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Stepping Away from the Silos

Strategic Collaboration in Digitisation

Margaret Coutts

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STEPPING AWAY FROM THE SILOS

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BIOGRAPHY

Margaret Coutts was Chair of the Jisc Content Advisory Group and of the Jorum Steering Group from 2011 to 2015, following her retirement as University Librarian and Keeper of the Brotherton Collection at the University of Leeds. Over a period of some 35 years, she has also held posts at the universities of Glasgow, Aberdeen and Kent. Her experience spans strategic planning for and delivery of information services to all major academic disciplines, and includes the creation of a converged service comprising library, computing services, administrative computing and academic teaching support. In the UK and beyond, she has taken pivotal roles in major partnership ventures between universities, across wider education and heritage sectors, and between universities and top commercial firms. Her active involvement in professional organisations, including RLUK, Jisc, SCONUL and CILIP, has covered an extensive range of issues, from innovative collections and services to key skills and workforce development, with major concentration over many years on the development of the digital environment, both in the UK and Europe.

FOREWORD AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book has its origins in my experience as a Director of two university libraries, as an active member of various Jisc, RLUK and SCONUL groups, and in particular as Chair of the Jisc Content Advisory Group from 2011 to 2014. In all these capacities, I observed that the problematic issue of effectively coordinating digitised content at national level recurred frequently, and always remained unresolved. The purpose of this book is to take stock of the UK's digitisation efforts since the 1990s, and to consider whether a solution could be found in using the country's existing outputs from publicly and philanthropically funded initiatives as a basis for a national digitisation framework.

In gathering and assessing the evidence for this, I have been immensely grateful to the many individuals who provided me with information about digitisation in their fields, and whose advice helped to shape the ideas put forward here. My sincere thanks go to Valentina Asciutti, Chris Batt, Margaret Buchan, Luis Carrasquiero, Neil Curtis, Kim Downie, Crestina Forcina, Michelle Gait, Laura Gibson, Catherine Grout, Nick Hiley, Natalie Jones, Ian Lyne, John MacColl, Mike Mertens, Elspeth Millar, Francis Muzzu, Nick Poole, David Prosser, Laragh Quinney, John Scally, John Simmons, Mary Smith, Martyn Wade and Matthew Wheeler. I would also like to note the very significant time and effort contributed by Caroline Brazier, Andrew Green, Paola Marchionni, Simon Tanner and Phil Sykes. Finally, I owe much to the library staff teams at the universities of Sheffield, Glasgow and Aberdeen, at the National Library of Scotland and at Robert Gordon University, as well as the enquiry staff at CILIP. Their unfailing support has been exemplary at all stages of the research on which this book is based.

COVER ILLUSTRATIONS

John McArthur, *Plan of the city of Glasgow: Gorbells and Caltoun*, Glasgow, 1778.
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EDITORIAL NOTES

Throughout this book, references supporting quotations and specific facts include page numbers where these are available in the original publication but not where the cited resources are online documents without pagination.

The titles of information resources and services, whether online or analogue, are italicised throughout the text. The titles of digitisation programmes and projects are not italicised.

All web links in references were correct up to October 2015.

In the bibliographic references, UK, Northern Irish, Scottish and Welsh government publications are listed directly under the title of the issuing department. Official publications from other nations are listed under the name of the country.

Throughout the text, the form of 'Jisc' is used for both the current and pre-current versions of this organisation's title.

GLOSSARY

ACE   Arts Council for England
ACRL   Association of College and Research Libraries
AHDS   Arts and Humanities Data Service
AHRB   Arts and Humanities Research Board
AHRC   Arts and Humanities Research Council
BBC   British Broadcasting Corporation
Becta   British Educational and Communications Technology Agency
BIS   Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (United Kingdom)
BnF   Bibliothèque nationale de France
CEDARS   CURL Exemplars in Digital Archives
CNC   Centre national du cinéma et de l'image animée (France)
CURL   Consortium of University and Research Libraries
CyMAL   Museums Archives and Libraries Wales
DCAL   Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Northern Ireland)
DCMS   Department for Culture, Media & Sport (United Kingdom)
DELNI   Department for Employment and Learning (Northern Ireland)
DfES   Department for Education and Skills (the United Kingdom)
DIAD   Digitisation in Art and Design
DNER   Distributed National Electronic Resource
DPC   Digital Preservation Coalition
DPLA   Digital Public Library of America
DPN   Département des programmes numériques (France)
DTI   Department of Trade & Industry (United Kingdom)
EEVL   Edinburgh Engineering Virtual Library
eLib   Electronic Libraries Programme
EThOS   Electronic Theses Online Service
EU   European Union
FE   Further Education
FIGIT   Follett Implementation Group on Information Technology
GLAM   Galleries, libraries, archives and museums
GROS   General Register Office for Scotland
HATII   Humanities Advanced Technology and Information Institute, University of Glasgow
HE   Higher Education
HEA   Higher Education Academy
HEDS   Higher Education Data Sharing Consortium
HEFCE   Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEFCW   Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
HEI   Higher Education Institution
HELIX   Higher Education Library for Image Exchange
HL   House of Lords (United Kingdom)
HLF   Heritage Lottery Fund
HM Government   Her Majesty's Government (United Kingdom)

ICT   Information and Communications Technology
IfA   Initiatives for Access (British Library)
IFLA   International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions
IHR   Institute of Historical Research
Ina   Institut national de l'audiovisuel (France)
Jisc (formerly JISC)   Joint Information Systems Committee
MIDRIB   Medical Images: Digitised Reference Information Bank
MLA   Museums, Libraries and Archives Council
MoU   Memorandum of Understanding
NAO   National Audit Office
NAS   National Archives of Scotland
NEDCC   Northeast Document Conservation Center
NFF   Non-formula Funding of Specialised Research Collections in the Humanities
NI   Northern Ireland
NINCH   National Initiative for a Networked Cultural Heritage
NISO   National Information Standards Organization
NLM   National Library of Medicine (United States of America)
NLS   National Library of Scotland
NLW   National Library of Wales
NOF   New Opportunities Fund
NPO   National Preservation Office
NRS   National Records of Scotland
OER   Open Educational Resource
PRONI   Public Record Office of Northern Ireland
RAC   Register Archives Conversion Project
RCAHMS   Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland
RCUK   Research Councils UK
RDN   Resource Discovery Network
RLG   Research Libraries Group (United States of America)
RLS   Resources for Learning in Scotland
RLUK   Research Libraries UK
RMN   Réunion des musées nationaux (France)
RRMH   Research Resources in Medical History (Wellcome Trust)
RSLG   Research Support Libraries Group
RSLP   Research Support Libraries Programme
RUDI   Resources for Urban Design Information
SAfS   Scottish Archives for Schools
SCA   Strategic Content Alliance
SCAN   Scottish Archive Network
SFC   Scottish Funding Council
SLIC   Scottish Library and Information Council
SRG   Standard Research Grants (AHRB/C)
TARA   Trust for African Rock Art
TNA   The National Archives
UNESCO   United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Digitisation since the 1990s

Some twenty years ago, digitisation rose to prominence in the educational, cultural and heritage sectors, bringing the prospect of revolutionised access to all forms of information and artefacts. Since then, it has gone through a cycle in which it has moved from high favour and priority to a more modest role, overshadowed by other developments in the digital world. It remains, however, a key element in the range of digital content on which all sectors now rely, and a key factor underpinning the current concepts, variously defined, of the 'digital environment' and the 'digital library' (Van Oudenaeren, 2010). As the digital world continues to present innovations that overshadow or replace earlier developments, it is timely to review digitisation progress to date, and to consider core aspects of the work that have had less attention than others as this groundbreaking development has come to maturity.

1.1 INITIATIVE AND INNOVATION

It is important to set such considerations in the context of the key developmental stages of digitisation. Terras (2011) includes in her full account the pre-1990 developments which created the basis for its widespread adoption from the 1990s onwards. Amongst the early adopters in the 1990s were the information and heritage sectors. They saw it as an unprecedented opportunity to extend access to their resources, to improve preservation, and to do so free of charge or at low cost. There was active support from leading educational and heritage organisations and significant amounts of public funding were invested. Total sums are very difficult to establish, but, for example, some £130 million was known to have been spent in the United Kingdom during the ten years up to 2005 (Bültmann et al., 2005, p. 3). All recognised that this was a true innovation. Lee described it as the 'decade of digitisation' (Lee, 2002, p. 160) and Lynch wrote of 'an enormous, exhilarating flowering of innovation, creativity and experimentation' (Lynch, 2000).

An entirely new field of expertise had to be developed, by a process of invention, experimentation, implementation, evaluation, refinement and further development. It also became clear that it was a multifaceted field, requiring that same process to be applied to issues of content, technology, infrastructure, intellectual property and sustainability. Universities, museums, galleries and national libraries were amongst the enthusiastic participants. In terms of content, small-scale projects typified the early work, often showcasing items of major intellectual and cultural value. The activity in this period, however, was as much concentrated on developing experience in and standards for the use of the technology and the provision of infrastructure, legal management and preservation. With standards and good practice consolidating around 2000, large-scale projects became more commonplace in the following years.

1.2 EXPANSION, CONSOLIDATION AND REVIEW

The wide variety of content produced in this period was welcomed by their communities, and user demand and expectation rose fast and high. By the 2000s, however, reality had also impacted. Digitisation was not a one-off, cheap solution, whether to enable access or to preserve, but a high-cost activity in terms of capital investment and, crucially, of recurrent expenditure. Most outputs required assured availability, periodic updating and long-term sustainability, all of which brought technical and financial implications. Moreover, the volume of material digitised to date was impressive, but constituted only a tiny fraction of the analogue resources yet to be considered for transfer to the digital environment. As Carr noted, 'the sums already spent from public and private sources have merely scratched the surface' (Carr, 2007, p. 49). There was also a 'fashion factor', summarised aptly by Van Oudenaeren. 'Paradoxically, efforts to digitise and place online additional content may be hampered somewhat by the very inexorability of the trends underway. Under the assumption that 'everything is going to be online eventually anyway', foundations, government agencies, and corporations may be less interested in supporting digitisation efforts than they were, for example, in the 1990s, when digitisation was a newer and more glamorous technology' (Van Oudenaeren, 2010, p. 98).

Some funders withdrew from supporting digitisation. Others became more cautious and judicious about their commitments and generally exercised a more strategic oversight of the work which they funded. This shift was intensified by the global economic downturn of 2008. Digitisation

initiatives continued, but many reverted to small-scale and short-term projects.

Faced with such complications and setbacks, the enthusiasm and energy of the early days of digitisation have inevitably been replaced by a more subdued approach to continuing activity. This should not, however, obscure the widespread activity in the education and cultural sectors. A recent survey of digitisation of heritage materials in Europe revealed that, of some 2000 institutions responding, 83% had a digital collection or were currently involved in digitisation activities, and 34% had a written digitisation strategy (Stroeker and Vogels, 2012).

1.3 'A CORE FUNCTION'

Digital content in its widest sense is now seen, at the very least, as having a central role in key provision for education and heritage. A recent consultation with UK library directors drew the advice that 'digitised materials are of pervasive importance for many areas of Higher Education institutions' mission' (Marchionni, 2014). Terras describes the commitment of libraries, archives, museums, galleries and private collections to producing digital surrogates as 'commonplace' (Terras, 2011, p. 16). More significantly, there is strong evidence that digitised content is now of central importance in some fields and disciplines. In 2008, an environmental scan from the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Research Committee listed ten assumptions for forward planning, the first of which predicted that 'there will be increased emphasis on digitising collections, [and] preserving digital collections' (ACRL Research Committee, 2008). Broady-Preston and Swain (2012) quoted a member of the staff from the National Library of Wales (NLW), 'now [digitisation] seems a core function in giving access'. Hernon and Matthews observe that in some cases faculty are increasingly dependent on digital materials, including digital archives (Hernon and Matthews, 2012, pp. 3–4). Van Oudenaeren uses stronger terms still: various user groups display an 'increasing to near-total reliance' on electronic information, including cultural information (Van Oudenaeren, 2010, p. 1), and Calhoun notes several major surveys and studies recording calls for online provision (Calhoun, 2014, pp. 112–3).

This trend towards digital dominance is, as one would expect, influenced by users' needs and expectations. Stubbings (2012) notes an Ithaka survey which shows strong recognition of users' preference for online access and Calhoun stresses that 'most segments of population place high value on

immediately available, convenient online sources' (Calhoun, 2014, p. 112). Coyne considers convenience for the academic sector specifically, and believes that students, researchers, faculty and authors need to access information around the clock and from anywhere in the world (Coyne, 2010, pp. 104—5). Significantly, many commentators are signalling that we may well be approaching, finally, the long-predicted time when digital supersedes analogue in standard provision across all fields of interest:

> *We can assume that most printed out-of-copyright paper publications will be digitised and fully available on the web by 2030*
> **(National Library of Scotland, 2010,** *p. 7)*

> *There is a growing expectation in society that all information resources should be available online 24 hours a day.*
> **(The National Archives and Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, 2010,** *p. 6)*

> *Digital formats are beginning to dominate library collections, especially in academic libraries.*
> **(Calhoun, 2014,** *p. 111)*

> *…the digital versions will be the principal mode of delivery*
> **(Pressler, 2014,** *p. 12).*

This trend is, of course, enabled by the pervasive nature of the digital environment and the ubiquity of born-digital materials that have long replaced physical formats in many fields. Over the last 10 years or so, this has obscured to a certain extent the case for progressing further digitisation of analogue materials. In the light of increasing digital dominance, however, and the incontrovertible fact that so much of the world's knowledge and cultural outputs still exist only in physical form, digitisation is as much a key element in future digital developments as it has been in the past. 'Digitization of existing library, museum, and archive collections is still a major priority, where funding can be found for these initiatives' (Hughes, 2012, p. 1).

1.4 CURRENT ISSUES

There are considerable risks in not advancing digitisation at this time. The numerous 'digital-only' users may ignore or never know of key content which is relevant to their interests and needs. Neglected knowledge, over time, becomes lost knowledge, to the detriment of all. The corollary is the likelihood that knowledge which already exists in analogue form will be created afresh in digital form, wasting intellectual and financial resources.