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Biography

Jennie Grimshaw is the Service and Content Lead for Government and Official Information at the British Library. She has worked in the field of official publishing since 1996 and has been personally involved in developing the tools and approaches described in the article.

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Official Papers at the Bodleian Libraries, Oxford

Abstract: This article was written by Hannah Chandler, the Official Papers Librarian for the Bodleian Libraries. Her article looks at how the print collections were managed in the past and how the collections are managed and arranged today in Oxford. It looks at the complex and dynamic environment of official publishing in terms both of print and e-format. Looking to the future, it considers how shared working practices and policy on giving access to and archiving born digital material are benefitting the legal deposit libraries. Finally, the article outlines the breadth of the challenge, not only giving access to information in perpetuity but also making it accessible to the information professional and user.
Keywords: official publications; government

INTRODUCTION

What is an Official Publication?

Official publications are not defined by subject content but by who has published them. They are issued for public use by local, national, provincial and intergovernmental organisations. Types of publications include legislation, parliamentary papers, debates and proceedings, and departmental publications. The type of material is very diverse as government and parliamentary publications have many functions to fulfil: informative, promotional, setting out government policy, parliamentary committees scrutinizing the work of government, proposals for legislation, consultation papers and statistics, to name a few. They can have generic names, such as white papers, green papers and blue books. They can be monographs or a run of statistics that cover many decades and are published in many different formats. Political events can change the way material is published and by whom. As they are used, for example, by legislators to form new laws and as a guide for future funding in all areas of our lives, they need to be a trusted source of data and information. Information should be easily accessible and the user should have confidence that information will be

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available so it can be accessed in perpetuity. Official publications are a complex and large body of material which cover a long time span and are used by a large spectrum of disciplines for many different reasons.

As you can see an awful lot is demanded of the information professional who deals with this body of material. It is a dynamic, challenging and interesting area of work that touches all of our lives.

THE BODLEIAN LIBRARIES

The Bodleian Libraries group is made up of 27 major research libraries. The principal library, the Bodleian Library, has been a legal deposit library for over 400 years. With over 12 million items and access to over 80,000 physical and e-journals, together the Bodleian Libraries group constitutes the second biggest library in the country. The Bodleian serves a large academic community from the University of Oxford along with visiting scholars from many disciplines accessing the unique material in our collections. With over 2,000,000 reader visits, 1,400,000 items loaned and 18,000 training hours from staff to readers in 2013/2014, it is a busy and dynamic environment.[1]

'The mission of the Bodleian Libraries is to provide an excellent service to support the learning, teaching and research objectives of the University of Oxford; and to develop and maintain access to Oxford's unique collections for the benefit of scholarship and society.'

The 2015 National Student Survey ranked Oxford Libraries highest out of all UK universities for the third year running.[2]

THE OFFICIAL PAPERS COLLECTION

As a general principle it is understood that the Bodleian's holdings of official publications should reflect the Library's status as a major research institution. The Official Papers collection, except where otherwise stated, forms the principal concentration of such material in Oxford. As a legal deposit library the Library is entitled to receive one copy of every item in print published in the UK and from 6th April 2013[3] that entitlement was redefined as a print copy or one copy of e-format, for example, e-books, e-journals, hand held electronic media and material from web sites. Publishers can make their e-content available by depositing content to the British Library which is then made available to all legal deposit libraries via their library catalogues only to be viewed in situ in the legal deposit libraries. Material harvested from the web is made available through the Legal Deposit Web Archive (LDWA) again to be viewed in situ in the legal deposit libraries.

Today, the print collection is situated on the ground floor of the Bodleian Law Library (BLL)[4]. The BLL has over half a million books on open shelf and primarily serves the Oxford Law Faculty. The Official Papers collection is also on open shelf. The collection is comprised of legislation, UK parliamentary proceedings, a full set of Journals of the House of Lords and Commons and parliamentary debates, UK parliamentary papers: First Series (1715–1801), the bound set of House of Commons and Lords papers dating from 1801 to the present day. Parliamentary proceedings, papers and departmental papers of the devolved assemblies, the Scottish Parliament and Ireland are also available.

The collection also houses departmental papers and periodicals from 1920, of a legal subject nature. Although Official Papers are multi-disciplinary in subject content, the aim of the open shelf material is to reflect policy and procedure of parliaments and governments, and due to the physical location, any material that complements the BLL collections is also kept on open shelf within the library. However, only a small proportion of UK departmental material is held on open shelf. The majority is accessible via the Bodleian Storage Facility from where it can be ordered up to a reading room of choice. The British official publications collections at the Bodleian are only comparable in terms of size with the other legal deposit libraries in the United Kingdom.

The Bodleian Library has had depository status for the International Labour Organisation, the International Civil Aviation Organisation and most notably the United Nations since 1946 and has a substantial collection of League of Nations documents. Many other international intergovernmental bodies are also represented in the collections. The European Documentation Centre, for example, is housed in the BLL. Material is received via legal deposit, purchase and donation. A large proportion of material is received via the Agency for Legal Deposit Libraries[5] but some publishers, notably The Stationery Office, choose to send their material directly to the section.

The Bodleian also has a very good collection of foreign official material; this is represented by our inclusion in the FLAG Foreign Law Guide[6] and the Guides to Foreign Government Publications[7].

There is very little point in keeping collections if they are not accessible to the user. It is imperative that collections are given exposure and resource finding aids. The Foreign and Colonial Confidential Print[8] collections are a very good case in point. These were not used until an Access database, available free to the general public, was set up in 2010. Over 13,000 documents had bibliographic data entered on to the database. This collection can now be searched by country, date, document number and subject. Although the Library does not have a full set we know exactly what we do and do not hold.

Today a project is underway to catalogue 19th and early 20th century African and Commonwealth official publications which are only accessible in the Bodleian via handlists. Official publications of this date that emanate from outside the UK are acquired by purchase or donation. This type of material can be found in a number of UK academic institutions but rarely in full runs and often poorly catalogued.

The Official Papers section is a specialist cataloguing unit, cataloguing UK and international publications. We

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still receive a substantial amount of material in print form to catalogue. As material arrives it is given a minimum level cataloguing record so it is findable on the day of accession. All government departmental material since 1998 is catalogued as are selected parliamentary papers. As the Official Papers staff work in the BLL, we are part of the BLL team, and we are involved in staffing desks, inductions and participating in team projects as they arise. To facilitate this, staff have completed the BIALL Legal Foundations course.

MANAGEMENT OF THE COLLECTIONS

The collection has existed in the Bodleian Library as a distinct entity since the late 1960s and was housed in the underground basement of the iconic Radcliffe Camera[9] until 2010. Twenty five years ago monographs had bibliographic data typed on to a card to be inserted into a card catalogue, huge quantities of periodicals to include parliamentary papers were registered in hand lists, and readers were trawling through printed indexes and catalogues as finding aids. The quantity of print coming through the section seemed to be ever growing. It was a Herculean task just to open the post every day and shelve incoming material.

Parliamentary material and a large proportion of government departmental material was published by Her Majesty's Stationery Office (HMSO) now The Stationery Office. No library at that time was systematically cataloguing parliamentary publications, indeed if at all. Departmental material, also known as grey literature, due to the paucity of bibliographic data on the publications, could be notoriously difficult to track down if not published by HMSO. The quality of government publishing would vary from department to department.

The situation was made worse if there was a change in the machinery of government: for example, the present Department for Education has had six different names since the beginning of the 1990s. A name change can also signal a shift in responsibilities and thus for the researcher it may mean looking to another government body for information on a particular topic.

This made the HMSO annual catalogues, departmental publications lists and parliamentary indexes essential tools to both researchers and information professionals. Before the advent of the internet, freely available copies of government and parliamentary material were not available. The BLL and other libraries within the Bodleian group purchased relevant duplicate copies to make sure that material was available to readers in their physical area. The move to online cataloguing in the 1990s facilitated much easier access to departmental material.

From around 1995 government material started appearing on the web, usually in conjunction with the printed item. Government departments were quick to recognize that the internet was an easy way to disseminate information to the general public quickly and at a low cost. Material rapidly started to be published only on the web and not in print. Government departmental publications were one of the first categories of material to move to e-only. Annual publication lists from government departments ceased being produced, so information professionals could not ascertain what was being published on the web. The consequence was that it became impossible to track the publishing output of one government department let alone the government estate.

The explosion in numbers of documents published only on government web pages was exponential. Government departmental websites differed in content, appearance and usability. Documents were posted with little bibliographic information and it could be very difficult to ascertain which dated version you were looking at.

Initially when cataloguing a print monograph with a parallel online version, the URL was added to the bibliographic record. This practice soon stopped as it was realised documents moved and links were not stable, or they broke. 'Link rot' become a new term in the information professional's vocabulary.

As the volume of print material began to reduce, it quickly became apparent that the legal deposit libraries were losing access in perpetuity to a very important part of the nation's heritage. Legally until 2013, the legal deposit libraries could not harvest or force publishers to deposit in electronic format. Without question material was being lost on the web. For centuries print material had passed through the hands of library staff to be catalogued, stored and owned by the library. It is interesting to note that Cheffins[10] stated in 2004, 'for over five centuries British official publications have been issued in print form and for the most part this continues and is likely to continue for the foreseeable future'. Eleven years into that foreseeable future and we can see that e-format is the modus operandi for governments and parliaments across the world. No one could predict the growth and success of the internet in disseminating information quickly, to so many and at such a low cost. Indeed, until the 2013 Regulations came into force, the only way of guaranteeing access to a copy published only online was to either to download it yourself or print a copy out.

The information landscape today is just as complex to the novice and indeed expert user, as the print environment ever was. A publication used to mean a distinct entity with a beginning and an end. You could hold a book or a periodical part in your hand and understand its construction by looking at the table of contents and index. You could get an idea of the size and chronological span of the periodical by looking at the shelf space it stood on or by the description of the item in a bibliographic record. The way information is being presented and interacted with on the web is changing the concept of what it is to publish. There are many ways that information is presented to the user: web pages, You Tube channels, Twitter, Facebook, html, pdf and blogs. What was once a distinct publication can now be spread over several web pages and not accessed in one unit.

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Just the quantity of material available on the web is mind boggling; at a rough estimate there are over 10 million registered .UK domain names. Can you be sure you are finding what you want, or everything relevant on a given topic? It is impossible to know what is out there in totality, which could have real time repercussions, as Jane Inman notes: 'It is always difficult to put a value on information but being unaware of the content of official publishing could cost an organisation dear.'[11] The British Library's UK Web Archive blog[12] published a very prescient article on how much is lost annually, up to '50% of resources unrecognisable or gone after 1 year.'

However, work has been underway to capture government websites for some time. The UK Government Web Archive (UKGWA) hosted by The National Archives has had a web archiving programme since 2003, UK government records have been archived under the Public Records Act 1958[13]. The UKGWA only archives material that is available to the general public and usually harvests material twice year. The UK Web Archive (UKWA) launched in 2008 is hosted by the British Library. As the 2013 regulations were not in place permissions had to be sought to harvest websites, this was very time consuming and only had a 30% success rate but at least some of the UK web domain was been captured. Both websites are freely accessible.

COLLABORATIVE WORK

The Legal Deposit Web Archive (LDWA) has been operational since April 2013. Permissions to harvest websites are not needed and an annual snapshot of the UK domain is now being taken for posterity, including official materials. The LDWA covers the publications of the parliaments and devolved assemblies of the UK, and those of departments and agencies. It is empowered to harvest material behind paywalls and more frequently than annually if required. To facilitate use of the enormous archive of data, themed collections are being created to orientate users, such as the 'General Election 2015' collection and sets of local authority websites. The legal deposit libraries share the work of selecting sites for inclusion in collections and applying quality assurance checks to improve the user experience. The work done by the British Library and other legal deposit libraries in harvesting, organising, quality checking and making material available to the user via the LDWA through such collections is an extremely positive development.

Each of the legal deposit libraries have different policies on how official papers print collections are managed and catalogued. The fact that all the legal deposit libraries are now working together on one digital collection of official documents means that work is not duplicated and there is a consistent approach. We are sharing resources and expertise on a body of material that one library in isolation would not have the staff or financial resources to be able to manage. The legal deposit libraries will coordinate collection management to ensure that resources can be found easily within the legal deposit libraries' catalogues. Salient documents and serials will be downloaded from government websites, held in a shared digital store and catalogued at the individual document level. For the first time there will be a consistent approach to selecting and cataloguing web-only government publications and thus giving this type of material exposure in library catalogues.

OUTREACH

As space is a premium in public and academic libraries, official papers collections are being relegated or disposed of. The removal of the public library subsidy for government material is a reflection that much of it is available free on the web. Many print collections have been made accessible by digitisation though not to all users; some are free and some are not. It can be very confusing for the user to navigate through all the different portals, websites and databases.

It must be noted that there is still a section of society who for a variety of reasons do not access information on the web. According to data from the Office for National Statistics the figures for January/March 2014 show that there are still 11% of adults (5.9 million individuals) who have never used the internet[14], so there is a significant section of the population who are at a distinct disadvantage.

There is no one stop shop for all things governmental or parliamentary. Not everything official has been digitized or catalogued. It can be hard to track how information changes when it moves from print format to e-only; there may not be consistency or continuity in titles of publications, how information is presented or what information is presented. This can especially be a problem for statistical information.

GOV.UK was launched on 16th October 2012[15], which has brought together a large proportion of the UK government estate into one portal - but not all. There are distinct websites for the devolved parliaments and assemblies as well as websites for government data, government records, historical data, debates, statistics, local government – I could go on. I have already named three websites that archive government material and there are more available. What is obvious is that looking for official information/data/publications is not always intuitive.

Today, with fewer and fewer information specialists in the field of official publications and the publishing landscape becoming more complex, it is imperative that information on new developments is disseminated to interested parties in a timely fashion. In the Bodleian we use a variety of methods to engage users. The Official Papers collection has a series of electronic library guides, 'libguides',[16] themed to help users in complex areas. Guides have been written on a particular type of material, for example parliamentary papers or they have been aimed at a distinct set of users, 'Official papers for education'. The libguides have proved very popular with over 20,000 hits a year.

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History information fairs are held biannually, conceived as a gateway to the Library's collections; a room full of specialists from different disciplines set up tables and the researchers come to talk to the subject specialists to link their areas of research to available collections. This is especially good for promoting official papers material, as it is so multi-disciplinary. Introductory classes are regularly run and a 'book a librarian' facility is also available for tailored advice.

The Standing Committee on Official Papers (SCOOP)[17] is an invaluable forum to liaise with information professionals from institutions across the UK and to keep up to date with developments. SCOOP's aims are to 'improve the access to, and availability of, UK official publications; to identify problems in the provision of access to UK official publications'.

SCOOP launched the OfficialPapersUK[18] blog on September 2015, from which the posts are simultaneously tweeted. The blog aims to keep followers up to date with new digital projects, news in official publishing and developments in library policies, whilst at the same time promoting collections across the UK. There is also a delicious bookmarking page that gives users links to the many free official papers resources on the web. The SCOOP Print Still Matters[19] website identifies print collections across the UK and has relegation guides for libraries looking to reduce their official publications collections.

CONCLUSION

The legal deposit libraries have aspired to make their print collections as comprehensive as possible and accessible in perpetuity. The web developments over the past 20 years have led us to a point where the role of the knowledgeable information professional becomes more important than ever when involved in managing the breadth of output from governments, parliaments and assemblies in the United Kingdom. Through the management of Official Publications in the LDWA, the same libraries can now apply the care and expertise to material only published on the web that was once focussed on the print collections. Official Papers are a complex and large body of material which are now found in a dynamic environment, demanding much from those who manage and archive information and for those who use it.

Footnotes

[1] Figures from the Bodleian Libraries annual report 2013/14. http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/191406/BodleianLibrariesAnnualReport13_14.pdf Accessed 20 November 2015.
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Biography

Hannah Chandler has been the Official Papers Librarian at the Bodleian Libraries since 1998. She is a member of the Standing Committee on Official Papers. Hannah manages the SCOOP Print Still Matters website and is the creator and a manager of the OfficialPapersUK blog on behalf of SCOOP.

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