

Going Digital, Experiences at the Wellcome Library

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The Wellcome Library

- Part of Wellcome Collection, a major new £30 million public venue in London developed by the Wellcome Trust
- Wellcome Library is one of the world's major resources for the study of medical history, 750,000 books, 250,000 pictures
- More than 30,000 readers visited us last year, including historians, academics, students, health professionals & consumers, journalists, artists & members of the general public



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The Wellcome Library goes digital

- Library acknowledges that born digital material will form part of its future research collections
- Increasingly archival materials, especially 'personal papers', are produced in digital form only, today's email & word processed documents are tomorrows research material
- If we don't engage with born digital material then Library collection growth is going to be limited
- 'Going digital' presents many challenges, but material inherently flexible, new access & dissemination tools can help us build new services

The digital problem

- Issues well known, are well documented & not discussed here
- Conceptual & competing frameworks for dealing with digital material already exist, we struggle to chose which to use
- Digital preservation problem is increasingly about fitting the theories into practice & finding tools to serve those theories
- Our problem becomes how do we identify & apply most appropriate 'solutions' when none is a 'complete' solution

Our digital 'Nike' strategy

- Digital Curation in Action Project, begun 2005. Long term activity examining how the Library will bring born digital material into its collections - we just did it!
- Looking to create a hybrid solution both digital & physical collections, digital isn't 'instead of', it's 'as well as'
- Learning by doing acquiring 'real' digital material from our donor/creator community & working out how to deal with it as we go
- We're not working in isolation, project & ad hoc collaboration with other institutions valuable way to build capability & gain experience
- Is it risky? I'll let you know

Archivists rule the world

- Support of the archival staff is essential, going digital is changing their work patterns, but archival practice is proving relevant to the management of digital material
- Archival workflows can be modified to accommodate digital material
- Using archival practice allows Library to use existing skills/staff to build a sustainable foundation for dealing with digital material
- Archivists supported by one new FTE, a Digital Curator, role to adapt archival practice & support archivists with technical issues
- To date this has proved a robust & flexible approach

So how will we do it...?

- Material will not be stored permanently on portable media
- Always retain an unmodified 'original' permanently
- Current material - produce a 'preservation master' – actively manage the preservation master, dissemination manifestations derived from it
- Legacy/obsolete material – normalise to an 'open' format, eg OpenOffice, -the 'preservation master' - actively manage the preservation master, dissemination manifestations derived from it
- Create descriptive & administrative metadata as the basis for resource discovery & future life cycle management
- Technology watch monitors material 'at risk' & prompts for action

How are we supporting this...?

- Process of donor/creator education & awareness promoting that we are now collecting born digital material, eg digital curation information on our Library website
- Staff development/training, internal & public courses, membership of Digital Curation Centre & Digital Preservation Coalition
- Developing tools/processes to support staff & donor/creator community, eg FAQs, new donor/loan agreement
- Good internal communication, sharing ideas & being prepared to change & be flexible, eg regular meetings

New workflow practical example

- Create activity log for each transfer
- Acknowledge receipt of material by letter, enclosing FAQ outlining what our processes are
- Anti-virus check – month in quarantine - anti-virus check - confirm with donor/creator material as 'clean', or otherwise
- Create manifest listing all material in transfer & send to donor/creator, transfer donation to network storage & verify
- Create (Manually) TechMD, eg DRIOD, checksums & file on network with activity log & copies of correspondence etc
- Create working 'copy' of material for archivists for arrangement & description, either on CD or network fileshare
- Send transfer media down salt mine for 18 months, just in case, then dispose

Technical issues

- Going digital is not easy, we don't have end to end management tools, much work still manual, so time consuming
- No integrated way to automatically create administrative metadata, created manually using Droid/PRONOM
- Don't yet have a repository to store material, so no active management or access
- Learning how to work with digital material without breaking it takes time & practice, eg normalisation techniques
- Real material = real lessons

Problems

- We have no mandate to collect, no obligation to donate so have to work hard to secure all material. Our archival 'lag' is between 10 & 15 years, too long for digital material
- Changing donor/creator roles Archivist/Records Manager Vs IT Manager
- Archives managers unfamiliar with providing digital material, makes them nervous
- IT managers may not understand point of long term preservation

Acquisition issues

- Acquiring digital stuff is no more or less easy than acquiring physical stuff
- Acquisition can be time consuming with no certainty of success, we don't yet have regular established transfers
- Finding it harder to acquire material in mid-career & less certain that material will have future significance
- None of which have simple answers

What lessons have we learned?

- Born digital acquired on same principles as other material, we collect it, manage it, make it available for the long term
- More difficult than we thought, digital preservation & life cycle management of born digital material isn't a push button activity
- More time consuming than we thought, accession/ingestion process is time consuming & laborious
- Need new tools to help store, manage & make stuff available
- Automation of processes will be essential, but can be difficult to build
- Collaboration & co-operation are successful strategies

Interesting side effects

- Experience with digital material is changing roles within the Library, strengthening the role of the archivists
- Focus on digital material is raising expectations of what we will hold in the future
- Different requirements of digital material are challenging ways we think about engaging with physical material, reassessing roles & responsibilities within the Library
- Changing the ways we want to record & document our interactions with physical material & its creators

Conclusion

- 'Going digital' presents many challenges, not all have immediate solutions
- Sound archival practice & a 'just do it' approach proving very flexible & relevant, we learn by doing
- Experience with digital material changing roles within the Library
- Different requirements of working with digital material are challenging the ways we think about engaging with physical material & so our practice evolves
- Project & ad hoc collaboration with other institutions valuable way to build capability & gain experience

For more information

On the web

- Wellcome Trust – www.wellcome.ac.uk
- Wellcome Library – <http://library.wellcome.ac.uk>
- Digital Curation at Wellcome – <http://library.wellcome.ac.uk/node288.html>

Published articles

- Ariadne Magazine, Hilton & Thompson, '*Collecting Born Digital Archives at the Wellcome Library*' - <http://www.ariadne.ac.uk/issue50/hilton-thompson/>
- Ariadne Magazine, Hilton & Thompson, '*Further Experiences in Collecting Born Digital Archives at the Wellcome Library*' - <http://www.ariadne.ac.uk/issue53/hilton-thompson/>

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Thank you
Questions now, questions later...?

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