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Issues in Vendor/Library Relations — Cycling Through

Column Editor: **Bob Nardini** (Group Director, Client Integration and Head Bibliographer, Coutts Information Services) <bnardini@couttsinfo.com>



Last May I was in England when the **Queen** was in Ireland. The TV screens in my hotel breakfast rooms were full of news about her trip. In London, the city had been placed on high alert the day I hauled my bags through the Tube system, but nothing happened. The **Queen's** visit, the first ever by a British monarch to the Irish Republic, was widely called a success, a sign of how, within everyone's memory, so much had changed. "Changed utterly," one might even say, two countries finding themselves at a distance from the spirits of revolution and violence marked by **W.B. Yeats** in 1916.

London, of course, is a museum for change. One appointment for me was at the University of Greenwich, in East London, which meant getting off the Tube the night before at the Tower Hill station, making my way across the street and up a steep escalator, swiping a pre-paid fare card at a reader station on the barrier-free platform, then boarding the DLR, an elevated train of quiet, sleek, driverless cars. This was the "Docklands Light Railway," which provides a splendid view of the "Docklands," a gleaming section of the city where skyscrapers and one of London's financial hubs can be found today. The most striking sight was an agglomeration of new residential buildings — dozens of high, colorful, angular projects whose architects seemed in competition to design structures as unlike residential buildings as they could manage. Together, they resembled the masts and flags of an armada of ships.

Which, not so long ago, was what you'd have seen in the Docklands. This was the area of the great docks before containerization put the Port of London out of business around 1980 and left much of this part of the city empty and derelict. Our DLR stop was Deptford, and not sure where we were going, we walked down what turned out to be the wrong street. Not long before I had read **Anthony Burgess's** novel about the tavern murder in 1593 of **Christopher Marlowe**, *A Dead Man in Deptford*, and the grim, dark area we were headed toward looked about right for the story.

But not for our hotel, and so we asked the only others we saw on the street, a pair of African men, for directions. Mainly with gestures they turned us back the opposite way. A few minutes and a couple of turns brought us to a short side street where we checked into a chain hotel, almost new, that had no reception desk but instead crisply uniformed staff to help business travelers and tourists register on kiosks. This part of town was in an earlier state of re-development than the Docklands. In one direction, as we walked to a late dinner, was another apartment project, new and nice but not striking, as we had seen from the DLR. In the other, next to a construction site, was a granite building, apparently closed now and slightly forbidding, identified by an inscription above its entrance as a dispensary, 1875. We found our meal several blocks further, in a lively area of restaurants and pubs offering hospitality above what the unlucky **Marlowe** had experienced not far away.

In the morning, at nearby Greenwich, we met in one of the buildings of the old **Royal Naval College**, a colonnaded masterpiece on the Thames designed in part by **Christopher Wren**. **Lord Nelson** lay in state there in 1806. Now it's a World Heritage Site. The **University of Greenwich** uses parts of it. I needed to kill time before my meeting and accomplished that by walking along a courtyard, the river visible at the open end of two long wings of a building enclosing inner green space in a U. A workman as I walked by asked if there was a lift inside the building. **Wren** might not have thought of elevators, but we didn't need one for our room on the ground floor, which once you entered from the stone passageway inside the colonnade, was a plain long meeting room like any meeting room anywhere. We met with a dozen or so librarians from around the UK who had come to London for the day's session.

The librarian next to me was from Glasgow. She spoke in a brogue and was a little shy. Another librarian, at the table's far end, was from the **London School of Economics** and spoke like she belonged there. Earlier this librarian had circulated a **YouTube** video of a student flashmob that had taken place in the **LSE** library at the end of exam week, a spontaneous event organized via 2.0 that for a throbbing fifteen minutes packed the library's atrium with dancing students. "A lovely event," she reported.

Across the table from me was a young librarian, also from London. She had short, geometrically-styled hair, and it would have been easy to see her dancing in a flashmob. She'd majored in Film Theory and Psychology, but "I don't believe in that anymore," she said. Today, she orders and licenses eBooks. She was talking to the librarian next to her, who was from one of the country's ancient universities. Before becoming a librarian he'd been a scholar, a theologian, "but I found I was reading bibliographies of bibliographies and thought there must be something else to life." He said there were a lot of "exotic species" at his university. Cooperation was difficult. The Classics faculty, for example, won't share the journals housed in its departmental library.

There may still be a few Classics departments positioned strongly enough for stubbornness, but throughout my trip to the UK it was clear that things were changing fast in higher education. Every day librarians talked to me about what they were doing or considering doing to respond to the new policies announced last year by **Prime Minister David Cameron**, whose government, by cutting subsidies and encouraging higher tuition, was transferring much of the cost of a university education to students themselves. While to an American parent this seems the normal state of affairs, in the UK some students will see nearly a tripling of their tuition, up to £9,000, and many will face the option of taking a loan or leaving school. That's the point, says the government, they will take the loan — if they feel the education is worth the cost.

Universities in the UK for some years now have worked under a system whereby the quality of an institution's research is formally assessed and ranked. Now students and families, more than before, will from their point of view be assessing and ranking them too. On the Website of any UK university you will find sections designed to draw students with photographs and information about the best research, the best teaching, the best facilities, or the best something else. Often the university's rankings are cited. On some you'll spot a tagline that compresses the institution's message. **Plymouth University** is "the enterprise university." The **University of Leicester** is "Elite without being elitist" (quoting *Times Higher Education*). The **University of Hull** is "the friendliest university!" The **University of Southampton** is "Contributing to the community." Not that any of this is unknown in North America, of course, but the focus on marketing in the UK is a little sharper, even, than ours.

UK librarians find themselves dropped suddenly into a market economy. Now it's their job to create demand for library services, services that won't be floated by government subsidy, but instead will require paying customers. One librarian told me that her library faced potential ten percent annual cuts, each year for the next four years. Everything the staff does is scrutinized for its contribution to creating a superior "student experience" — a phrase I heard often. When needless practices are eliminated or other forms of waste uncovered, "that's what we want to show in our reports to the vice chancellor," she said.

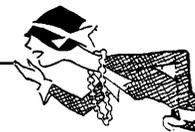
Ideas, again, not unknown in North America. But the concentrated dosage of change UK universities are now undergoing offers a magnified view of the changes faced by libraries across the western world. One library has a staff position responsible for "Content Life Cycle," created under the assumption that from the moment an item is acquired, it will have a life cycle defined by usage. When usage declines the cycle is over, and the content will go. Nothing is permanent when it comes to the collection, or anything else. Everything is cycling through.

We returned from Greenwich by water, on the River Bus, a conveyance of London Transport. It must be impossible to ride on the Thames and not feel you're being taken to school about change. St. Paul's Cathedral, built from the ashes of the 1666 Great Fire of London, rises over the surrounding city. And so does the Gherkin, since 2004 the pickle-shaped focal point of London's financial district. The river view of the Parliament Buildings and Westminster Abbey remains a perfect picture of London from past centuries — unless you look to the opposite bank, where in 1999 the London Eye was erected, and joined its iconic counterparts in defining this city.

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Library Perspective, Vendor Response

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Column Editors' Note: *This column for Against the Grain is devoted to discussing issues affecting library acquisitions, library vendors and the services and products they supply to academic libraries, and the publishing marketplace as a whole. It is an ongoing conversation between a book vendor representative, Robin Champieux, and an academic librarian, Steven Carrico. — RC and SC*

Steve: I thought we might chat about the *Library Survey 2010: Insights From U.S. Academic Library Directors*¹ that was officially released this Spring. It contains several interesting survey topics and responses from 267 college and university library administrators that are worth discussion. We don't have the space here to go into depth on the survey responses in the sections "Strategy & Leadership" and "Core Library Services," so I suggest we focus our attention on the section "Library Collections Development and Management." One set of survey responses that caught my eye are how 54% of library administrators believe that in five years e-journal usage will be so prevalent that academic libraries will no longer need to maintain print copies of journals received online; while at the same time, only 7% of library administrators believe that in five years eBook use will be so prevalent that academic libraries will no longer need to maintain print monograph copies. It seems clear that these survey results are underlining what we knew or thought we knew: college and university libraries are moving away from collecting print journals (if the content is available online) but are still reluctant to phase out print books even when eBook versions are available. What's your take on this mindset?

Robin: The response isn't surprising — I think we're all aware that the transition to electronic journals is ahead of monographs and the evolutions are different — but taken in isolation it is misleading. Or rather, when you read the survey results as a whole a more nuanced and affirmative picture emerges. Library directors are predicting that they will devote more money to electronic monographs. Within five years, most predict that spending on e-monographs will surpass that of print monographs. The

survey results also emphasize the important relationship between the respondents acceptance of print monograph deaccessioning and preservation conditions. With preservation and access to historical collections needs met, the majority of directors reported that print deaccession would be important. What I think the report demonstrates is less about the increasing acceptance of eBooks and more about the still developing and uncertain practices and policies they necessitate.

Steve: True enough. In fact, a summary statement from the report made on print journals is telling: "the lack of standards and policies means that collections management decisions at many libraries are made on a case-by-case basis, rather than as part of a strategic process of evaluating collections and access."² This is certainly the case in my library. If a print journal is available online, or if a publisher of a print + online journal is now allowing online only for the same price, our selectors almost always cancel the print subscription. Unfortunately, many print cancellations are frequently done by selectors and Acquisitions staff scrambling to meet budget cutting deadlines. Not much evaluation goes into the process, so it is not exactly strategic. The concept about academic libraries not having a strategic process for deaccessioning the print versions of journals acquired online can apply equally to many libraries not having a clear collection strategy for eBooks, as you stated earlier.

Robin: Yes, but I think it is important to discuss some of the reasons why such a strategy for eBooks is so elusive. As the report's authors aptly raise, there is no widely accepted access model, nor are there mature preservation solutions. Is it your sense that these issues are proving more difficult to address with eBooks than with journals?

Steve: I think so. With journals the strategies of collection, archiving, and access is easier to conceive in an online environment — basically the online versions are replacing the print versions. A lot of libraries are not even bothering to keep a print archive if online access is available; others are taking steps to archive print versions with their state or regional consortia. With eBooks it's not so simple. In most cases the eBooks are not replacing the print versions; print and eBooks are being acquired in tandem. With so many academic libraries facing restrictive budgets, has collection management even been more challenging?

Robin: I think some of the challenges are tied to the infrastructure of producing, distributing and acquiring monographs and eBooks. This system, if you will, is very different from those supporting journals. Consequently, it is difficult to apply the lessons and practices the library community has developed for e-journals to eBooks. It strikes me that for monographs

and particularly electronic monographs, there is more distance between the players: the creators, publishers, distributors, buyers, and users of the content. This is just an anecdotal observation, of course, but consider preservation through the lens of a much used acquisitions workflow. From its primary book vendor, a library buys the majority of its electronic monographs; the vendor has contracts with multiple aggregators and the library executes separate agreements with its desired eBook providers. The library-aggregator agreement addresses an approach to archival access and preservation that is, in most cases, platform specific, unrelated to individual publisher practices, separate from any relationships and agreements the library may have with individual publishers, and often incompatible with the long-term archival services the library is employing. It strikes me that successful perseverance practices will need to address the business of acquiring eBooks to avoid vendor specific and publisher exclusive solutions.

Steve: Agreed, but one lesson the libraries may have learned from dealing with e-journals is with the purchasing methods now used for eBooks. From my observations at ALA and talking with other academic librarians, it sure sounds like most libraries are buying eBooks individually, whether firm ordered or acquired through approval plans or PDAs, and not so much as part of a pre-packaged deals that were so popular a decade ago. The Big Deal model that forces libraries to pay for an entire package of content — whether each individual journal in the package is wanted or not — does not seem to be acceptable for many libraries acquiring eBooks. You deal with a lot of academic libraries, **Robin**, would you say this is the case and be a distinction between e-journal and eBook acquisitions?

Robin: My perspective is skewed because I work for a company that does not sell packages of content. But, yes, there does seem to be an emphasis on title by title purchasing; however, academic libraries have always bought monographs this way. It's not surprising the same approach and expectations would hold for eBooks. Similarly, libraries are applying trusted monographic acquisitions and collection development strategies like approval plans to eBook. A question for another column might be should they?

Steve: That's a great question and we can delve into that another time. Talk to you soon. 🍷

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If the **Queen** can go to Ireland, and if the riverscape of the Thames is simply a palette, none of us anywhere should be surprised if, in our libraries, like London itself, everything seems utterly changed. 🍷

Endnotes

1. **Long, Matthew P.** and **Roger C. Schonfeld.** *Ithaca S+R Library Survey 2010: Insights from U.S. Academic Library Directors*, Ithaca, 2010. 43 pages.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 31.