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Ink causes a stink: Preservation advocacy in the UK

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines new ways of championing preservation awareness in the UK. It focuses on the UK national picture and the preservation assessment survey at the BL, looking at the work of the UK National Preservation Office and summarising the results of the preservation survey 'Knowing the Need'. It also gives an overview of recent and current initiatives to raise awareness about caring for the collections at the BL, in particular 'The User Experience Project', whose aim is to educate users in the use of the library and its holdings, involve them in the care of their national collections and promote understanding of key collection care issues.

Introduction

The title of my presentation today, 'Ink causes a stink' is taken directly from newspaper coverage last December of the British Library's decision to use pencils only in its reading rooms.

Ink causes a Stink

The British Library is banning pens from all of its reading rooms to protect its books. The home of the Magna Carta and the Lindisfarne Gospels will only allow pencils from January. A spokeswoman said: "Marks made with ink are particularly difficult to remove and sometimes defaced books cannot be replaced."

Library to ban pens

THE British Library is banning pens from all its reading rooms to protect precious books.

The home of the Magna Carta and Lindisfarne Gospels will only allow scholars with pencils

from January. A spokeswoman said: "Marks made with ink are particularly difficult to remove and sometimes defaced books cannot be replaced and have to be withdrawn from use."

Pens banned to save rare books

THE British Library, home to the Magna Carta and the Lindisfarne Gospels, is to ban pens to stop researchers writing in "valuable and historic books. The ban, from next month, applies to all reading rooms at the British Library's St Pancras site, its newspaper collection at Colindale and its library at Wetherby. A spokeswoman said: "This policy is intended to

BY TOM TEODORCZUK
protect the most precious and vulnerable collections. Marks made with ink are particularly difficult to remove and sometimes defaced books cannot be replaced."
Only pencils and computers will be allowed, but TV historian and a regular British Library user Tristram Hunt said: "This will seriously

inconvenience large numbers of scholars. It will also seriously harm people's work as pencil tends to fade. Nobody should be marking British Library property but the management seems to have a total contempt for the people who go to study."
One insider said: "There was a Thai student who caused thousands of pounds of damage and was very lucky to avoid prosecution."

British Library bans pens after student damages texts

■ A ban on pens is being implemented at the British Library in London after a student caused so much damage to some texts by T S Eliot that he was asked to pay £11,500 to repair them. The library, which is the repository of important

texts such as the Magna Carta and the Lindisfarne Gospels and every book published in Britain today, has ordered all its members to take only pencils into the library with them in an attempt to prevent permanent damage to books and

manuscripts. A pen ban has long been in place in rooms housing rare books and manuscripts and the maps and philatelic sections, but is being extended to the reading rooms for humanities, social sciences, science and technology.

The decision was widely reported in the press at the time, giving welcome - albeit unexpected - exposure to an important change in library policy. The change was a direct response to an increase in graffiti damage to library materials being consulted in the reading rooms. However, we must not rely on hard-hitting press headlines to advocate core preservation principles for us, but must seek to be ever more resourceful and creative in the ways in which we can reach our audiences.

Our target audiences are diverse and we therefore need to shape our message accordingly to influence and achieve optimum impact.

I would like to give you an overview of the British Library's approach to collection care advocacy and describe some of the initiatives being adopted to broaden the message to reach a wider audience.

The National Preservation Office

The National Preservation Office was established by the British Library Board in 1984. This was in light of the Radcliffe Report which highlighted an urgent need for preservation policies to be in place in libraries, plus a need for preservation training and provision of a national advisory and research centre. The NPO is located within the British Library building at St. Pancras, London and is funded by contributions from the six copyright libraries of the UK and Ireland, in addition to the National Archives, the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, and the National Library of Ireland with modest additional support from others.

Over the past twenty years there has been an increased emphasis for the NPO on its practical, advisory and information role, and a commitment to provide an enquiry service (both print and web-based) for preservation practitioners, collection managers, and agencies with responsibility for collections. The NPO has recently joined forces with other agencies to form a new national advisory service 'Collections Link'. This innovative service will provide advice by telephone and email in 16 areas of professional practice and is supported by online resources available at www.collectionslink.org.uk which gives access to over 200 fact sheets and guidelines at the press of a button. The service aims to target multiple audiences – museums, libraries, archives, local history societies and historic buildings; anyone, in effect, who has responsibility for the care of a heritage collection. The result of this wide remit is an increase in cross-domain working - a development which is more prevalent in the UK than ever before. By reaching out to a wider community the aim is to connect with and influence all disciplines involved in caring for our national heritage.

Preservation Assessment Survey

One of NPO's key objectives for the three-year period (2005 – 2008) is to develop the Preservation Assessment Survey (PAS) tool together with training for preservation practitioners and collection managers in the use of the PAS tools. The application of the tool enables a national picture of preservation need to be established and provides statistical drivers for fund-raising initiatives. The NPO will also publish an annual digest of the PAS database and Report – the latest of which 'Knowing the Need' I will outline below.

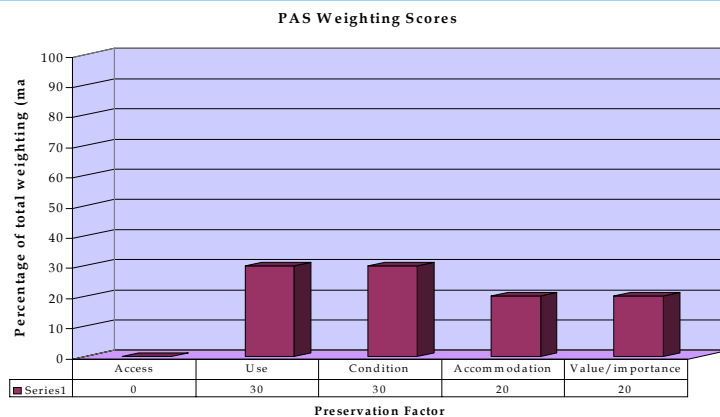
PAS is a survey method for assessing the preservation needs of any library or archive collection. It is a practical, pragmatic and useful way of measuring the condition of a collection and establishing what the highest preservation priorities are. It is important that the findings are used as the basis for positive action and the results disseminated to strategic bodies, government, grant-making organisations and others involved in planning and strategy.

The Preservation Assessment Survey (PAS) works by selecting a sample population of approximately 400 items from a collection and assessing each item against specific criteria - access, use, condition, accommodation and value. The sample size was calculated and verified by statisticians at Loughborough University and is an accurate representation of any collection, within + or - 5%. The criteria are applied as a series of weighted questions in a standard questionnaire and each item receives a total score as a result of the answers to these questions. This enables items to be grouped into five preservation priority bands – band 1 contains the lowest scoring items which are therefore of low priority, while band 5 contains the highest scoring items of very high priority.

PAS SCORING

BAND 1	Very Low Priority (1-20)
BAND 2	Low Priority (21-40)
BAND 3	Medium Priority (41-60)
BAND 4	High Priority (61-80)
BAND 5	Very High Priority (81-100)

PAS WEIGHTED SCORING



- Sample of c.400 items assessed (+/- 5% accuracy)
- Low score = low preservation need/low priority
- High score = high preservation need/high priority

The NPO has coordinated to date over 97 surveys across the UK covering public libraries, academic libraries etc. and has used the data to build up a national picture of preservation need in the UK. The 97 surveys, excluding the six copyright libraries, incorporate over 43,000 separate items (books, documents, photographs, etc.), representing an estimated minimum total of 28 million items.

The UK Preservation Needs Assessment report '**Knowing the Need**', first published February 2006, identifies the areas requiring most improvement as:


- environmental monitoring
- storage

- disaster preparedness
- cleaning

As a direct result of these findings, the NPO organises regular training seminars for collections managers and staff to address these issues – such as ‘Preservation for Access’ and ‘How clean are your books?’

Further analysis of the surveys reveals that 87% of the UK collections are ‘stable’ and 13% unstable. Only 3% of material has significantly brittle paper, and 18% slightly brittle. A telling figure is that 70% of all material surveyed shows some sort of damage. Across all surveys, some form of damage was recorded in 80% of newspapers, 79% of parchment and vellum items and 70% of manuscripts.

LIBRARY
HSLIRB


KNOWING THE NEED

National UK Picture

- 97 surveys completed so far
- 43,000 individual items surveyed (represents estimated 28 million collection items)

- 87% of UK collections are in stable condition
- 13% of UK collections are in unstable condition
- 70% of material surveyed show some form of damage
- 21% of material surveyed showed evidence of brittle paper

- 80% of all newspapers surveyed showed some form of damage

- Most pressing issues are environment, written disaster plan, Storage, ‘housekeeping’ – cleaning.

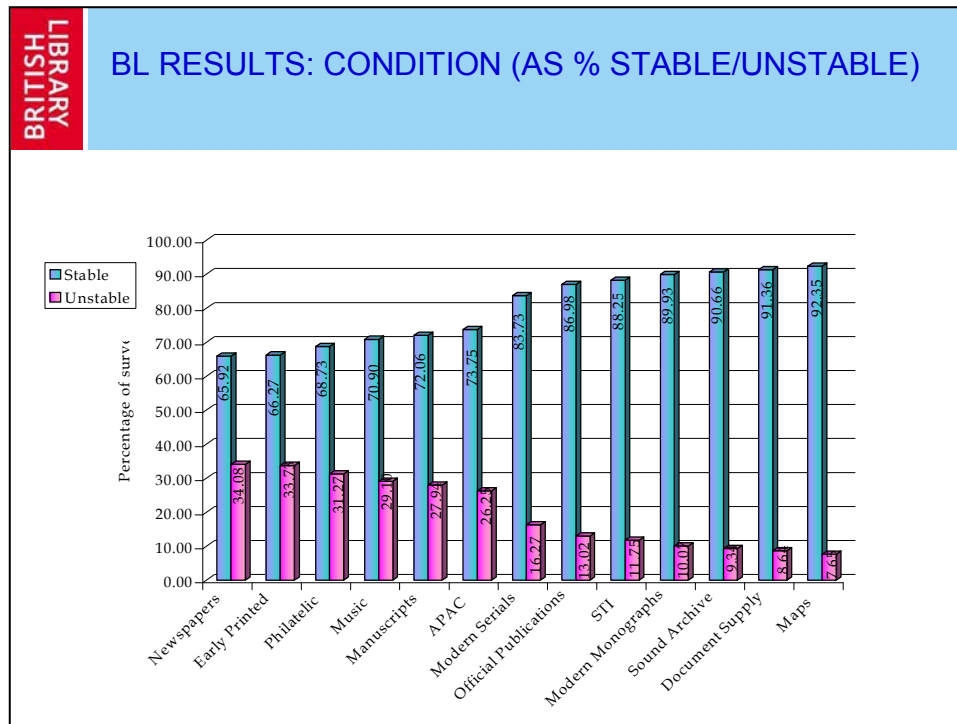
Copies of the full report can be downloaded at:

<http://www.bl.uk/services/npo/publicationsnpo.html>
[Knowing the need: a report on the emerging picture of preservation need in libraries and archives in the UK, 2006 \(PDF format\) 1.45 MB](#)

The British Library Survey

The British Library, having been involved in the design and testing of PAS, is committed to using the survey to give an objective picture of the condition of all its collections. We completed a survey of the condition of the entire BL collections in 2005 and are now using the results to prioritise the allocation of preservation and conservation resource to the collections in greatest physical need.

The programme of surveys started in 2000 with an initial broad experimental pilot of the library collections as a whole, followed by 13 individual surveys of the library's collection areas. Overall, this resulted in comprehensive coverage of over 150 million collection items. The headline figures do not greatly differ from the national picture in as much as 86% of our material is in stable condition.



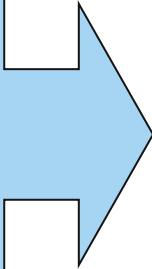
In brief, the map collection is the most stable and newspapers, not surprisingly, the most unstable. This correlates with the national picture, where 80% of all newspapers surveyed showed some degree of damage. This information permits us, amongst other things, to prioritise our preservation resource. We are in the process of disseminating the findings to curatorial colleagues to help them address the collection areas in most need.

Preservation Planning and priority-setting

Each year the preservation resource at the BL is distributed to target material most in need of preservation. The preservation bidding cycle starts in October when collection departments are asked for their requirements for the forthcoming year. The information is collated and scored using weighted criteria similar to the PAS criteria, and the resultant scores are used to aid the decision making process in prioritising the allocation of the available resources.

PRESERVATION BIDDING CYCLE

- £3m preservation budget
- collection areas bid for work via bidding database
- same format, same criteria applied to all bids
- bids for
 - conservation
 - boxing/enclosure
 - binding
 - microfilming
 - digitisation
 - migration
 - furbishing
 - condition assessment



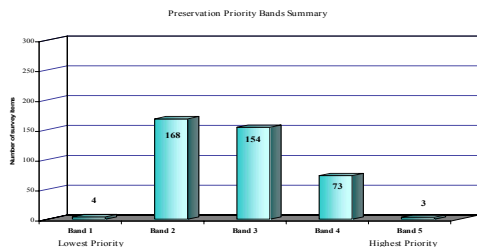
- Oct Bidding cycle begins
- Nov All bids submitted by end of month
- Dec-Jan
 - All bids verified, scores computed
 - bids for external services costed, budget profiled
 - bids for internal treatments sent to Conservation for estimating
- Feb Preservation Board meets to ratify budget and bid programmes
- April Programmes begin

The survey results for the newspaper collection are a good example of where the statistical evidence is used to actively benefit the material. The survey of this collection showed that 34% of the material is unstable with 19% in poor condition which soon may need to be withdrawn from use. This, along with other external factors, has informed recent decisions to prioritise the preservation of this collection, principally through an enhanced copying and reformatting programme.

Results: NEWSPAPER LIBRARY Condition and Preservation Priority Bands

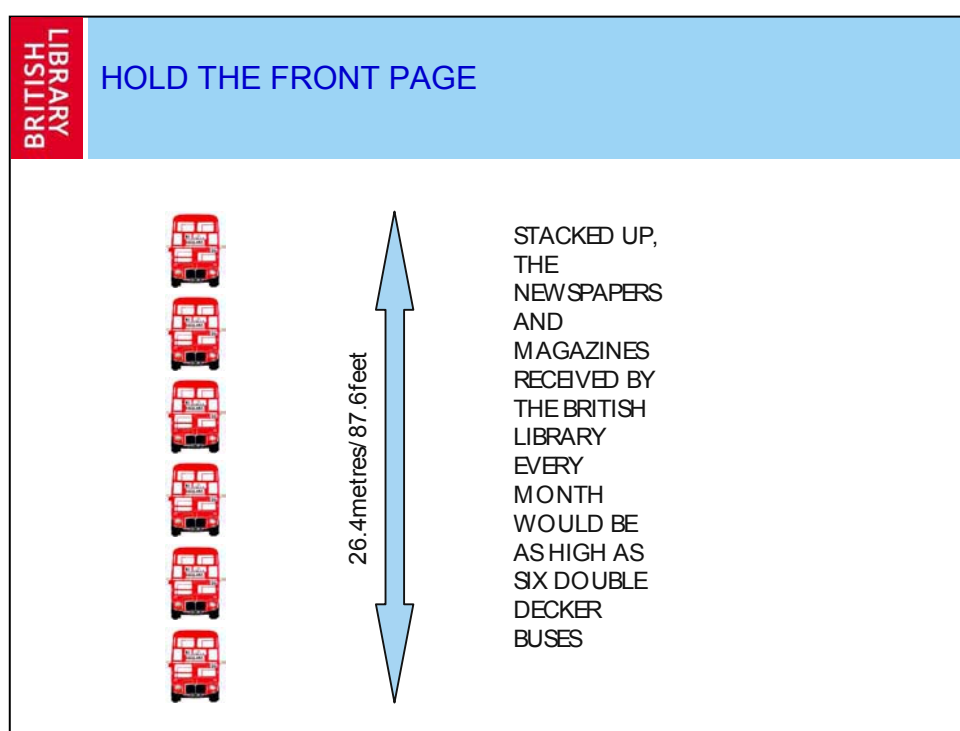


% Stable: 65.92
% Unstable: 34.08



% in Band 1: 1
% in Band 2: 41.79
% in Band 3: 38.31
% in Band 4: 18.15
% in Band 5: 0.75

A further initiative to raise the profile and highlight the vulnerability of newspapers was an exhibition which was opened by Her Majesty the Queen in May entitled 'Front Page' – celebrating 100 years of the British Newspaper. Discussion took place at an early stage to ensure that Collection Care messages were embedded throughout the exhibition and a comprehensive double leaflet, issued free to every visitor, explains the scale, nature and deterioration of newspapers. The front of the leaflet, entitled 'Save the Front Page; Preserving the national newspaper collection' unobtrusively suggests the nature of its key message to the visitor by its choice of language, while providing a wealth of information and core preservation issues inside. At the end of the exhibition visitors are left in no doubt as to the scale of the problems associated with caring for newspapers, with graphic illustrations and facts such as – if we stacked up all of the newspapers and magazines that we receive at the BL every month, the pile would be as high as six double-decker buses.



The User Experience

In the summer of 2005 'The User Experience Programme' was initiated at the BL with the express aim of enhancing the use of the library's collections - making them accessible, providing an excellent and sustainable service, whilst still focussing on Collection Care issues. The programme aims to improve, inform and educate users and has listened to staff experience and opinion to effect necessary change. This includes restructuring of the admissions process with more user-friendly education upfront and new plasma screens, as well as the introduction of new directional signage, iconography illustrating collection care principles, and the publication of leaflets with the core collection care messages.

THE USER EXPERIENCE

- Change in admissions process.
- Directional signage updated in phased programme
- New plasma screens being installed
- St. Pancras maps redesigned
- New iconography
- Collection care principles
- New core leaflets 'Taking Care of our Collections'

In the initial study there was universal agreement that we were overwhelming our users, particularly new applicants, with too much information – too much and all at once. So we are adopting a more measured and layered system of communication, using different media to inform (such as Public Address announcements and visual aids) because people learn in a variety of styles. Our own past experience and experience of others suggests that mandatory induction training has negligible benefit and has proved not to be the most effective way of communicating. The key Collection Care messages we are embedding are prevention, conservation and security. We want to convey to our users the issue of the life cycle of a collection, the need to prevent wear and tear through handling, the uniqueness and irreplaceability of our material, the fragility of some materials and the conservation costs once damage has been incurred. We are finalising reader placemats to be on show at every reader desk highlighting best practice on reading room protocol using icons similar to those in our 'Taking Care of our Collections' leaflet.

ICONOGRAPHY

Reading Room Requirements

Yes
Show for
inspectionYes
PencilsYes
Clean dry handsYes/sound off
LaptopYes/sound off
MobileYou can use laptops and take
mobiles in but please turn off
the sound before you enter a
Reading Room.No
Coats, bags and
umbrellasNo
Pens or
highlightersNo
Sharp
implementsNo
Food, drink,
bottled water,
sweets or gumNo
Cameras

Collection items cannot be removed from any Reading Room

ICONOGRAPHY

General Handling Advice

Equipment designed to help you care for the collection item you are using – such as book rests, weights and trolleys – is available in the Reading Rooms. Staff can advise you how and when to use this equipment. By following the advice below you will be helping to care for our collections:

Only carry what you can hold easily – as a guide three books or one large volume. Use a trolley to move more books and large items or ask staff for help. Books are more stable if stacked alternately spine to front of book.



Make the best use of your space by keeping it tidy and don't stack open books on one another. Laptops, cables or other items should not be placed on books or papers. Close books not being used and ensure that larger items don't overhang the desk.



Place open books on book supports and use special weights to hold pages. Don't force books to open wider than they naturally wish to go as this will break the spine. More advice on how different types of binding should be supported is available in the Reading Room.



We try to make our items accessible as possible, but we ask for your patience and understanding when:

Items are out of circulation, for instance if they are withdrawn from use for conservation or are on loan to another institution.

Items are too fragile to be handled, in these instances we will try to provide a copy in microform or digital format.

Items become permanently unavailable, for instance if they are stolen or damaged beyond repair – either accidentally or deliberately – making them unfit for use.

Wash your hands before going into the Reading Rooms to prevent grease and dirt transferring to collection items.

Touch items as little as possible – follow text with slips of paper rather than fingers to prevent making marks.

If you want to make a rubbing or tracing of a binding you will need to seek written permission.

Handle all items, new and old, carefully. Avoid leaning on books or papers as this may tear the paper or damage the binding structure.

Please use paper slips provided to identify pages you wish to photocopy. Collection items should never be written on or marked in any way.

Ask staff for help if items have uncut pages, are tied with tape or wrapped in paper that cannot be easily untied or are difficult to handle.

Our aim is to encourage responsible use of our collections

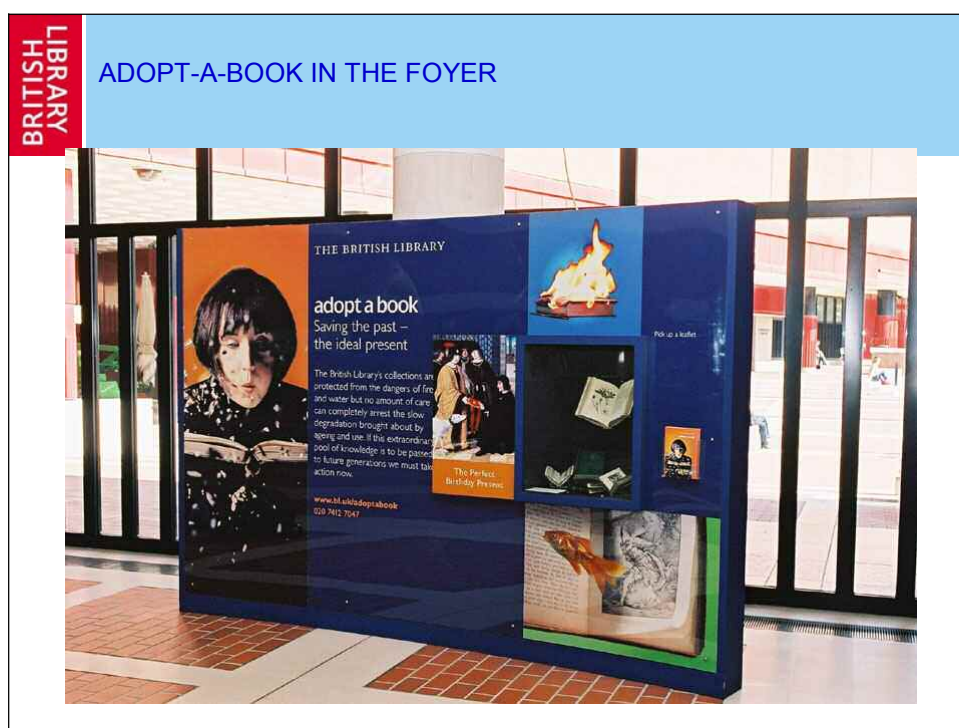
Education and an understanding of Collection Care principles are paramount if the library is to ensure the longevity of material in its care. Preservation staff are for the first time offering handling guidance to library users, in addition to regular training to any member of staff that comes into contact with library material in the normal course of their everyday work. There is commitment to inculcate a climate of collection care throughout the library and the preservation department has recently recruited trained conservators to help promulgate its message. We promote and feature Collection Care activities in the fortnightly staff newsletter and have recently set-up a Collection Care Publishing, Editing and Web group (PEW) to coordinate dissemination and outreach opportunities.

Target Audience Approach

As mentioned earlier, the focus of the different audiences often informs not only the nature of the message, but the manner in which it is communicated. Audience groups to whom we strive to deliver key messages include

- Government, grant-making organisations
- Other libraries professionals in the field
- Public – both new and established users of the library and the general public
- Library Staff

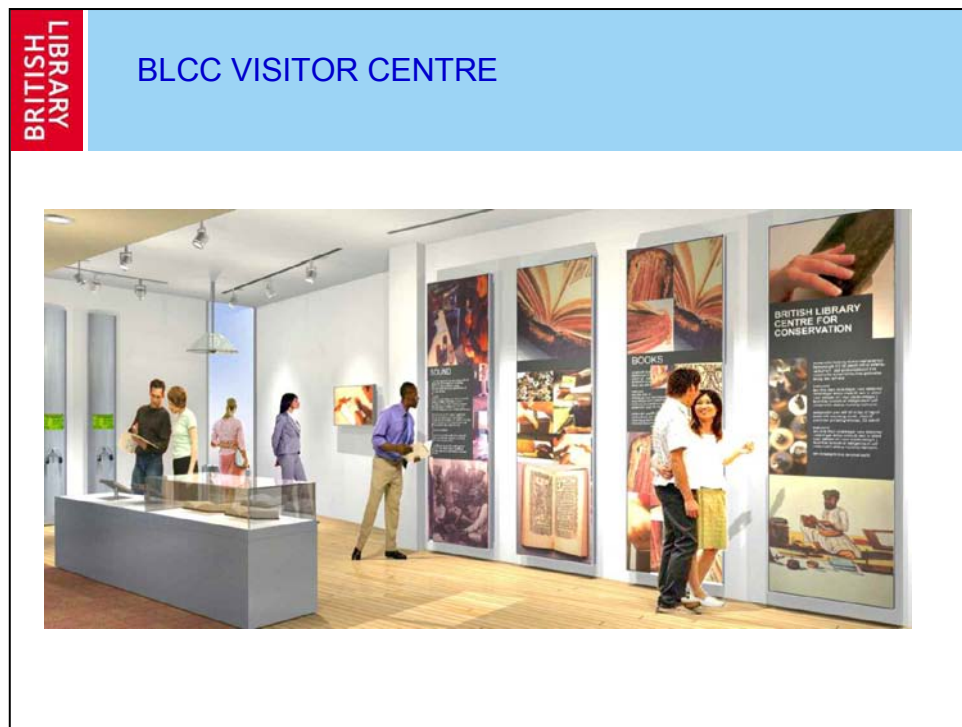
For example, Collection Care delivers modular practical training sessions for library users - readers and/or staff – on topics such as manual handling, salvage, security awareness, and the correct use of trolleys and book cradles.



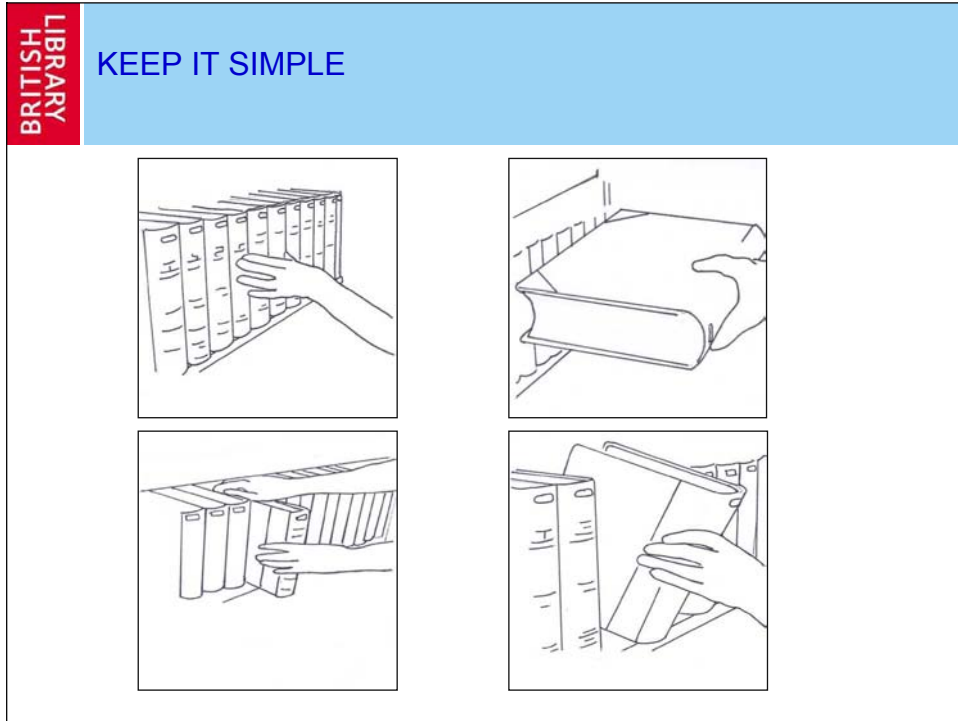
For the general public – whether they visit and/or use the library or not – we advocate the same fundamental preservation principles through dedicated Collection Care web pages on the BL web site; or through our Adopt-a Book project, where anyone can fund the conservation of a nominated collection item. The Adopt-a-Book scheme has been running for many years and has allowed Collection Care to fund three additional trained conservators to work on its collections. Adopters can visit the Library to see the completed conservation of their item and learn first hand from the conservator the preservation principles and practices associated with it.

With the construction of our new Centre for Conservation (BLCC) - a centre of excellence for the conservation of book and sound - advocacy for professionals and public alike will reach new levels. The Visitor Centre will be of particular relevance to any drive towards advocacy, dissemination and learning, with regular public programmes and behind the scenes tours. The BLCC will not only ensure the protection of the British Library's world-renowned collections, but will also enable the Library to demonstrate an even stronger leadership role in the field of conservation. In addition, it will expand the Library's scope for innovative research and enhance the

Library's outreach and training capacity to share its conservation expertise both with professionals and the general public.



Finally, I would like to end by sharing the work of a student who spent three weeks in the preservation department as part of her work experience last November. She came up with some very straightforward designs for book handling. I think this illustrates exactly the message that we want to get across – keep it plain, keep it minimal – make it easy to understand, above all keep it simple.



Thank you for listening. I am happy to take any questions.