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People Profile: Eric Calaluca

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The Good Library Campaign and the Future of U.K. Libraries

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T he last ten years in the United Kingdom have been "the Harry Potter" decade. If ever there was a star who encouraged children and reluctant book readers to enjoy life between the covers, it was Harry, in this series of wonderful books whose stratospheric popularity has inspired awe among everyone connected with books or the publishing industry.

So you would assume that public libraries in Britain have been flourishing during that time. What other institution, after all, could better benefit from and encourage the fruits of the craze for Harry Potter than the public library? But you would be wrong. During those years book borrowing from British libraries has fallen from 420 million books each year to 250 million. The decline is continuous and relentless; at this rate, the graph hits zero in about 15 years' time. By 2020, British lending libraries will be a thing of the past.

Declining Book Collections
How has this come about? Book sales have been wonderful. Market research shows that the number of people reading and enjoying books continues to grow and touches all corners of our society. Magazine sales are also strong — reading is increasing in popularity.

But in Britain, a country long admired for its educational system and for its magnificent contributions to literature, library book collections have fallen, over the past decade, from 80 million books to 60 million books. Although funding for public libraries keeps rising, the