.uk/collections/newspapers.html
Northern façade of BL Newspapers building: 1980s
1822: Newspapers transferred to British Museum from Commissioners of the Stamp Office

1869: Newspaper Printers and Reading Rooms Act: newspapers to be deposited by publishers at the British Museum.

1897: Space for newspapers in the British Museum at Bloomsbury exhausted.

1902: British Museum Act authorising purchase of the Colindale site.

1903: British Museum Newspaper Repository completed as a warehouse for English provincial, Irish, Scottish, and Welsh newspapers.
1922: Newspaper Repository is full.
1928: Royal Commission on National Museums and Galleries Interim Report recommends that the Colindale Repository be enlarged to contain all newspapers published later than 1800 and that a reading room be built.
1930: Building of the library commences.
1932 - Aug 23: British Museum Newspaper Library is opened.
1940 - Oct 20: A Luftwaffe bomb destroys the 1903 building. An estimated 6,000 volumes of newspapers are also destroyed and a further 15,000 volumes are damaged.
1971: New Microfilm building is completed.
1975: *Catalogue of the Newspaper Library Colindale*, compiled by P.E. Allen, is published in eight volumes.

1986: First of the NEWSPLAN reports is published (South West).

1991: Newspaper Library becomes responsible for the Newspaper Legal Deposit Office at 120 Colindale Avenue, formerly administered by the Copyright Receipt Office.
History 4

1995: Conversion of the catalogue is completed.

1996: Final NEWSPLAN report is published (London and South Eastern Library Region).
Newspaper Library website is established on The British Library's Online Information Server.

1999: An online catalogue of the collections is made available in the Reading Rooms.

2000: The Newspaper Library catalogue of over 52,000 newspaper and periodical title holdings is launched on the web.
British Library Newspaper Collections

- Complete Runs of UK newspapers from 1800
- Some 660,000 volumes and parcels
- Estimated 330,000 reels microfilm
- Time consuming to access
- Possibility of missing material
- Lack of indexes to newspapers (some notable exceptions)
Consulting newspapers: 1

- London: 16,239 titles; Redbridge – 82 titles; Sutton 45 titles
- Manchester: 1,204 titles; Bristol 203 titles
- Readers search for information by title, by date
- Page by page, column by column
- Accuracy of retrieval depends upon concentration
- Stamina needed to concentrate
- Powers of observation enhanced to reduce risk of missing information
Consulting newspapers: 2

- Readers can spend months/ years upon a line of enquiry
- Tangential discoveries beneficial
- Many readers wish for the enquiry process to be speeded up
- Finding aids largely absent for most printed newspapers
Manual Indexing of Newspapers

- Work done on a surprising scale for UK Newspapers in several UK regions
- Limited indexing carried out on selected portions of newspapers
- Highly labour intensive
- Exclusion of material of research interest
Automatic Indexing of Newspapers: problems

- Complexity of multiple fonts
- Closeness of fonts on same page
- Imperfections of letterpress inking
- Imperfect registration of text recto/verso
- Bleed through of ink recto/verso
- Great quantity of text
- Need to index continuous runs of issues
- Spine binding curvature on film
“The reprographic revolution” 1

Strands that have come together:

- Scanning of originals or microfilm
- OCR improvements
- Huge gains in access to low cost storage in computers
- High grade software to recognise OCR text
- The advent of the world wide web
- Software to improve access to large quantities of text
“The reprographic revolution” 2

“Historic newspapers” digital scanning

- British Library projects:
  - Pilot Project: http://www.uk.olivesoftware.com
  - Collect Britain: http://www.bl.uk/collectbritain

- Commercially funded work:
  - Gale – The Times (London)
  - Proquest – New York Times

- Many other examples
Images

Mercurius Civicus.
Londons Intelligencer
13-20 July 1643
Diurnall Occurrences
... from the
13. of Decemb. to the
20. of the same. 1641
(London, 1641)
British Library,
E.201.(3.)
The final speech of King Charles I, given at his execution in January 1648/9. Shelfmark: E.540.(17).
The Newcastle Courant 4 July 1724
The Calcutta Gazette; or, Oriental Advertiser
17 February 1785
New-York Price Current Saturday
August 31st 1799
The Poor Man's Guardian July 5th 1834
The Emperor Napoleon III at the Battle of Solferino. Supplement to The Illustrated London News, February 1860
The Family Circle Edition of the Christian World, January 1892

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THE GERMAN EMPRESS,
THE Dukes of Edinburgh, E.G.,
THE Duke of Gloucester, &c.

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CARBOLIC SMOKE BALL CO.
The Graphic 31 May 1884. London and Westminster, 1584.
Police News 14 April 1888
Police News 4 May 1895
Íslending 24 July 1897
Seeing. Pears Annual 1897.
The Mafeking Mail

December 7th 1899
The Graphic 4 February 1901
Royal Funeral Number
The Last General Absolution of the Munsters at Rue du Bois. The Sphere 27 November 1916.
The Evening Standard 17 February 1940: fake copy
Penny Illustrated Paper
August 14 1869
Newspapers always excite curiosity. No one ever lays one down without a feeling of disappointment.

Charles Lamb. *Detached Thoughts on Books and Reading*.

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Possible? Is anything impossible? Read the newspapers.

Duke of Wellington. *Words of Wellington*