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special.html :
An investigation of access to special collections using the Internet

by

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Abstract

- This dissertation investigates the strategies and achievements of special collections departments in higher education institutions in the UK in attempting to provide access to their special collections using the Internet, focusing on their World Wide Web pages.

- A review of related literature discusses use of collections and the impact and opportunities of Internet technologies, with some reference to projects set up as a result of the Follett Report.

- A three part methodology is used to gather information consisting of a questionnaire survey sent to special collections departments in the UK, an evaluation of sixteen WWW sites, and a comparative analysis based on interviews with staff at Manchester, Oxford and Durham Universities.

- The results of the questionnaire survey are presented and analysed, and the primary objectives, the principal basis of sites, the nature of staff involvement and the role of HEFCE non-formula are identified. The effects of WWW pages on user behaviour and use of the collection, such as e-mail queries, are examined.

- The evaluation of WWW pages compares areas including the provision of special collections finding aids, digital images, information content and the design and structure of sites. It identifies a division between sites providing basic promotional information and sites attempting to be more dynamic information resources.

- The comparative analysis provides much further detail and sheds light on the limitations of special collections sites.

- It is concluded that special collections staff in the UK have made significant achievements and that there is potential for further development.

- While recognising the limitations of available resources, it is principally recommended that:

- Special collections departments re-examine their working practices and training requirements to take account of the increasing importance of the WWW.

- Special collections departments reconsider their definition of readership to include e-mail queries and virtual visits to WWW sites.

Acknowledgements

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Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1 Aims

This project aims to investigate access to specialised research collections using the Internet.

1.2 Objectives

- To define special collections within the terms of this investigation
- To consider the user needs of the research community and the general public
- To assess what recent initiatives to increase access to special collections have attempted and achieved
- To examine the strategies and achievements of a range of UK academic institutions
- To establish criteria with which to judge special collections resources

1.3 Context and scope

The primary focuses of this project are the special collections Web sites produced by higher education institutions in the UK. This study also refers to the projects that came into being after the Follett project in 1993, which highlighted the need for development of electronic access to special collections.

The above objectives identify the need to consider user requirements in this area, but investigative work with scholars and other users of special collections resources was felt to be outside the scope of this project. Literature on the information needs of humanities scholars will be reviewed instead.

1.4 Definitions

The basis for the term 'special collections' has been taken from the scope of "specialised collections for humanities researchers," as used in the document *Accessing our humanities collections : a guide to specialised research collections for humanities researchers*[1]. Thus printed books, manuscript collections and archives are all recognised as special collections in this study, as they are in this document.

1.5 Methodology

The aims and objective of this study will be achieved by means of:

- A review of related literature on special collections and their users, recent developments in electronic access, and the Follett Report.
- A three part investigation of institutional approaches, comprising:

1. an assessment of the strategies and achievements of special collections departments to increase access to their collections using their WWW pages, by means of a questionnaire survey
2. an evaluation of special collections web pages
3. an investigation of the experiences of three institutions in working to increase access to their collections using the Internet, assessed by semi-structured interviews with staff.

1.6 Project outline

A review of the literature will be given in Chapter 2, and Chapter 3 will establish the methodology for the investigative work as outlined in section 1.5. The results and analysis of the questionnaire will be presented in Chapter 4, and the hypothetical criteria for the WWW pages will be used to produce an evaluative analysis of a range of special collections WWW pages in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 will contain the findings of the semi-structured interviews at Manchester, Oxford and Durham using comparative analysis, and in Chapter 7, conclusions will be drawn and recommendations made.

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[1] **Joint Information Systems Committee.** *Accessing our humanities collections : a guide to specialised collections for humanities researchers.* London: JISC, 1997.

Chapter 2
Literature Review and Background

2.1 Special Collections and their users

The term 'special collections' for the purposes of this study, is a broad term covering printed books, manuscripts and archives, although academic institutions vary in their own definitions. What makes special collections special? The rare book and manuscript library is made special by virtue of the age and intrinsic artefactual and artistic value of, say, its early Bibles and Shakespeare's First Folios. However, much special collections material, including many rare books and manuscripts, is less attractive. Traister[1] notes that "Our job is to be, not the "treasure room", but the rubbish heap." Some of the kinds of rubbish to be found in special collections are personal records, memos, letters, jottings and scraps, and ephemera such as menus, tickets and leaflets - all are special as physical artefacts and not just for the information that they contain. Greenberg concludes that what this diverse material has in common is "a scarcity that makes them unusually valuable and forces scholars to travel in order to use them.[2]"

Why have Special Collections?

The primary role of special collections is, as Rosann Auchstetter notes, "in support of research and scholarship[3]". For major libraries, this role encompasses the acquisition and curatorship of books and manuscripts of world wide academic significance. Consequently, the existence of special collections libraries can also be justified on the grounds that they are storehouses of cultural treasures at both national and local levels, in trust for the public who contribute towards their upkeep. The same public should be able to use these storehouses for their own personal research, in genealogy and local history, for example. Finally, special collections have a role to play in educating the public about their collections.

The General Public as users of Special Collections

The general public include " the casual visitor - a tax payer, a personal friend of the trustee, a tourist ... [4]", all visitors who may be interested in special collections without any desire to read them[5]. They have limited access to special collections through the exhibitions and publications produced by special collections departments. These exhibitions are a valuable form of outreach to the world outside the scholarly ivory tower, interpreting collections for the general public, and publicising their existence to funders, donors and visiting dignitaries. Nevertheless, they are usually temporary in nature : a "brief moment in the sun[6]" for treasures that normally enjoy conservation level gloom.

Humanities scholars as Special Collections users

Academics and graduate students in the humanities use special collections to look for fresh historical and literary clues to shed light on their research. Bibliographers are interested in the book as a physical artefact, searching for all possible variant editions[7], along with its publishing history and the history of its ownership. Consequently these users are interested both in the materiality of the text, and the information the text contains.

A number of studies have been done in recent years on the behaviour of humanities scholars, particularly in the light of the adoption of information technology. Franklin[8] and Wiberley[9] found that the majority of scholars affirmed the "importance of primary records for the traditional work done by bibliographers, textual editors and literary critics.[10]" They frequently consult special collections librarians: Wiberley notes "Because special collections finding aids are unique, humanists expect to need help with them.[11]" Randolph Adams commented in 1940 on the users with "fantastic, futile, footless problems[12]", and this "circuitous route in their research efforts[13]" is echoed by Watson-Boone[14] in 1994. Finally, Pearsall agrees with Watson-Boone that "humanities scholarship is cumulative rather than successive in nature[15]", noting that "the answers that satisfy one generation of scholars may well provoke a later generation to further questions.[16]"

Recent trends in scholarly behaviour

Use of special collections changes with new academic developments such as New Historicism, which argues "that texts must be interpreted in the light of their socio-political contexts[17]", or, as Lundin neatly puts it, "Text becomes context in the light of differences being related, of a larger world extrinsic and intrinsic in meaning.[18]" Such a change can be good news for special collections, as it means that relatively obscure materials and under used collections are all grist to the mill of New Historicist scholars[19], seeking to sift through the 'rubbish' in order to recreate the environment into which the text can be placed. However, it does mean changes to the patterns of study; from sole attention to the texts of one author or topic, to interest in a more thematic and wide ranging study centred on a historical or literary period[20].

2.2 Technological opportunities for special collections

Technological opportunities for scholars

Sturges[21] picks out JANET, Britain's Joint Academic Network, as a profound technological change to scholarship. JANET (currently being superseded by Super-JANET[22]), has united Britain's academic institutions since 1984, and it is the UK's academic gateway to the Internet, a large network of computers joining together and incorporating smaller networks all over the world. For scholars the Internet through JANET has two major advantages : it provides international access and there is no (visible) cost at the point of use[23]. According to Deegan[24], humanities scholars are "a significant and growing proportion" of the academics using the Internet.

Electronic documents on the World Wide Web

The development of the World Wide Web (WWW) in particular has opened up the Internet to wider use. It allows computers around the world to store their documents in a standard form[25], which can be linked to other national or international files or pages by the use of hypertext. The link is expressed by a URL which provides information about the host, domain, and file name[26]. Most documents available on the WWW are written using HTML, a basic code that can be written and read on any computer[27]. However, another code that is receiving attention in the scholarly world is SGML, which allows the presentation of the document to be flexible, able to be converted, for instance, into HTML or a CD-ROM format[28]. Consequently, SGML has the potential to provide "long term, large scale, richly structured information.[29]"

Networked access to primary sources can be achieved through digitisation of the material or through the creation of electronic texts by keying in or using Optical Character Recognition. The last two methods produce a searchable machine readable text, but are subject to error and require careful proof reading. Digitisation is expensive and requires much electronic storage space, but it produces the high quality images that scholars require to access the artefactuality of the text[30]. These technologies offer significant opportunities to provide networked access to primary sources.

Technological opportunities for the general public

The Internet opens up the world of rare books and special collections to the public because it enables remote, twenty four hour access to otherwise closely guarded treasures by means of digital images. Traditionally, special collections departments have mounted exhibitions for the public, and the Internet allows them to create on-line exhibitions. These are a selection of images from items in the collection, with explanatory text, which may or may not be linked to an physical exhibition in the library. The images are generally lower resolution pictures, rather than being of the high resolution that scholars require. While on-line exhibitions have been created within an academic context, they have much to offer the casual visitor or Internet browser.

How can the Internet serve special collections?

Scholars and librarians have identified ways that technology must develop to serve humanities scholars. Lehmann stresses the need for "simple, universal gateways[31]", and Watson-Boone "the creation of a network of see and see also references[32]". Oram suggests that innovation in collection guides is particularly important, creating "publications which make essential links between collections and resources", which will form an "intellectual map of the collections[33]"

World Wide Web Pages are a practical solution to these needs:

- a single, practically universal interface
- capacity for images of MSS and bindings
- can be linked internationally to documents in other collections for comparison
- hypertext environment makes multiple links and can set documents in context
- can be locally designed to suit the specific needs of collections

The opportunity exists for WWW pages to be a capable and flexible gateway for access to special collections.

2.3 Initiatives for access to special collections : digital library projects

A number of ground breaking projects have demonstrated what can be done to enable electronic access to special collections. A comprehensive discussion of these projects is beyond the scope of this project, however, they are relevant to the study in that access to 'digital special collections' projects is set up through the WWW pages of special collections departments.

- The Beowulf electronic archive. Based on the only extant manuscript, this will allow the reader to manipulate images, compare the manuscript with other scholarly versions, "access an Old English glossary or a related archaeological find; or initiate a bibliographical search and retrieval of a related article[34]."

- The York Doomsday Project[35]. An electronic resource of the performances of the York Mystery Cycle in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, including play scripts, accounts, devotional literature, and stained glass windows.[36]

- The Treasures Digitisation project, including images of Leonardo da Vinci's notebook and the Lindisfarne Gospels, which visitors and remote users can view and manipulate in an on-line exhibition.[37].

- The Library of Congress has numerous digitisation projects underway, including the American Memory Project, which consists of searchable primary source and archival materials relating to American culture and history. It also has an American Treasures on-line exhibition, presenting "the rarest, most interesting or significant items from America's past.[38]"

These digital library projects have used the Internet to create entirely new kinds of information resources for special collections, freeing their thinking from the limitations of print to embrace the possibilities of hypertext and digital imaging.

The role of electronic special collections

Should special collections departments concentrate their energies and finances on creating resources like those above which could potentially bring radical change to traditional patterns of use in special collections? In Greenberg's opinion, these technologies "will make special collections as they now exist in individual libraries and archives irrelevant to the process and progress of research in the humanities.[39]" However, the view of the British Library is that " ... people will want to consult traditional materials alongside digital using a single gateway to gain access to the catalogues and all types of information.[40]"

If digital resources will exist alongside traditional resources, access to electronic special collections will not replace access to the real thing. How can access to special collections be improved using Internet technology? One solution is to provide information about collections on WWW pages, perhaps alongside or as a gateway to special collections catalogue records. This solution was translated into practical proposals as one of the results of the Follett Report in 1993, which has had far reaching effects in the special collections departments of UK institutions.

2.4 Initiatives for access to special collections : the Follett Report

The primary impetus of the Follett Report in 1993 was concern over pressures upon libraries in higher education[41]. The Follett Group's brief was to investigate the future needs of higher education institutions for library and information resources, and to identify "practical proposals[42]" to meet those needs.

The Follett Report : Access to specialised research collections

The Follett Group recognised the problems of higher education institutions in maintaining specialised research collections which incurred heavy costs in storage, conservation and providing access[43]. They recommended that:

"a small proportion of the funds currently allocated for research through the main funding council grant should be reserved for allocation specifically to support certain library collections and provision ... in the humanities[44]."

Higher education institutions were invited by the joint funding councils to apply for grants to increase access to their specialised research collections. There was a clear emphasis upon suitability of the cataloguing for on-line or networked access[45]. Applications for 1995 - 6 also invited funding for "publicity or development of the collection or user related services.[46]", and the importance of disseminating information about the collections supported was made clear[47]. This initiative was welcomed, and forty seven institutions benefited in 1994 - 5, and fifty six in 1995 - 6[48]. These included Internet projects such as the Aberdeen Bestiary Project, and the Early Printed Books Project in Oxford.

The Follett Report : Electronic Libraries

Information technology was considered by the Follett Group to be one of the single most important areas to be considered[49]. Interest was expressed in the electronic or "virtual" library, and fifteen million pounds were allocated to the 'Electronic Libraries Programme', managed by the Joint Information Systems Committee on behalf of the funding bodies. Digitisation was examined as a means of increasing access to collections by electronic means for researchers and students throughout the sector,[50]

and one of the successful projects in this area was the Internet Library of Early Journals project.

The Follett Report and Special Collections

The Follett Report has had practical implications for special collections departments in academic institutions in the UK in two areas. The non-formula funding for specialised research collections has created opportunities to develop access via networking, and allowed the exploration of electronic solutions to the unique problems of their institutions. The funding devoted to the eLib projects, while coming from a different perspective, attempts to tackle the information needs of humanities scholars, who are the principal users of special collections.

2.5 Summary

Special collections are the research resources for humanities scholars and cultural resources for the general public. Access to these primary sources is paramount to humanities scholars, who rely on special collections staff to help them in their circuitous research efforts, and may want to consult a wide range of obscure materials on a theme or period. The Internet offers opportunities for scholars to consult primary sources remotely, and for the general public to gain an insight into special collections through digital images and on-line exhibitions. The World Wide Web is a particularly useful medium for these purposes as it is flexible, universal, and able to display digital images. Several digital special collections and on-line exhibitions have been developed in this country and abroad. While these are excellent resources, it is not likely that their use will replace the use of the physical collections. Consequently, it is necessary to explore how the Internet can increase access to special collections by providing information relevant to researchers. The Follett report in 1993 made funding available for initiatives to provide access to special collections, which was enthusiastically taken up and offers significant potential to increase access to special collections using the Internet.

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Chapter 3
Methodology

The investigative work for this dissertation comprises three parts:

- a survey of strategies of special collections departments to increase access using their web pages, and of their experiences of the reactions of special collections users, assessed by questionnaire.

- an evaluation of special collections web pages using a set of criteria developed from criteria produced by David Wallace[1].

- an investigation of the experiences of three major institutions in working to increase access to their special collections using WWW pages, assessed by semi-structured interviews with staff.

3.1 The questionnaire survey

The purpose of the questionnaire survey was to investigate the strategies and achievements of special collections departments throughout the UK in increasing access to their collections using the Internet. It was intended to have a broad focus in order to establish a picture of general trends.

Identification of a suitable population

Three factors determined the identification of the survey population.

- They should be a special collections or archives department in an academic institution

- They must also have a substantial presence on the WWW

- The JISC document *Accessing our humanities collections: a guide to collections for humanities researchers*[2] provided a framework of institutions actively seeking to promote access to their collections. However, institutions that fulfilled the first two criteria generally fulfilled the third.

A short list of 36 institutions was selected, which covered a wide range of collection types. Although this is a relatively small number for a survey population, it actually represents a large proportion of the special collections departments in the country.

Notable omissions from the study were Nottingham University, which was avoided because another Loughborough student was working with the Special Collections department on her dissertation, and Leeds University, which was avoided because no special collections web pages as such were found.

Design of the questionnaire

- The questionnaire was planned to fill four sides of A4 paper, which covered two sides of an A3 sheet.
- A short introduction was set at the beginning of the questionnaire, to reiterate the nature of the project, and the desired completion date.
- The name of the institution and contact for future reference were required for tracking purposes, and in order to set answers in context.

The questions were divided into three sections.

Section A:

This was the largest section, composed of questions for which lists of answers were provided. As many answers as were relevant could be selected. The questions aimed to investigate the setting up and development of the web site. Question 4, which asked about the use of HEFCE non-formula funding for the web site, had a set of categories relating to the rough percentage of funding used for the web site. These categories did not exceed 'More than 50%', because on the evidence of the project descriptions in *"Accessing our humanities collections ...[3]"*, it was felt to be unlikely that a significant number of respondents would have used more than 50% of their funding for the web site.

Section B:

Question 6 was intended to investigate the existence of, the reasons for, and the response of users to, on-line exhibitions.

Section C:

This was the most open ended of the sections, aiming to assess :

- quantitative reactions of users to the web sites
- qualitative changes in their behaviour.

A section was left to add any further comments.

The questionnaire ended with a note of thanks, and details as to where to send the questionnaire in the event of the loss of the stamped addressed envelope. A copy of the final version of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix A.

Final stages

An individually tailored covering letter was included with the questionnaire. This gave the researcher's address and e-mail address, and explained the selection of the respondent, mentioning the document *"Accessing our humanities collections: a guide to collections for humanities researchers[4]"*. However, it was made clear that the questionnaire was not related to any formal evaluation study on the part of the higher education funding bodies. The relevant web site for the respondent was given.

The questionnaire was sent out on Friday 9 May. Three weeks was judged to be a suitable period in which to reply, making the final reply date 30 May, and this was indicated clearly.

3.2 Evaluation of Special Collections World Wide Web Pages

The aim of this part of the field work was to critically examine special collections World Wide Web pages, in order to assess their information value to the user. The field work followed two stages.

Development of criteria

Criteria produced by Richard Wallace[5] for the evaluation of archival sites on the WWW were examined, assessed for their usefulness to the project and adapted to form a set of criteria to be used for the evaluation of special collections web pages.

Selection of institutions and evaluation process

Sixteen institutions were selected from the group who had replied to the questionnaire, and the three institutions used for the case studies. This enabled a division to be made between eight institutions who said that they had used HEFCE funding for their web sites, and eight who said that they had not. All the institutions had substantial material on the Web. The set of criteria developed with reference to Wallace's criteria were then used to evaluate the Web pages, and the results recorded in tables. An evaluative analysis could then be made.

3.3 Semi-structured interviews

The aim of the interviews was to identify the common and unique features of each institution, and to illustrate the institutional relationships and patterns of influences that create access to special collections using the Internet in case studies.

Choice of institutions

The criteria for the choice of institution should be a 'centre of excellence' in these areas:

- It should have very significant special collections
- It should have a substantial presence on the WWW
- It should be participating in a number of Follett projects to increase access to special collections

The institutions selected were Oxford, Manchester and Durham Universities.

Design of interview questions

The topics covered in the questionnaire were used as a focus for discussion, providing a structure to ensure that crucial areas were covered. However, extra material was added, or the questions adapted to suit the particular needs of each institution.

Schedule

- **Manchester University : 21 May**

Charlie Hulme, Library Systems Manager, Gareth Lloyd, Archivist, John Tuck, Assistant Director, Christopher Hunt, University Librarian.

- **Oxford University : 23 May**

Julianne Simpson, Web Administrator and Cataloguer, Early Printed Books Project, Julie Anne Lambert, Supervisor, John Johnson Collection, Richard Gartner, Pearson Non-Book Media Librarian, Bodleian Library.

- **Durham University : 28 May**

Beth Rainey, Head of Special Collections, Richard Higgins, Web Co-ordinator for Special Collections.

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Chapter 4
Analysis of the Questionnaire Survey

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will present a summary of the results of the questionnaire survey : a copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix A. The results will then be analysed, and the most significant findings summarised. The results can also be found in tabular form in Appendix B.

Response rate

The questionnaire survey was sent out on Friday 9 May, 1997. A total of 28 replies were received from the sample of 36, making the response rate 77.7%. Not all questions were completed by all respondents, but this was not enough of a problem for any response to be discounted.

4.2 Results and analysis

Section A: Strategies for Access

Objectives of special collections Web sites

The results, as represented in *Figure 1*, show that there are three dominant objectives for special collections Web sites.

- **To publicise the collections.** This was the principal objective, with 96% of respondents giving this as an answer.

- **To provide information for external users.** 92% of respondents saw this as an objective of their special collections Web site.

- **To provide information for internal users** This closely followed the first two objectives at 89%.

Figure 1

Objectives of special collections Web sites

- External users
- Internal users
- General public
- Digitised special collections
- Publicity

Figure 2

Original Basis for the web site

- Printed only
- Unpublished only
- New only
- Printed + New
- Printed+Unpublished+New
- Printed+Unpublished
- Unpublished+New

- **To provide information for the general public.** This was a lower priority at 67%, not surprising considering the academic nature of the institutions concerned.

- **To provide access to digitised special collections.** Although a relatively small number of institutions (32%) classed providing access to digitised special collections as an objective, more indicated in their comments that they were intending to use the Web site for this purpose in the future. The general consensus seemed to be that access to digitised special collections "is a lower priority" and "will come later".

- Most respondents indicated that their objectives included more than one of the categories.

- There were few other comments, except for one respondent who added as an objective "to drag Special Collections out of the nineteenth century, kicking and screaming if necessary!"

Overall, these results show that special collections Web sites have a significant purpose, and are not just in an experimental stage. They also show that special collections departments are committed to increasing access through their Web sites, firstly by increasing awareness of the collections through publicity, and secondly, by providing information about their collections for the academic community.

Original basis of the Web site
- **Printed materials.** It was clear that printed materials played a very significant part - 23 respondents (82%) had used printed guides partly or wholly as the basis for the site (see *Figure 2*). In fact, 44% of respondents indicated that their Web site was based only on existing printed materials, as it is clear from their comments that they considered 'unpublished materials' to be draft handlists or alphabetical lists to collections.

- **New material.** Only one respondent answered that the design and content of the pages were entirely new.

- **Scholarly publication.** No respondents indicated that their Web site was based on a scholarly publication.

- **Old and new.** It is clear that the general trend is to use a mixture of existing and new materials for the Web pages, and this was re-emphasised in the comments for this question.

- **Gateways to catalogues.** One respondent pointed out that the intention behind the Web pages was to link them to a catalogue with detailed descriptions of collections, and in general the comments showed the importance of the on-line handlist or the special collections catalogue, which was a factor not explored by the questionnaire design.

Staff roles

Responses to Question 3, about staff roles in the development of the Web site, which are outlined in *Figure 3*, revealed a varied picture. Particularly interesting are the combinations of staff involved in the development of the Web pages.

- **Special collections collaboration.** Special Collections are often at the head of the team : 65% of respondents reported input from the special collections department for whole or part of the pages. While only 18% of special collections staff were solely responsible for the development of their Web pages, 47% were developing them in collaboration with other staff.

- **Computing services collaboration.** This collaboration is reaching outside of the library to computing services, who are playing a significant role in the development of special collections Web pages.

- **Role of other library staff.** Another striking result of Question 3 is that slightly more respondents replied that other library staff had set up their pages than special collections staff.

- **'Others'.** One respondent classed a "micro-support librarian" as an other, another mentioned collaboration with the University's Press and Information Office, and some of the 'others' named were staff funded by HEFCE non-formula funding.

- **Sites at an early stage.** It was also commented that some pages were at an early stage, and staff roles were consequently not well developed.

With the necessity of providing information about their collections in an on-line form, Special Collections are relinquishing traditional tendencies to be separate from the main library in order to make use of the IT skills of other staff. In some cases they seem to be handing over the responsibility for providing on-line special collections information to other staff.

HEFCE non-formula funding

Results for Question 4 show that the HEFCE funding has played a significant part in the development of the Web sites, with 54% of respondents stating that HEFCE non-formula funding had been used to develop the Web site. The greatest number of respondents indicated that only a small proportion of the funding had been used for Web site development (see *Figure 4*).

- **Initial impetus.** Even if only a small proportion of the funding was used for the site, it may have provided the impetus to get the site going, which would not otherwise have happened. One institution commented that "Since the project ended, a considerable amount of staff time has been spent on developing the site."

- **Recent importance of the WWW.** It is also relevant to consider that the importance of providing information about collections on the Internet has increased rapidly in the last few years, and since the original submissions for the funding were tendered. Probably at that time, disseminating information about HEFCE projects using the WWW seemed a low priority compared to cataloguing and conservation. This is reflected in the words of one respondent "We would, in *hindsight,* have included Web site development as an aspect of our bid/projects." (27)

- **HEFCE funded staff.** Comments indicated that, for the large part, the HEFCE funding was used to pay for staff whose time spent on the project was difficult to quantify in the rough categories provided.

Figure 3

Staff responsible for the web site

4%
7%
11%
18%
18%
11%
7%
4%
20%
18%

- ▣ Special Collections only
- ■ Library staff only
- ☐ Computing staff only
- ☐ Other
- ■ Special Collections+Computing
- ▣ Special Collections+Library
- ▨ Special Collections+Library+Computing
- ☐ Special Collections+Other
- ■ Other+Computing

Figure 4

Percentage of HEFCE funding used for web site development

Number

7
6
5
4
3
2
1
0

1

Percentage

- ☐ 0-9%
- ■ 10-19%
- ☐ 20-29%
- ☐ 30-39%
- ■ 50%+

- **Complex development of Web pages.** It is evident that the development of Web pages is a more complex process that the simple arrangement in the questionnaire could probe. HEFCE funding is just one of the factors that has brought their Web sites into being. This is clear from the sites who indicated that HEFCE funding was not used for their sites : the move into cyberspace was already happening for them.

- **HEFCE provides opportunities for the Web.** What the HEFCE funding may have achieved is a welcome opportunity for some institutions, particularly smaller institutions who might not otherwise have had access to the capital or the expertise, to venture onto the Internet.

Changes to the Web site

Almost every respondent was planning changes in the near future to their Web sites, creating a picture of a high level of activity as well as of differing priorities.

- **Ongoing change.** 22% (see *Figure 5*) said that they were constantly changing or updating their site, taking advantage of the Web's facility for easy updating.

- **Planning to extend the site.** Still more (39%) were planning to expand their site to cover new material.

- **Expand collection level descriptions.** 14% expressed interest in expanding their collection level descriptions.

- **Add more collections.** 11% wanted to add more collections to the pages; a large undertaking, especially for smaller institutions.

- **Add images.** 14% of institutions were keen to add more images, seeing them as having an important publicity function.

- Other comments included adding collection guides, inserting a form to allow identification and counting of page visitors, introducing a search engine and the redesigning of the main University Library site to provide better subject access.

These comments show evidence of the Web acting as a medium for ongoing change and dynamic new development in providing access to special collections.

Section B : On-line exhibitions

Five respondents had an on-line exhibition, and four were planning one. Of these, one respondent said that they had and were planning an on-line exhibition.

- Put together, these respondents represent a small but appreciable group who are keen to provide access to their collections through this format.

- Institutions that did not have or were planning on-line exhibitions did not provide reasons why not. However, if these institutions were not involved in running real exhibitions, to put up an on-line exhibition would be a large outlay in terms of staff time.

The main reasons that emerged for having or planning an on-line exhibition were:

- **Publicity and promotion.** Publicising collections to stimulate use and increase awareness was a key reason for respondents.

- **To showcase the variety of collections.** This was mentioned by three respondents, who wanted to give browsers an idea of the "rich variety and scope of the collections." The images were a taster, "to give an impression of material in the collection."

- **To provide access.** This was a theme in two answers, one of which saw the exhibition as an "addition" to the main Web site.

Other answers were

- **To preserve real exhibitions.** One respondent saw the role of on-line exhibitions as capturing real exhibitions for posterity.

- **To provide current exhibition information.** One advantage of the on-line format was that it could provide up-to-date information about real exhibitions.

- **To make a first step towards document delivery.** One respondent considered this as the ultimate aim : "users will want the document delivered to their desk top rather than travel here to look at them."

- **To illustrate how HEFCE funding has been used.** One respondent saw on-line exhibitions as a good way of giving evidence for and justifying the HEFCE funding that they had received.

Figure 5

Planned changes to web sites

Legend:
- ongoing / updating
- Extend/expand
- Expand collection level descriptions
- Add more collections
- Add images

Y-axis: No. Respondents (0, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12)
X-axis: Changes (1)

Figure 6 (see p.31)

Queries generated by the web site

Legend:
- Post
- E-mail
- Visits
- Telephone

Y-axis: Number (0, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18, 20)
X-axis: Query type (1)

28

Clearly institutions have varied reasons for mounting on-line exhibitions on the Web, but principally they seem to want to use on-line exhibitions as a means to provide access to their collections by publicising them and providing information about them. In addition, an on-line exhibition allows them to showcase their collections, as a preview of the treasures that the user could explore. The showcase aim is peculiar to this format, as the on-line exhibition is not strictly (or, at least, not yet) a scholarly resource like the Beowulf project, or a straight presentation of collection information. It is notable that special collections staff feel that this is a valuable feature for scholars.

User feedback from on-line exhibitions.

The select band of respondents who had mounted on-line exhibitions were the only ones who could answer Question 6d, about response from users to on-line exhibitions. They described positive responses, indicating that awareness of the collection had been raised. One institution reported increased national and international requests for printed posters and guides, another that it had brought users into the library to view the print based exhibition.

Section C : Achievements in Access

Visits to the Web site

- **Few figures available.** Collecting figures for Web site visits proved surprisingly problematic, with many respondents not being able to provide any figures at all. The figures required were those for special collections pages only, and it was judged that figures for the whole of the main university site were not sufficiently precise. This caused problems for some institutions who could not distinguish the hits for the special collections pages exclusively.

- **Figures discarded.** Of the ten sites that provided figures, one with hits of 4000 per week appeared to have given figures for the main Library page rather than specifically for the special collections pages. Another, which reported hits of 7000 per week, was discounted because of the unusual nature of the page, which was a digital library resource rather than a special collections page of the normal type.

- **Figures available.** Responses providing visitor figures (see table 4.7b) are too few to be able to draw a conclusive pattern. Certainly there are three distinct groups of figures (10-40), (120-125), (500, 700). Perhaps these sites are at different stages of development.

- **Effect of on-line exhibitions?** The figure of 700 came from a site with an on-line exhibition, and it is tempting to draw the conclusion that the inclusion of material like this is what attracts visitors to sites. Further investigation would be needed to confirm this hypothesis.

- **Significant figures of use.** However, we can say that some special collections sites do seem to be experiencing significant use, and figures such as 700 visits per week give some indication of what can be achieved.

- **No means of measuring use.** The most striking factor of the results for this question is the number of sites which have no means of measuring their use (58% of respondents).It would seem to be as important to track the number of visitors to the Web site as it would be to log how many copies of printed guides were given out.

- **Training implications.** Some comments indicated that special collections staff were dissatisfied with this situation. Perhaps one explanation lies in the comments of one respondent to an earlier question on changes planned for the site. They wished to set up a form on the site to count and track visitors, but were waiting until training became available to do this. Special collections staff may be lacking the IT skills with which to set up facilities to gather this valuable information.

Queries generated by the Web site

As *Figure 6* demonstrates, special collections staff do have evidence that queries are being generated via the Web site.

- **E-mail queries.** The most popular means of query is e-mail, not surprising considering that the user who has Internet access will have e-mail access and is likely to know how to use it. Queries by e-mail and post, the second most popular type of query, are likely to come from remote users wanting to be able to communicate quickly and cheaply.

- **Other query types.** Queries through telephone calls and personal visits are more expensive for the users but are likely to be requests for more sophisticated and detailed information.

- **Personal visits.** Personal visits in particular are likely to be 'high value' queries for the institution that measures use by the readers present in the reading room.

- **Limitations of the question.** This question gives no indication of the number of these queries relative to the number of queries based on information through other means. Also, the results do not tell us whether personal visits were made solely on the basis of the information provided on the Web site.

- **Split opinions.** The comments for this question were particularly interesting, as they were split between respondents who thought that the Web site had generated queries and those that thought it had not, or at least not yet.

- **Sites at an early stage.** Three respondents thought that there was not sufficient data to tell thus far, with most external queries still generated from printed sources. One respondent pointed out that it was difficult to know if enquirers had come via the Web of some other route. Many sites are still at an early stage of development, and staff are cautious about attributing queries to information gathered from the Web pages.

- **Positive response.** The most positive comments were from a respondent who reported queries resulting from the Web site of all four types, and in addition "applications for fellowships to work on the collections." This seems to indicate that Web sites can act as sources for research relevant information.

Changes in the expectations of researchers

The results for question 9a reveal that the majority of respondents (61%) felt that the Web site had not changed researchers expectations of information seeking. Nevertheless, there is a small but reasonably significant number of sites which are changing the perceptions and expectations of researchers about the ways that they can use special collections.

- **Opinions slow to change.** In the light of earlier results, which showed that the Web pages were often electronic versions of the printed guides, it is perhaps not surprising that researchers are not expecting anything profoundly different or exciting. The development of special collections Web pages is part of the larger trend towards developing electronic resources for humanities scholarship. It may be some years before the move to Internet based information sources is fully accepted.

- **Sites at an early stage.** A clear and recurrent theme in the comments was that many Web sites were in an early stage of development, and it was too early to say whether they had changed researchers expectations. Some respondents expected researchers interest in the site to increase as the site became fully developed and more original material was added.

- **Increased awareness.** Respondents reporting changes in expectations noted general changes in the awareness of the collections, with expectations - especially of digitisation projects - increasing the more information was provided.

- **E-mail queries.** Two respondents picked out the use of e-mail for queries as a decisive feature of change. Increased e-mail queries could have positive implications for the management of staff workloads. However, it was felt that e-mail access via Web pages encouraged general enquirers to contact at an earlier stage than previously, and also to expect a faster response than they would for a postal enquiry. To the chagrin of special collections staff, these speculative queries were often submitted without thorough research, or even prior to reading relevant published material.

Changes in the use of the collections

The response to this question, which considered changes in the use of the collections, was a positive one, with 68% of respondents saying that there had been changes. It is interesting that these results were almost the reverse of those for the previous question. Possibly this was because the respondents felt on surer ground with changes in the use of collections, which were more quantifiable.

- **Differing opinions.** Again, opinion was split as to whether the Web site had brought about changes, with the majority deciding that it had, and valuable background detail was provided in the comments, which showed that the split between those who thought that the Web site had brought changes and those who did not was not so clear cut.

- **Publicity.** The principal changes in the use of collections seemed to be in the area of publicity with a higher profile creating increased awareness and therefore "potential use".

- **Small increase in users.** A number of institutions qualified their positive response by saying that the number of users was small, or that there had been an "impression" of increased use.

- **More e-mail queries.** Those who were more wholehearted in saying that the Web site had changed the use of collections specified that this involved " more enquiries from abroad" and "use from remote sites." This factor was picked up by one respondent who stated that the Web site "generated more enquiries via e-mail, telephone and post, but not necessarily more use of the collections on site."

- **Poor quality e-mail queries.** The increase in e-mail enquiries seemed also to have opened the door to random and ill-prepared e-mail queries, demonstrated in one comment: "All other Web-orientated enquiries were for information that we don't hold (local records), in spite of the nature of our collections being clearly delineated."

Further Comments

Most of the respondents made use of this section, to expand on their other answers or to add related comments. They were particularly concerned with what they were going to do or would like to do to their sites.

- **Catalogues and catalogue description.** A frequent theme was plans to provide on-line handlists and special collections catalogues on the Web. Respondents were especially interested in increasing the level of item or collection description (e.g. "standardised meta level archive descriptions").

- **Sites at an early stage.** Again, respondents stressed that sites were at an early stage, and not yet fully developed. Work on the sites was ongoing, and they would like to do more. Restraints on their progress were time, staffing levels and available funding.

- **Importance of the WWW.** The importance of the Web stands out as a means for world wide dissemination of information, and a gateway for access to special collections.

- **Publicity.** As a means of promoting and publicising collections, it is now as necessary as print.

- **Evolution of WWW sites.** While it may be that there is a division, as one respondent suggested, between "summary, promotional sites", and sites that are gateways to comprehensive and exciting information resources, it seems that the former are rapidly expanding into the latter. Special collections Web pages are changing all the time, and special collections staff are keen to develop them.

4.3 Summary of main findings

- The primary objectives of special collections Web sites are to publicise the collections, to provide information for external and internal academic users, and in the future, to provide access to digitised special collections materials

- The basis for the Web sites is usually a mixture of old and new materials, with a tendency to rely heavily or solely on existing printed guides to collections.

- Special collections Web pages are likely to be a collaborative effort, involving a possible combination of special collections staff, library staff, and computing staff.

- HEFCE non-formula funding has played a significant part in the development of special collections Web pages.

- Special collections Web sites are constantly expanding and changing in new directions.

- The small number of institutions involved in on-line exhibitions are aiming to provide an additional means of access to their collections and also to publicise them, particularly through a 'showcase of images' that represents a taster of their collections.

- The figures of use that are available would seem to show that special collections sites can achieve large figures of use.

- Many sites have no means of measuring their use.

- Many sites are still at an early stage of development.

- Opinions are divided as to whether the Web sites are generating a significant number of queries yet, although some institutions report that this is happening.

- Development of special collections Web pages has had little or no effect so far on the expectations of researchers

- Development of special collections Web pages has brought about changes in the use of collections, particularly more e-mail enquiries from abroad or long distance

- The quality of these enquiries can, however, be poor - not necessarily enquiries of real value as far as special collections staff are concerned.

The findings of the questionnaire have showed that the World Wide Web is becoming increasingly important as a gateway for access to special collections, although there is much work still to be done. Special collections departments have attempted to provide access to their collections using the Internet, and the questionnaire sheds some light on the responses to this move into cyberspace from the users themselves. The next step is to focus upon the WWW pages that special collections departments have produced and to look at them with a critical eye, in order to judge what the user is likely to be able to gain from them as an information resource.

Chapter 5
Evaluation of Special Collections World Wide Web Pages

5.1 Introduction

This chapter begins by examining a set of evaluative criteria produced by David Wallace[1] to evaluate "activities and products of archivists and archives on the World Wide Web[2]."The relevance of the criteria for this project is assessed, and then criteria for the evaluation of special collections Web pages are developed. Sixteen special collections are reviewed, to produce an evaluative analysis. A full list of these sites can be found in Appendix C.

5.2 Examination of Wallace's Criteria

General features

The focus of Wallace's criteria, which are presented in a condensed form in Table 5.1, is content rather than stylistic analysis. The aim was to discover how archives Web pages are being used by their authoring institutions, and what they provide for users in terms of research relevant information and facilities. Wallace applied these criteria to archival sites world wide, but principally in the USA, where sites are often more highly developed than in the UK. Consequently the criteria cover a number of features which are not in evidence yet in the UK's academic sites. The institutions that Wallace examined were also, on the whole, institutions such as the Public Record Office that have Web sites in their own right. This differs from the special collections sites examined in this study which are subsidiary sites of the academic institution to which they belong. A third major difference is of course that Wallace's criteria were developed for archival sites only, and do not take into account the different features of special collections sites which cover printed books.

Table 5.1 :Wallace's Evaluative Criteria

Dimension	Sub-Dimension	Values	Meaning
Finding Aids	Available	Y/N	Are findings aids available on this site?
	Format	Text/hypertext	Are collection level findings aids presented as ASCII text files, or are hypertext links built into them?
	Searchable	Y/N/n/a	Are the findings aids searchable?
Collections	Available	Y/N	Are actual items from the collections available for viewing?
	Format	Text/Still images/ Moving Images/ Sound	In what format(s) are items from collections available?
	Searchable	Y/N/na	Are the collections searchable?
	Links to external collections	Y/N	Are there hypertext links to collections from other institutions?
Reference Services	Available	Y/N	Are reference services provided through this site?
	On-line queries	Y/N/n/a/	Does this site accept on-line queries from users?
	Document delivery	Y/N/na	Does this institution negotiate document delivery services through its site?
Search and Retrieval Interface	Available	Y/N	Does this site provide users with a search and retrieval interface to its collections?
	Browsable Index(es)	Y/N/n/a	Does this site allow users to scroll through indexes to collections and/or finding aids?
	Authority control	Y/N/na	Does this site employ authority control to its descriptions?
Institutional Information and Policies	Annual Report	Y/N	Does this site provide this institution's annual report?
	Mission statement	Y/N	Does this site provide this institution's mission statement?
	Acquisition	Y/N	Does this site provide this institution's acquisition policies?
	Access	Y/N	Does this site provide this institution's access policies?
	Copying	Y/N	Does this site provide this institution's copying policies?
User Information	Statistics	Y/N	Does this site provide statistics of use?
	User feedback	Y/N	Does this site allow users to submit on-line feedback to this institution?
	On archives	Y/N	Does this site provide basic information on archives for novices?

Specific features

Relationship with main site

Wallace's criteria assume that the institution is separate and autonomous, but it would not be worthwhile, for example, for most special collections pages to have search and retrieval interfaces generated by separate search engines to those for the university site. Consequently in some cases the facilities and information available on the main site need to be taken into account, and the criteria adapted accordingly.

Finding aids for printed books

Special collections of printed books are frequently catalogued onto the main OPAC, and the criteria need to accommodate the OPAC as a finding aid.

Images

Wallace's criteria covered the format of the images of items from the collections to be found, such as still or moving image, but made no other kind of classification. More detailed criteria is needed to describe the number and type of images to be found on sites. On-line exhibitions are also a visual resource worthy of special note.

Reference Services

Wallace treats 'reference services' and 'on-line queries' as separate criteria, but the difference between them is not made clear. This area of the criteria can be simplified, and in addition can take account of the fact that no UK sites are as yet offering document delivery services.

Links between pages

When considering a Web based resource, the user friendliness of the site, and the logic of the hypertext links and flows, affects the information value of the site, because of the user's perceptions - or frustrations - of using it. Information rich sites can be handicapped by poor structure and links between pages. Another important factor is the number of links necessary to reach the special collections page from the main page. If the user reaches the main university site through a popular search resource such as the University of Wolverhampton UK sensitive Maps[3], how many pages do they need to go through before they reach their goal of special collections? The criteria need to consider the structure and ergonomics of the pages in order to assess their information value.

Currency

Sites will perform poorly in comparison to others if their information is old, which also demonstrate that the institutions are failing to take advantage of the facility of the WWW for easy updating of information. The currency of the site should be assessed by the criteria, to give an indication of the institution's commitment to ongoing maintenance and expansion[4].

Collection history

Practically all sites gave some details of the history and development of their collections, but it was difficult to know under which category this information fell in Wallace's criteria. Special collections criteria, therefore, should assess whether collections background or history is available on the sites.

5.3 Development of special collections criteria

Using Wallace's criteria as a guide, criteria were developed for the evaluation of the special collections Web pages which are the subject of this study. These criteria are presented in Table 5.2.

Selection of sites

Thirteen sites were selected from the list of institutions to which questionnaires had been sent, and additionally, the three sites belonging of the case study institutions. A full list of the sites reviewed can be found in Appendix C. These sites were chosen as a suitable sub-population because:

- They had all either replied to the questionnaire, or been interviewed.
- They all had a substantial amount of material on the Web.

A further division was made between sites who had used their HEFCE non-formula funding to develop the site and sites that had not, using the information provided in the questionnaires as a guide.

The selected sites were evaluated using the special collections criteria on 30 July, 1997. The results of the evaluation are presented in Tables 5.3a and 5.3b.

Table 5.2 Special Collections Criteria

Dimension	Sub-dimension	Value	Meaning
Finding aids/ catalogues	Available/ linked	Available/ linked	Are on-line finding aids available on or via this WWW site?
	Type	Handlist/ OPAC/both	Are the finding aids on-line hand lists, OPAC records or both?
	Hypertext/ Text	Y/N	Are on-line handlists presented as text files, or do they have hypertext links built into them?
Images	Available	Y/N	Are images of items from the collections available?
	Quality	Low/ high	Are the images of low resolution, or high resolution for scholarly study?
	Numbers?	<10 <20 >20	Approximately how many images are available?
	On-line exhibitions	Y/N	Is there an on-line exhibition?
Searching and reference services	Search and retrieval interface	Y/N	Does the site provide users with a search and retrieval interface to its collections?
	Browsable index(es)	Y/N	Does the site enable users to scroll through indexes to collections and/or findings aids?
	E-mail queries	Y/N/main	Is an e-mail address provided for special collections queries?
Structural context	Position within institutional site	no.	How many links must be followed from the main site before the special collections page is located?
	Ease of locating special collections	1-5	On a scale of 1 to 5, how easy is it to find the special collections ? (e.g. are they under a logical heading)
	Links to external collections	Y/N	Are hypertext links provided to other institutions?
	Currency	date	When was the site last updated?
Institutional information	Mission statement	Y/Main/N/n.a	Does the site provide a mission statement for the special collections section, the main library only, or neither?
	Acquisition	Y/Main/N/n.a	Does the site provide an acquisitions policy for the special collections section, the main library only, or neither?
	Access	Y/N	Does the site provide access information for the special collections section?
	Copying	Y/N	Does the site provide copying information for the special collections section?
User and Collections Information	Statistics	Y/N	Does the site provide statistics of use for the special collections page?
	User feedback	Y/N	Does the site provide a form to submit feedback?
	On collections	Y/N	Does the site provide general information about the collections?

Table 5.3 a: Institutions that did not use HEFCE funding for their WWW pages

Dimension	Sub-dimension	Cambridge	Manchester	Napier	Newcastle	Oxford	SOAS	ULL	Warwick
Finding aids	Available/linked?	Yes	Yes	Not yet	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
	Handlist/OPAC/	Both	OPAC	(OPAC)	Handlist	OPAC	-	OPAC-limited	Handlist
	Hypertext/Text?	Text	-	-	Text	-	-	-	Hypertext
Images	Available?	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
	Quality?	-	High	Low	Low	High & Low	-	-	-
	Numbers	-	>20	<10	<20	>20	-	-	-
	On-line exhibitions?	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
Searching and Reference services	Search and retrieval interface?	Main	Main	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
	Browsable index	No	No	No	No	Yes(JJ)	No	No	No
	E-mail queries?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Structural context	Position within institutional site?	2	2	5	3	Varies	3	3	4
	Ease of locating special colls.?	5	5	3	4	2/3	2	4	4
	Links to external collections?	No - sp.c Yes - main	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
	Currency?	11/96	2/97	31/7/96	11/12/96	Varies	1/4/97	10/12/96	17/2/97
Institutional information	Mission statement?	No	No	No	No	Yes JJ, EPBP	No	No	Yes
	Acquisition?	No	No	No	No	Main	No	No	Yes
	Access?	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Copying?	No	No	No	No	Main	Yes	Yes	No
User and Collections Information	Statistics?	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
	User feedback?	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
	On collections?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Table 5.3 b: Institutions that used HEFCE funding for their WWW pages

Dimension	Sub-dimension	Bath	Dundee	Durham	E. Anglia	Heriot Watt	Liverpool	LGU	Swansea
Finding aids	Available/linked	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Handlist/OPAC	Handlist	Both	Both	Handlists	-	Both	OPAC	Handlist
	Hypertext/Text?	Text	Hypertext	H/T& SGML	Text	-	H/T & SGML	-	Hypertext
Images	Available?	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Quality?	-	Low	-	Low	-	Low	Low	Low
	Numbers?	-	<20	-	<10	-	>20	<10	<20
	On-line exhibitions?	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
Searching and Reference services	Search and retrieval interface?	Main	No	No	Main	Main	No	No	Main
	Browsable index	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
	E-mail queries?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Structural context	Position within institutional site?	2	1	3	4	1	2	3	3
	Ease of locating special colls.?	4	5	4	3	3	4	4	4
	Links to external collections?	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
	Currency?	17/7/96	13/5/96	26/3/97	?	?	24/3/97	12/4/96	10/1/97
Institutional information	Mission statement?	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
	Acquisition?	N/A	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
	Access?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Copying?	N/A	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No
User and Collections Information	Statistics?	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
	User feedback?	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
	On collections?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

5.4 Analysis of results

Finding aids

All but three sites provided some kind of finding aid, enabling access to their collections by remote users, generally in the form of OPACs for printed books and on-line handlists for manuscripts and archives. Those sites that did not offer on-line finding aids were planning to have them available in the near future. Sites providing handlists in SGML, such as Durham and Liverpool, are putting a high quality resource onto the Web, allowing for future technological developments, and making a step towards long term information provision for special collections. The provision of HEFCE funding has been one factor which has enabled these institutions to provide these substantial on-line resources in SGML. Five of the sites reviewed were providing hypertext links within their finding aids, exploiting the multifaceted access enabled by hypertext, which allows the user to jump to specific parts of the collection or to other collections. The University of Wales at Swansea had only recently put up its excellent handlists, which were constructed using hypertext. Warwick's plain text finding aids had a search and retrieval interface, while the others provided less sophisticated access requiring the user to scroll through an ASCII text file. These special collections sites are exploiting the Web to provide interactive on-line finding aids for their users. The sites achieve more than being a means for promotion, and are developing into research relevant resources.

Images

Digital images of items from the collections were provided by nine sites. However, there were wide variations in terms of the quality and scope of the images provided. Sites such as Dundee and the London Guildhall University had sprinkled their pages with low resolution illustrative examples of the material held in their collections. These images would seem to be mainly for promotional purposes, but they do give an indication of the range of material held, and they add to the overall visual impact of the site. Swansea was a different kind of site in that the images it presented (of the Banner collections), although they were low resolution, formed the small nucleus of an image collection that could be expanded into a more substantial resource.

Oxford, Manchester and Liverpool were the only institutions to provide more than twenty images each, and Oxford and Manchester the only institutions to provide high resolution images. This is indicative that these institutions see image provision as a key deliverable of their special collections pages, and they are committed to building image resources. Oxford is distinctive in that it has made the most serious attempt to build up scholarly resource of images, beginning with the Celtic Manuscripts Project[5]. None of these resources except for the Toyota Collection were searchable. However, in most cases the number of images available would not merit the development of an interface.

There was no distinctive pattern to be discerned between HEFCE and non-HEFCE funded sites in terms of image provision. HEFCE funding, barring the Celtic Manuscripts project, has not been used for mounting digital images on the Internet, and eLib projects, into whose province this falls, have not really concerned themselves with special collections.

Manchester, Liverpool and Swansea provided on-line exhibitions, which have the potential to act as sophisticated marketing tools to attract interest in the collections. They are a particularly suitable format for collections that can be presented in narrative form (such as the life of John Wesley on the Methodist Archives pages).[6].

Searching and reference services

The six sites that provided a search and retrieval interface did so through a search engine on the main site. More unusual were sites like Warwick's Modern Records Centre which provided a separate search and retrieval interface. The MRC's identity as a separate institution in its own right is likely to be the reason for this. On the whole, special collections sites are not really extensive enough to warrant a separate search and retrieval interface, but as the amount of information and facilities they provide expands, this function may become necessary. Other sites (Oxford, Dundee, Durham, East Anglia, Bath), provided browsable indexes, thereby allowing entry through authority controlled terms. Four out of eight HEFCE funded sites provided this feature, which is appropriate to the Follett emphasis on ease of on-line access.

Wallace considered that remote reference services would be "a rich opportunity made possible by the distributed network environment.[7]" The most basic of reference services is provided when an institution puts up its address and telephone number on the Web, allowing users to contact them with their queries. However, the Internet allows more immediate communication between users and the authoring institution by means of e-mail enquiries. All but one of the sites reviewed provided e-mail addresses for enquiries, often more than one. The first steps are being made towards the provision of on-line reference services with these e-mail addresses. However, more sophisticated facilities such as the provision of forms for on-line queries and document delivery services were not in evidence.

Structural context

The position of the special collections site within the structure of the institutional site as a whole was closely tied to the criteria of the ease of locating the special collections pages. Clearly the easiest sites to locate were those where a link to the special collections pages was provided on the home page, as with Dundee and Heriot Watt. It seemed that archives sites were generally easier to locate than special collections sites, possibly because their function is seen as more distinct from the Library than special collections, and so links are provided at an earlier stage.

Most users coming from the University home page would have to navigate through three pages, a link to a 'Services' or similar page, then to a 'Library' page, then to a 'Subjects' or a 'Services and Collections' page, where the link to the special collection page would be found. Sites scored highly for their user friendliness when the special collections link was clearly apparent on the page, for example, not in the middle of a long list of library services in a small font. Newcastle, Cambridge and SOAS presented their special collections information in long text files, which required much scrolling through to identify relevant information, although the problem was alleviated to some extent by hypertext links back to a contents page at the top. The opposite problem occurred with the University of London Library's site, which had links set up to individual pages for specific collections which contained disappointingly little information. However, this would allow for future expansion of collection information.

A more unusual structural problem was to be found on Oxford's site, which lacks a central site as a gateway to special collections resources. The Bodleian acts as a focal point to some extent, yet the Early Printed Books Project page, which is equally as valuable to special collections users, is only reached through the Library Automation Services page and is not previously signposted.

Eleven sites provided links to other special collections resources, and those that provided multiple links, such as the Manchester Methodist pages, and the Early Printed Books pages were useful reference guides and research tools. The concept of linking sites by hypertext is one that is central to the nature and purpose of the WWW. These related links pages transform the printed source into an added value information resource on the Web, by creating a network of relevant information. Most sites managed to provide one or two relevant sites, and popular links were the National Register of Archives and the British Library. It is difficult to be certain why the other sites did not provide related links, especially as it was quite common to find bibliographies listed, and 'Webliographies' would seem to be an appropriate development.

The dates gathered from the evaluation process show that six sites have been updated in the last six months, and another five within the last year. This means that the information these sites provide is likely to be more current and accurate that the information provided in a printed leaflet, which would not be so frequently revised. For some sites, it was suspected that the date displayed did not reflect the last point when the site was updated. At Cambridge, for instance, the location of the special collections information had very recently changed from the CURL libraries server at Leeds to the main Cambridge Library site, but there was no indication of this on the date of the special collections pages.

Institutional Information

When searching for mission statements, a separate mission statement on the special collections page was looked for. This kind of information tells users about the nature of the special collections institution and is an addition to collection information. Formal separate mission statements were present in six institutions, although mission type statements were present in many sites as part of their collecting policy or institutional history. Only two institutions provided acquisition policy information, and one (Heriot Watt) was extremely brief. Oxford provided a formal acquisition policy which did not cover special collections. Five sites provided copying information for special collection materials, information which would be very useful to the new or remote user, who might be unaware that different regulations exist for copying in special collections. All sites provided access details, and this would appear to be their primary function. It would seem that to a large extent, Web pages are still thought of as an electronic version of a printed information leaflet, and are used as such in a promotional capacity. There is still an expectation that users will want to physically visit the site for their information search. Perhaps some special collections departments do not consider it to be desirable to produce a special collections Web page which would replace a scholar's physical visit with a virtual one.

It is surprising that more institutional information is not available on these sites. In particular, information about access and copying are likely to be very specific, and different to main library practice, and should be available on the special collections site. Quite apart from the benefits to users, one has to agree with David Wallace that "these sites provide a rich potential for professional communication and exchange"[8].

User and collections information

As well as the provision of information, the Internet enables new forms of communication between users and site providers. Users are able to see how popular the site is when a counter of visits to the site is provided on screen. Only three sites provided these usage statistics. These were HEFCE funded sites - Bath (National Centre for the Cataloguing of the Archives of Contemporary Scientists), Dundee and London Guildhall University, who may have seen it as a priority to display the figures in order to justify their special funding. It is not clear why only three sites provided statistics, when this information is so useful for the management of the authoring institution, and for those of other institutions considering WWW developments. Possibly the information is seen to be of limited value, since it does not show what kind of people visit the sites, how long for, and whether they find anything of use to them.

User feedback was taken to mean the provision of a form specifically for this purpose, and only Bath scored in this capacity - another site that, like the Modern Records Centre at Warwick, has a high degree of autonomy. Of course, it would be possible for users to take advantage of the e-mail addresses provided for queries for the purpose of user feedback. However, users are less likely to provide feedback, especially positive feedback, unless they are provided with a specific means to do so.

All sites provided some sort of collections background and history, and this kind of information was also often embedded in collection level finding aids. For the new user, especially a general public user, the provision of images is likely to give more of a sense of the nature of the special collections at the institution than textual information ever could.

5.5 Summary of main findings

- These criteria reveal a valuable picture of the special collections resources available to users via the Internet; a snapshot in their development

- Most special collections sites provide access to finding aids. HEFCE funded sites are developing high quality on-line finding aids with browsable indexes.

- Provision of images varies and there are no substantial scholarly resources, but large universities such as Oxford are leading the way. Images are being used in a promotional capacity.

- Special collections sites rely on using the facilities, such as search and retrieval interfaces, provided on the main site in addition to their own.

- E-mail addresses are provided for queries and feedback.

- Some sites were handicapped by the design of their main university sites and the logic of their hypertext links.

- Most sites provide some links to other collections.

- Sites are updated once or twice a year

- Apart from access information and mission statements, the institutional information provided can be sparse.

- Few sites provide usage statistics or forms for user feedback.

- Most sites provide basic information as to the nature and background of their collections.

- A primary function of sites is to provide access information for research visits.

- Another main function of sites is to promote collections.

- There is a big difference between sites that give information useful for preparing research visits, with the minimum information of access, basic collection descriptions and e-mail addresses, and those attempting the more ambitious step of trying to create a research resource.

- A number of institutions are beginning to exploit the WWW to provide substantial, visual, and interactive information resources.

The questionnaire survey and evaluation of special collections Web pages have raised a number of questions and areas that could not be explored through those means of enquiry. The next step is to look more closely at three institutions, Manchester, Oxford and Durham, which have large special collections and significant presences on the WWW.

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Chapter 6
Comparative analysis of 'Centres of Excellence'

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the interviews with staff at Manchester, Oxford and Durham Universities. It attempts to give an overview of the strategies these institutions have used to set up and develop their special collections Web pages, and to give an indication of the results of their efforts. It also aims to identify some of the factors that were not previously identified in the questionnaire, but that came up as important to the institutions in the interviews. The overall picture of the results is analysed, using comparisons between the three institutions. The URLs of the WWW pages referred to can be found in Appendix C. For an evaluation of these WWW pages, please refer to the previous chapter.

6.2 : Strategies for Access

Aims and objectives

The case study institutions had differing perspectives on the objectives of their Web sites, although they all provided information for external and external academic users, and to some extent, for the general public.

Manchester:

- To provide information for external and internal academic users,
- To provide information for the general public. The Methodist Archives pages were deliberately written avoiding academic terminology to be user-friendly to the general public[1].
- To provide access to digitised special collections - the original vision for the site was to have images of a thousand manuscripts, but that has been limited by time and resources[2].

- To publicise the collections, especially in the case of the Methodist Collections, which are not very well known[3].

- "To provide access to all who have need of our collections.[4]" - is one of the terms of the John Rylands Trust.

Oxford

- The Bodleian main page Western Manuscripts (WMSS) information is intended for internal and external academic users.

- The image archive provides access to digital special collections[5]. This archive does have a publicity function, but it also exits for reasons of conservation and preservation.

- In contrast, the Toyota site at John Johnson (JJ) exists to provide information for the general public and motor car specialists, and "to satisfy the brief of Toyota City, the sponsors"[6].

- The Early Printed Books Project (EPBP) is more directly concerned with publicity and providing a means of access while the records are not yet loaded[7].

Durham

Durham's Web site aims[8]:

- To reach local and remote users

- To publicise the collections

- Giving access to digitised special collections is not a priority[9].

- Durham felt that it was more important to produce cataloguing descriptions than to put up images. "If there are digitised images, they must give organised and explanatory access to the collections, rather than being 'electronic postcards[10]."

Manchester has a distinctive vision for public information provision in its Methodist pages. Its provision of images are a way of providing access to special collections for the public, which is appropriate to the aims of the institution. Manchester and Oxford differ from Durham by providing image galleries and archives, as Durham is more cautious about the value of collections of images. The aims of Oxford's special collections sites are very much shaped by their individual characters.

Creation of sites

Manchester

- The main site was put up in 1995, and the Methodist site in early 1996[11].

- The pages are largely based on printed guides.[12]

- Staff at Manchester indicated that the reliance upon printed materials was so great because of the lack of staff time and resources to write new material[13].

- The basis of the Methodist site was an adaptation of a scholarly paper, and existing research guides[14]. The related links pages were developed by searching the Internet for possible user groups (e.g. church history, family history)[15].

Oxford

- The Bodleian used a mixture of old and new material for its pages, including material from printed guides[16], whereas the Toyota site was wholly new in design and content[17]. The EPBP pages were based on a small booklet called "Project background[18]." Their related links page grew from a collection of useful links for the cataloguing team.

Durham

- The site was put up a year and a half ago[19].

- The information on the pages was based on an existing collection level descriptions, handlists, and the "extensive knowledge of the collections of long - serving staff"[20].

- Beth Rainey has reservations about the use of related links pages, feeling that outdated links can undermine the information value of the resource[21].

Where the sites can differ from the printed information, which is their primary source, is in the provision of related links pages. The Methodist site at Manchester excelled in this area, as the Archivist had researched and forged links with a number of user groups. The EPBP in Oxford had also set up a related links page. However, the fact that Durham had reservations about related links pages show that they have their disadvantages. Manchester's comments in particular highlight some of the limitations and difficulties faced in the development of a special collections site.

Staff roles

Manchester

- When creating pages, Special Collections staff provide the material and give it to the systems staff[22]. Looking into the future, perhaps "special collections staff will create their own pages, although this would require them to have both the relevant skills and the time to do so.[23]"

Oxford

- The Bodleian's Web pages are generally co-ordinated by Thaddeus Lipinski, the Web manager[24].

- For the Toyota site, Julie-Anne Lambert did the image cataloguing and Richard Gartner set up the Web pages[25].

- In the EPBP, Julianne Simpson wrote the pages onto a disk, and gave it to the Web server member of staff at LAS. When the new Web server comes into action, however, she will be able to do things herself[26].

- Oxford's special collections Web sites are maintained separately by the Bodleian and Library Automation Services. It is recognised that the unification of initiatives and resources would be ideal, and there have been moves towards this, but there is still not much overall co-operation[27].

Durham

- Having gathered information from other staff, Richard Higgins did all the work on the pages[28].

Manchester and Oxford, the two larger institutions, delegated the construction and maintenance of the pages to systems staff, with special collections staff collaborating by passing on the relevant materials. This produced a distinction between special collections and IT functions. The provision of HEFCE funding, as in Durham and the EPBP has given staff the freedom to bypass traditional institutional divisions, and create their own pages.

HEFCE funding

Manchester

- HEFCE Non-formula funding has played no part in this process, as the funding awarded to Manchester was largely for the purposes of catalogue conversion[29].

Oxford

- HEFCE funding played a significant role only in the development of the pages for the EPBP. The original application for the funding did not include the Web site, which Julianne Simpson set up in her own time. When there had been feedback showing that the site was worthwhile, it was included in the bid for the next round of funding, and written into Julianne Simpson's job specification[30].

Durham

- As Richard Higgins' post is funded by Follett funding specifically to make information about the special collections available on the Internet, "HEFCE funding has been directly responsible for the development of the Web site.[31]"

It is significant that the EPBP did not originally include the Web site in its bid as administrators had to be convinced of the site's worth before it officially became part of Julianne Simpson's job. This is an indication that, at the time that bids for the funding were invited, it was not anticipated that the Web would be as important a means for the dissemination of information about special collections as it has become. HEFCE funding was directly responsible for the development of Durham's Web site, and the fact that Durham bid for an entire project that was just involved with mounting special collections on the Web shows that institutions are grasping the challenge of using the new medium to provide access. Consequently HEFCE funding has been a vital kick start to opening up these collections on the Web.

Changes planned for the site

Manchester

- More exhibitions, some mirroring real exhibitions and some purely virtual
- Co-operation with US - joint virtual exhibition on John Wesley, and investigating the idea of a joint virtual library with other Methodist Universities in the US[32].

- Creation of pages for each of the major collections for which the John Rylands is famous[33]

- The special collections catalogues which are currently being retrospectively converted will be incorporated into the main OPAC, and a link from the John Rylands University Library of Manchester pages will be provided[34].

- Methodist Collections catalogues to be scanned onto the site.

- International outreach - translation of the Methodist pages into other languages e.g. Korean to reach South Korea which has very strong Methodist traditions[35]

Oxford

- In the next twelve months, the Bodleian plans to rationalise their Web pages, and to add information about the Special Collections department[36].

- In addition, WMSS are experimenting with automated manuscript finding aids in SGML[37].

- "It is hoped to set up a John Johnson site giving access to 13000 Allegro records of JJ material, some of which have scanned images attached, and also electronic access to the slide collection. This would incorporate the list of Main Subject headings of the JJ collection"[38].

- The EPBP hopes to add a new page with guide to finding rare books on OLIS and possibly to put up a form on the site for users to enter feedback, give suggestions and point out mistakes in a structured way[39].

Durham

- Durham will be acquiring new software with a Web interface to provide an easier link from the Web pages to the on-line handlists in SGML, and completing the task of putting the handlists onto the site[40].

All the sites had an ongoing programme of change and expansion. A main area of change is the experimentation with on-line finding aids for manuscripts and archives in SGML for WMSS at the Bodleian and the Methodist collections in Manchester, an area in which Durham have already blazed a trail. A third area of change is the provision of images, steadily increasing at Manchester and Oxford, and not ruled out as a future possibility at Durham.

6.3 : On-line exhibitions

The John Rylands University Library of Manchester has already mounted a number of on-line exhibitions, and is planning more. The reasons for this include

- Publicity - to raise the profile of the Library and to increase visitor figures
- To preserve the work that has gone into the creation of physical exhibitions
- To encourage the use of the Web site - the more interesting things are on it, the more people will want to use it
- To give an insight into the collections - always show a wide range of materials
- To some extent it exists for the purposes of serious study and conservation. In the future, the virtual images might be used instead of the originals[41].
- The exhibitions have had management backing as an international outreach programme that can attract foreign students, and because of the emphasis on original research, which is in line with current scholarly thinking[42].

There has been a small response to the exhibitions, with occasional praise or enquiries about printing, and favourable feedback for the Methodist pages with a number of American churches putting up links to the exhibitions[43].

Oxford

- The Bodleian has no plans to mount on-line exhibitions of its special collections, as it does not see this as a priority[44].
- The EPBP would like to use scanned images of bindings as part of an exhibition on the WWW[45].

Durham

- Durham are not planning any on-line exhibitions[46].

Manchester was enthusiastic about its on-line exhibitions as a means of outreach and publicity and could provide substantial reasons to justify them, especially the Methodist site. Oxford and Durham are more cautious about their value, possibly because they are less interested in attracting the attention of the general public.

Images and copyright issues

Manchester

- A possible conflict was identified between providing Internet access to images and ensuring generation of income : "guarding the copyright to your images in order to promote your collections through profitable means is a way of exploiting your special collections.[47]"

- Lack of resources has limited the images on the Manchester site to more "a set of pretty pictures[48]" than a scholarly resource.

Oxford

- Copyright concerns affected the choice of images for the JJ site, and staff are actively looking at ways to tighten up on copyright[49].

- It was commented that "There are two different approaches to providing images for special collections sites. One is to provide only reference quality images (as in Toyota) and the other is to put up high resolution images (as in Celtic MSS). ... However, you have to expect some leakage if you put up images on the Internet.[50]"

Durham

- The feeling at Durham was that it was not worthwhile to put up a few images of the 'prettiest' things in the collection - if images were to be used at all, they should create a substantial scholarly resource.

Choices have to be made over images and copyright issues about whether to provide reference quality or high resolution images. The problems of protecting the copyright of special collections images on the Web are making staff hesitate before planning to mount images.

6.4 : Achievements in Access

Visitor figures

Manchester

- In April there were 286 visits to the John Rylands University Library of Manchester page[51].

- However, there were 1917 visits to the Methodist Archives home page[52]. This has grown from about 200 visits per month to the main page in February last year[53].

- The systems team have a program that counts the monthly hits for every site, and also records the computer that has accessed the site.[54].

Oxford

- For all the Bodleian pages together, visitor figures are reported of about 12000 per day[55].

- For the WMSS information, the figures are more like 5 visits per day[56].

- The visits are logged by a program that can trace the origin of the computer of the user[57].

- The Toyota site probably receives about 10 visits per day, but this varies enormously, being sometimes as low as 1 or as high as 30.[58]

- The EPBP has as yet no means of counting, or tracking use, of its Web pages, but this problem will be remedied with the new server[59].

Durham

- Unfortunately, Durham has no "effective way of tracking visits to the Web site.[60]", as visits to the site are logged by the University computer, which does not distinguish between Richard Higgins working on the site and a 'real' user.

Because of the variations between pages, it is not easy to compare figures. A comparison of the John Rylands and the Bodleian by putting a rough figure of 70 visits per week for the main John Rylands University Library of Manchester, Deansgate page and 50 visits per week for the WMSS page would show that these pages are receiving roughly similar amounts of use. However, the comparison looks very different if we take the figures as being c. 70 per week for the JJ pages and about 500 per week for the Methodist pages, making the Methodist pages particularly successful.

Queries generated by the site

Manchester

- According to staff, the site is generating queries (mainly by e-mail), especially from overseas researchers[61].

Oxford

- A relatively small number of people are sending e-mail queries to the Bodleian [62].

- The EPBP reports roughly one query a week, but "sometimes the quality of the enquiry is poor, showing that the enquirer hasn't actually read the Web site text"[63].

  Durham

- "People are beginning to pick up information from the site.[64]"

- It is difficult to tell whether they have got their information from the Web site or by more traditional means.

All the institutions reported that queries were being generated through the Web sites, mostly through e-mail, but that the numbers were small. Sometimes the quality of the enquiries was poor or not concerned with research (e.g. enquiries about printing.) However, overseas researchers are beginning to use the sites to decide whether to visit these libraries.

Changes in expectations/use of collections

Manchester

- Researchers are more aware of the collections at John Rylands, and what they offer[65].

- This upsurge of interest generated by the site is not yet reflected in actual visits to the Library. Gareth Lloyd wondered if it was necessary to change the definition of readership to include more than physical presence in the library.[66].

Oxford

- The Toyota site has not, as yet, created much more use, but "the creation of a JJ site would be expected to increase use"[67].

- The EPBP reports "a couple of cases where enquiries about the collection via the Web site have led to visits[68]." However it was felt that it was too soon to judge any effects upon users, as the records had not been loaded yet.

- Some staff in the main Bodleian are "nervous about encouraging a flood of visitors[69]" by publicising the collections. Likewise, "college librarians are hoping that they will not be inundated by queries caused by the access to the EPBP records.[70]"

Durham

- If the expectations of researchers have changed, it is in the nature of more general e-mail and postal queries wanting detailed replies than used to be the case[71].

- It was felt to be too soon to say whether the Web pages were changing use of the collections, and certainly there had been no dramatic changes as yet[72].

Sites are still at a relatively early stage of development, and users are taking time to adjust their expectations and working habits. Any impact that the sites have had has not been reflected in terms of actual visits. Staff are aware that increased access is not necessarily a good thing if it causes a drop in the standard of service. These concerns could limit the future development of special collections sites. There was also a feeling at all the institutions that the real achievements of special collections Web sites will only be seen in the long term. "We are sowing seeds for the future.[73]"

Special Collections Cataloguing on the Internet
Oxford

- Staff at the Bodleian felt that the availability of on-line cataloguing records through the Internet was the reason for the increased use of collections rather than any material put on to Web pages. Nevertheless, access to the Pre-1920 catalogue (one of the most relevant for special collections of printed books) over the Internet is still not possible, and is not likely to be for a few years[74].

- There are advantages to using the Internet for the cataloguing of ephemera, as in John Johnson. Index terms don't really identify ephemeral items properly, and using images on the WWW would solve this problem[75].

- The new GEAC system would allow the EPBP to link scanned images of bindings to catalogue records, especially valuable as vital features "such as manuscript inscriptions are difficult for even the most experienced rare book cataloguer to describe satisfactorily[76]."

Durham

- On-line handlists, with links to additional material, bibliographies and theses, can reflect 1000 years of archival organisation., and are particularly suitable for that medium[77].

- For printed books, OPAC records are the best way of making information available to local users over the network, as they will actually be needing to call up the material. to look at it[78].

- Remote users, on the other hand, need collection level or thematic guides to establish what kind of material Durham holds, so that they can decide whether it is worth making the trip. So Web pages, and the availability of OPACs are not a replacement for union catalogues[79].

Both Durham and Oxford were enthusiastic about the advantages of using the Internet for the cataloguing or listing of non-book media such as manuscripts, archives and ephemera. If handlists and on-line catalogues are so valuable to users, is it more worthwhile to concentrate funding into special collections cataloguing than into Web pages? The answer to this question depends on the policies and the collections of the institution. However, for remote users, both kinds of networked information resources available are no replacement for union catalogues.

6.5 The Internet Library of Early Journals

The Internet Library of Early Journals (ILEJ) is an eLib project conducted jointly by the Universities of Manchester, Oxford, Birmingham and Leeds[80]. It aims to provide electronic access to 20 year runs of three eighteenth century journals (*Gentleman's Magazine, The Annual Register and Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*) , and three nineteenth century journals (*Notes and Queries, The Builder and Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*). In the summer of 1997, twenty years of the full text of *Notes and Queries* should be made available at the main Web site at Oxford, where the user interface is being developed.[81]. The material is scanned at Manchester, then sent by ftp to Leeds, where the text is automatically generated from images by an Optical Character Recognition process.

Delays have been caused by the late delivery of the book scanner, and the difficulties caused by old typography, foxing, and warped or creased pages, but progress has now accelerated[82]. The delays to the progress of the ILEJ project shows some of the particular problems of working with special collections and new technology. However, the lessons learned here will be useful to future projects.

The user perspective

Although the work of the project has been spread around the four different institutions, the user will experience a seamless interface[83], and be able to see and search the full text of the journal. Because the recognised text is not completely accurate, the search engine uses "fuzzy searching" techniques to ensure good results[84]. The existing indexes of the journals will also be available, so that there will be multiple routes into the journals. The higher education community will be able to use the journals free of charge at the point of use. Users have already shown considerable interest, as information about the project has been disseminated at conferences[85]. They will continue to use the originals but: "The facility to search and call up the full text for specific words and phrases will undoubtedly transform the research potential of this type of material.[86]"

The user interest that has been created in this project could act as an impetus to repeat the experiment with other special collections sources. The collaboration of institutions with significant humanities research interests has also developed a system of virtual working practices between them which would be valuable for future projects. The electronic access the ILEJ provides opens up a new world for researchers who are able to manipulate the electronic text in ways not possible with the originals. It represents something really new for humanities scholars on the Web.

6.6 Summary of main findings

- All three institutions aim to provide information for local and remote users, but differ in providing information for the general public and mounting images on the Web.

- Sites are based on a range of primarily printed sources.

- Opinions were divided as to the value of related links pages.

- Opinions were divided as to the value of mounting small collections of images on the Web

- Sites are restricted in development by lack of staff time and resources, but also by the attitudes of staff, who have concerns about strains put upon the existing services.

- Special Collections staff are generally leaving page design and maintenance to systems staff.

- The provision of HEFCE funding has allowed special collections to set up their own pages, and has been vital to get projects going.

- The future holds exciting development in on-line finding aids in SGML and an increased number of images.

- Only Manchester was enthusiastic about on-line exhibitions, seeing them as attracting scholars and opening up the collections to the general public.

- Copyright concerns influence the planning of image provision.

- Pages such as the Manchester Methodist pages are experiencing significant figures of use.

- There has been a small increase in e-mail queries, sometimes of poor quality.

- Staff are enthusiastic about the opportunities the Internet offers for special collections cataloguing.

- The ILEJ project shows the potential of the Web for the collaboration of institutions, manipulation of electronic texts, and the transformation of the research potential of special collections materials.

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Chapter 7
Conclusions and recommendations

7.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the conclusions of this study, referring back to the relevant sections of the results, and makes recommendations as to practical steps that result from it. It is recognised that the resources available to special collections departments in academic institutions are limited, and likely to remain so. In this situation new tasks can only be taken on at the expense of other areas, meaning that institutions must take decisions about their strategic priorities. It is hoped that these notes will be relevant to such decisions. The only alternative would be to seek additional resources, similar to the HEFCE non-formula funding, or sponsorship funding such as that for the Toyota Project.

7.2 General conclusions

The Internet, and specifically the World Wide Web, is acting as a significant gateway for access to special collections sites, and its importance looks set to increase. Many sites are still in an early stage of development, and special collections staff are cautious about attributing changes in the use of special collections to them. However, staff are keen to develop on-line finding aids, substantial image resources, and searchable digital resources. The Internet is beginning to show that it can transform the research potential of special collections materials.

7.3 Specific conclusions and recommendations

Special Collections Web sites and their users

- The questionnaire and interviews have shown that the primary objectives of special collections Web sites are to publicise the collections, to provide information for external and internal academic users to enable research visits, and in the future, to provide access to digitised special collections materials. [4.2A]

- There is a split between sites providing basic information, which are purely promotional, and sites that are genuine information resources, valuable to researchers - but the gap between them is closing. [5.4]

There are choices to be made about the allocation of resources into, for instance, on-line special collections finding aids or into collections of digital images. The decisions made will depend upon the nature and the collections of the institution.

It is recommended that special collections departments should systematically examine their aims and design their sites to match, taking advantage of the potential of the Web for providing more than basic promotional sites.

Basis for sites

- The basis for the Web sites is usually a mixture of old and new materials, with a tendency to rely heavily or solely on existing printed guides. [4.2A]

- Staff lacked time and resources to produce new material, and were concerned that greater emphasis on the Web would mean a poorer service to readers. [6.4]

- Most sites provide basic information as to the nature and background of their collections. However, apart from access information and mission statements, the institutional information provided can be sparse. [5.4]

- Most sites provide some links to other collections, but some institutions were unsure about the value of related links pages, as the tendency of links to become outdated without warning was seen as a weakness. [5.4, 6.2]

Special collections Web sites should move away from this reliance on print to take advantage of the facilities of the Web. One key way to develop pages is to provide more related sites, providing an intellectual map of special collections resources on the Web. It would also be valuable for special collections staff to review the information content of their pages, taking into account that WWW pages are likely to be read by overseas users and non-academics, for whom information needs to be as clear and complete as possible. However, this would require resources in the form of staff time and expertise for the maintenance of links and construction of new material.

It is recommended that special collections departments should re-examine workflow patterns and allocation of resources, and make Web maintenance more central to daily working practices, in order to take account of the increasing importance of the Web.

Limitations of sites

- The interviews highlighted the limitations put upon special collections Web sites, which the other methods of enquiry were unable to reveal. [6]
- Sites are restricted in development by lack of staff time and resources, but also by the attitudes of staff, who can lack enthusiasm for the Web and who have concerns about strains put upon the existing services by developments in Web access. [6.4]

It is recommended that special collections departments re-examine their training requirements to provide staff with training in Web design and maintenance. This should increase staff enthusiasm, as would increased freedom to do more hands-on designing of their own sites.

Staff roles

• Special Collections Web pages are likely to be a collaborative effort, involving a possible combination of Special Collections staff, Library staff, and computing staff. [4.2A]

The Web has brought about a lessening of the traditional separation of special collections from the rest of the library - they are having to collaborate to make use of the IT skills of other staff.

It is recommended that there should be more research on what training special collections staff have, particularly with regard to the Internet.

HEFCE funding

• Many HEFCE funded sites are still in an early stage of development. [4.2A]

• The provision of HEFCE non-formula funding has allowed special collections to employ staff to set up their own pages. [4.2A]

• In particular it has provided an initial impetus to get pages going, which may have expanded greatly after the HEFCE project has finished. [4.2A]

• HEFCE funding has helped Durham develop innovative on-line handlists. [6.2]

• However HEFCE funding did not affect some institutions' move onto the Web as it was already happening for them. [4.2A, 6.2]

It is recommended that there should be more research on the results of these projects when they are completed.

On-line exhibitions

• On-line exhibitions are only being used by a small proportion of UK institutions. [4.2B]

• The small number of institutions involved in on-line exhibitions are aiming to provide an additional means of access to their collections and also to publicise them, particularly through a 'showcase of images' that represents a taster of their collections. [4.2B]

• Manchester University was enthusiastic about on-line exhibitions, seeing them as attracting scholars and opening up the collections to the general public.[6.3]

On-line exhibitions represent a lot of work for special collections staff, which is probably why they are available on relatively few sites. However, they are an innovative development which has scholarly value as a showcase of the types of material held in a collection. They also have real promotional value as a permanent window into special collections for the general public. As a striking and interesting feature they are likely to attract visitors to sites.

It is recommended that institutions explore the idea of on-line exhibitions, to showcase their collections to scholars and to boost visitor figures.

Images and copyright issues

- Opinions were divided as to the value of mounting small collections of images on the Web.
- Copyright concerns, and possible conflicts of commercial interest, dominate the planning of image provision, and are stopping sites putting up images.
- There are choices to be made about image quality - should it be reference or high resolution quality? [6.3]
- Most UK institutions have chosen to provide low resolution images. [5.4]
- There are no substantial scholarly resources of high resolution images, but large universities such as Oxford are leading the way.
- Images are being used in a promotional capacity.

Even a sprinkling of images creates an interesting feature on the site, and exploits the possibilities of the Web as a promotional medium. Careful image selection and low resolution images can evade the problems of copyright to some extent.

It is recommended that sites attempt to provide images on their sites to create interest and to promote the site, where copyright allows.

Visitor figures

- Many sites have no means of measuring their use. [4.2A]

- Few sites provide usage statistics or forms for user feedback. [5.2]

- The figures of use that are available show that special collections sites can achieve large figures of use. [4.2A, 6.2]

It is recommended that staff develop programs and set up on-screen counters to track the use of sites, possibly involving new training.

Queries generated by Websites

- Opinions are divided as to whether the Web sites are generating a significant number of queries yet, although some institutions report that this is happening. [4.2C]

- Sites provide e-mail addresses for queries and feedback. [5.4]

- There has been a small increase in e-mail queries, sometimes of poor quality.[4.2C, 6.4]

- The quality of these enquiries can, however, be poor - not necessarily enquiries of real value as far as special collections staff are concerned. [4.2C, 6.4]

It is recommended that in order to avoid random, ill researched queries, forms or structured query pages should be provided which check what enquirers have looked at and guide them through an enquiry process.

Researchers' reactions to Websites

- Development of special collections Web pages has had little or no effect so far on the expectations of researchers. [4.2C, 6.4]

It is likely that expectations will change as sites develop into more than electronic versions of the printed guides.

It is recommended that special collections departments conduct formal or informal evaluative surveys to discover the reactions and requirements of their users.

Changes in the use of the collections

- Development of special collections Web pages has brought about changes in the use of collections, particularly more e-mail enquiries from abroad or long distance. [4.2C]

- It has not brought about any significant changes in the numbers of users actually visiting the library. But this will always be affected by other factors such as the availability of research grants. [6.4]

It is recommended that special collections departments should consider adjusting their definition of readership to include 'virtual visits,' and use of the Web site for e-mail queries. Here the ability to count and track visitors to the Web site would become absolutely necessary.

Special Collections cataloguing and the Internet

- Most special collections sites provide access to finding aids. [5.4]

- HEFCE funded sites are developing high quality on-line finding aids with browsable indexes. [5.4]

- Staff are enthusiastic about the opportunities the Internet offers for special collections cataloguing. [6.4]

- There is still a need for union catalogues, or an Internet version of this type of resource. [6.4]

It is recommended that there should be further research into the development of special collections catalogues and finding aids on the Internet, as this study did not specifically consider this. This research might also consider the development of an Internet version of traditional union catalogues.

Evaluation and structural context of special collections WWW pages

- This is a difficult task as the Web sites are so individual and UK Web sites are not yet fully developed in some instances.

- Criteria such as Wallace's provides a useful tool upon which to build an evaluation, which should also consider standard Web evaluation criteria such as page design and currency as well as content.

- Web page criteria will need to be constantly adjusted as the nature of the pages themselves changes.

- Special collections sites rely on using the facilities, such as search and retrieval interfaces, provided on the main site in addition to their own.

- Some sites were handicapped by the design of their main university sites and the logic of their hypertext links.

- Some sites were flawed by poor design of the main sites which hindered the special collections searcher.

It is recommended that evaluation criteria for special collections Web sites should, while covering basic areas, be flexible and frequently updated to follow the dynamic pace of Web development.

It is also recommended that special collections staff should seek to work closely with those who design the University's main sites in order to raise the profile of their department and make their needs known.

These conclusions demonstrate that special collections Web pages of any real value cannot be developed as an additional extra to existing services. Sites that are dynamically different will have dramatic effects upon the traditional face of special collections. It is this challenge which faces special collections staff.

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Appendix A
The Questionnaire Survey

Access to special collections using the Internet

I would like to explore the strategies and achievements of your institution in access to special collections using the Internet. I would be grateful if you could help me by filling in this questionnaire, and returning it to me by

Friday 30 May, 1997.

Please tick as many boxes as are appropriate, and give fuller details where necessary.

Name of institution:

Contact for future reference:

Section A : Strategies for access

1. What are your objectives in providing a special collections web site?
To provide information for external users ☐
To provide information for internal users ☐
To provide information for the general public ☐
To give access to digitized special collections materials ☐
To publicise the collections ☐
Other (please give details) ☐

2. What was the original basis for the web site?
Printed guide to collections ☐
Scholarly publication ☐
Previously unpublished material ☐
New design and content ☐
Other (please give details) ☐

3 Who was responsible for the development of the web site (actual setting up of the pages)

Special collections staff ☐
Other library staff ☐
Computing staff ☐
Other (please give details) ☐

_____

_____

_____

4. Was HEFCE non-formula funding for specialised research collections used to develop the web site?

Yes ☐
No ☐

If so, roughly what percentage of the funding was used for web site development?

0 - 9% ☐
10 - 19% ☐
20 - 29% ☐
30 - 39% ☐
40 - 49% ☐
More than 50% ☐

Any comments:

_____

_____

_____

5. Do you plan to change your web site in the next 12 months?

Yes ☐
No ☐

If so, please give brief details:

_____

_____

_____

Section B : On-line exhibitions

6a. Do you currently have an on-line exhibition?
Yes   ☐
No   ☐
6b. Are you planning an on-line exhibition?
Yes   ☐
No   ☐

6c. If you have or are planning an on-line exhibition, what are your reasons for doing so?

_____

_____

_____

6d. On the basis of past on-line exhibitions, are you aware of any response from users?
Yes   ☐
No   ☐

If yes, please give brief details:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Section C : Achievements in access
7. How many visits are there to the web site per week?

_____

8. Do you have evidence that the web site has generated specific queries by:
Post   ☐
E-mail   ☐
Personal visits   ☐
Telephone ?   ☐
Other (please give details or comments)   ☐

_____

_____

_____

9. In your view, as a result of the web site have there been changes in:

a) the expectations of researchers:

Yes ☐

No ☐

Please comment:

_____

_____

_____

_____

b) use of the collections:

Yes ☐

No ☐

Please comment:

_____

_____

_____

_____

10. Are there any further comments you wish to make on this topic?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Thank you for your cooperation in completing this questionnaire - your help is appreciated. Please return it in the S.A.E. provided, or otherwise to: Christine Love, John Phillips Court, Garendon Rd, Loughborough, Leics., LE11 OQB.

Appendix B
Tables showing the questionnaire survey results

Section A: Strategies for Access

TABLE 4.1 : Responses to Question 1 :What are your objectives in providing a special collections web site?

Objective	Number of respondents	% of total respondents
Provide information for external users	26	92
Provide information for internal users	25	89
Provide information for general public	19	67
Provide access to digitised special collections	9	32
Publicise collections	27	96

(28 respondents answered this question)

TABLE 4.2 : Responses to Question 2: What was the original basis for the web site?

Response	Number	% of total respondents
Printed only	10	37
Unpublished only	2	7
New only	1	4
Printed + New	2	7
Printed + Unpublished + New	5	19
Printed + Unpublished	6	22
Unpublished + New	1	4

(27 respondents answered this question.)

TABLE 4.3 : Responses to Question 3: Who was responsible for the development of the web site?

Response	Number	% of total respondents
Special Collections only	5	18
Library Staff only	6	20
Computing staff only	1	4
Other	2	7
Special Collections + Computing	3	11
Special Collections + Library	5	18
Special Collections + Library + Computing	3	11
Special Collections + Other	2	7
Other + Computing	1	4

(28 respondents answered this question.)

TABLE 4.4a : Responses to Question 4: Was HEFCE non-formula funding used to develop the web site?

Yes	% of total respondents	No	% of total respondents
15	54%	13	46%

(28 respondents answered this question.)

TABLE 4.4b : If so, roughly what percentage of the funding was used for web site development?

Percentage	Respondents	% of total respondents
0-9	7	51
10-19	2	14
20-29	1	7
30-39	2	14
50+	2	14

(14 respondents answered this question.) No respondent indicated that 40-49% of the funding had been used for the web site.

TABLE 4.5a : Responses to Question 5: Do you plan to change your web site in the next 12 months?

Yes	Percentage	No	Percentage
27	96%	1	4%

(28 respondents answered this question.)

TABLE 4.5b :Types of changes planned

Type of change	Number of respondents	% of total respondents
Ongoing change / constant updating	6	22
Planning to extend / expand the site	11	39
Planning to expand collection level descriptions	4	14
Add more collections	3	11
Add (more) images	4	14

Section B : On-line exhibitions

TABLE 4.6a : Responses to Question 6a. : Do you have an on-line exhibition?

Yes	% of total respondents	No	% of total respondents
5	20	20	80

(25 respondents answered this question.)

TABLE 4.6b : Responses to Question 6b:Are you planning an on-line exhibition?

Yes	Percentage	No	Percentage
4	20%	16	80%

(20 respondents answered this question.)

TABLE 4.6d :Responses to Question 6d

On the basis of past on-line exhibitions, are you aware of any response from users?

Yes	Percentage	No	Percentage
3	75%	1	25%

(4 respondents answered this question.)

Section C: Achievements in Access

TABLE 4.7a : Responses to Question 7:How many visits to the web site per week?

Figures available	Not known	Insufficient data
10	13	1

(24 respondents answered this question.)

Table 4.7b : Range of figures provided for numbers of visits to special collections web sites

10	30	35	40	120	125	500	700

TABLE 4.8 : Responses to Question 8 :Do you have evidence that the web site has generated specific queries by post, e-mail, personal visits or telephone?

Query type	Number	% of respondents
Post	15	65
E-mail	19	83
Personal Visits	9	39
E-mail	10	43

(23 respondents answered this question.)

TABLE 4.9a : Responses to Question 9a.

In your view, as a result of the web site, have there been changes in the expectations of researchers?

Yes	Percentage	No	Percentage
7	39%	11	61%

(18 respondents answered this question.)

TABLE 4.9b : Responses to Question 9b : In your view, as a result of the web site, have there been changes in the use of the collections?

Yes	Percentage	No	Percentage
13	68%	6	32%

(19 respondents answered this question.)

Appendix C
List of World Wide Web sites reviewed in Chapter 5

Bath (National Cataloguing Unit for the Archives of Contemporary Scientists)

    <URL:http://www.bath.ac.uk/Centres/NCUACS/>

Cambridge (Rare Books and Special Collections)

    <URL:http://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/RareBooks/camrare1.htm#rare>

    <URL:http://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/MSS>

Dundee (Manuscripts and Archives)

    <URL:http://www.dundee.ac.uk/Archives>

Durham (Special Collections)

    <URL:http://www.dur.ac.uk/Library/asc/index.html>

East Anglia (Archives)

    <URL:http://www.lib.uea.ac.uk/libinfo/archives/archilib/archlib.htm>

Heriot-Watt (Archives)

    <URL:http://www.hw.ac.uk/archive>

Liverpool (Special Collections)

    <URL:http://www.liv.ac.uk/Library/special/libspec.html>

    <URL:http://www.liv.ac.uk/Library/special/glasier/glasier1.htm>

    <URL:http://www.liv.ac.uk/Library/special/gypsy/intro.htm>

London Guildhall University (Fawcett Library Special Collections)

    <URL:http://www.lgu.ac.uk/phil/special.htm>

Manchester (Special Collections)

<URL:http://rylibweb.man.ac.uk/data1/dg/text/text/jrulmdg.html>

<URL:http://rylibweb.man.ac.uk/data1//dg/text/method.html>

Napier (Edward Clark Collection)

<URL:http://www.napier.ac.uk/depts/library/clark/ecchome.html>

Newcastle (Special Collections)

<URL:http://www.ncl.ac.uk/library/guides/guide.html>

Oxford (Special Collections and Manuscripts)

<URL:http://www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/guides/wmss>

<URL:http://www.lib.ox.ac.uk/icc/>

<URL:http://www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/toyota>

<URL:http://image.ox.ac.uk>

<URL:http://www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/imacat.html>

School of Oriental and African Studies (Archives and Manuscripts)

<URL:http://www.soas.ac.uk/Library/Guides/Archives.html>

Swansea (Archives)

<URL:http://www.swansea.ac.uk/library/archive.htm>

University of London Library (Special Collections)

<URL:http://www.ull.ac.uk/ul/subjects/sc.html>

Warwick (Modern Record Centre- Archives)

<URL:http://www.csv.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/mrc/mrc.html>