Deconstructing Digital Libraries

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Introduction to SERS

- The Bodleian Library
- ~30 “Bodleian” libraries
- ~30 other libraries
- 46 college libraries
- And a few others!

- 750 Staff
- £25M budget
- 11 million items
- 156 shelf miles (250 km)
- SERS provides all electronic services
Why do (Research) Libraries Exist?

- What are the salient features of the content?
  - Data? Facts? Understanding? Information?
  - Ideas and the development of ideas
    - The artefacts of “intellectual discourse”

- Libraries are not just archives or museums
  - Assumptions about discovery, access, reach and accessibility
  - Low latency access essential

- History
  - Content generator as well as repository
  - Gap between librarians and academics
Changing nature of intellectual discourse

- Artefacts of discourse are changing...quickly
  - Books, letters, papers, websites, social media, linked-data
- Reduced turnaround times
  - Desire for currency of content shortens publication cycle
- Rise of interdisciplinary projects
  - Reduce silo-ization
  - Broad discovery and linking
  - What about “subject specialists”
- Rise of collaborative projects
  - Reach, interoperability and openness
  - Cash
Shift of emphasis in outputs

- Shift to born-digital content
  - and digital surrogates of existing material
- Publication not necessarily the primary outcome
  - Creation of (online) resources
    - Data/information unpackaged, linked, diverse format
  - Creation of communities
    - Dynamic and ephemeral content
  - Concept of “impact”
    - How is this measured?
- There is no “thing” that can be deposited
Impact of technology

- Internet technologies and standards encroach on many traditional library and academic areas
  - Often more pragmatic, better tested and better supported
  - Open Source and Open Standards
- RDF, Semantic Web and linked data
  - Access/reuse of content is a key value proposition
  - Flexibility and extensibility are very useful features
- Decreasing unit costs of processing and storage
  - Balance between capacity to create and capacity to preserve
- The internet achieves a high rate of change
  - With engagement by users
Implications for Libraries

...how to maintain our role as information custodians in this changing environment...
Proactive approach to content

- Involvement early in the content creation cycle
  - Proposal or bid stage – talk to academics
  - Ensure content creators are aware of the issues
    - Cost visibility
- Embed standards and preservation at the outset
  - Preservation and curation after the event is not cost effective
  - Endowment model for preservation
  - Metadata from the source rather than cataloguers (!)
- Dynamic resources need hosting rather than archiving
  - Store knowledge directly
  - Proximity of sources, Virtual Research Environment, publication
  - Versioning captures valuable process information
Catalogue 2.0

- Objects have a context from which much of their meaning is derived
  - Include context objects representing people, places, events etc.
  - Catalogues become contextual skeletons fleshed-out by “traditional” digital objects
  - Authority lists become prosopographical and biographical resources
  - Geopolitical and temporal information
  - Aggregations become a key structural element
  - Should reflect actual knowledge – conflict with cataloguing practice!

- Annotations and files can be attached to any object
  - Context objects hold content...what is the difference?

- Objects are not static – preservation challenge
Some projects...

- Cultures of Knowledge (www.history.ox.ac.uk/cofk)
  - 17C correspondence network
- IMPaCT – 13-16C Persian codices (uses CofK model)
- Fihrist (www.fihrist.org.uk)
  - Oxford/Cambridge Islamic Manuscripts Online
  - → JISC Islamic Manuscript Gateway
- Google Books
- digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk (old and new digital collections)
- vocab.ox.ac.uk – vocabularies and ontologies in use
- ora.bodleian.ox.ac.uk – institutional repository
- DMSTech and Open Annotation Collaboration
Questions

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