

Going Digital: The Case of the Wellcome Library

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Digital Preservation Coalition Briefing Day - Digital
Preservation Planning: Principles, Examples & the
Future with Planets
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The Wellcome Library

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



Archives & Manuscripts

- Collections dating from antiquity to the present day
- Western Manuscripts Collection dates from the time of Henry Wellcome
- Contemporary Medical Archives Centre (CMAC) founded in 1979
- Western Manuscripts & CMAC amalgamated in 2000 to become the Archives & Manuscripts department
- Collecting repository
- First (known) digital accession received in November 2004



The Wellcome Library Goes Digital

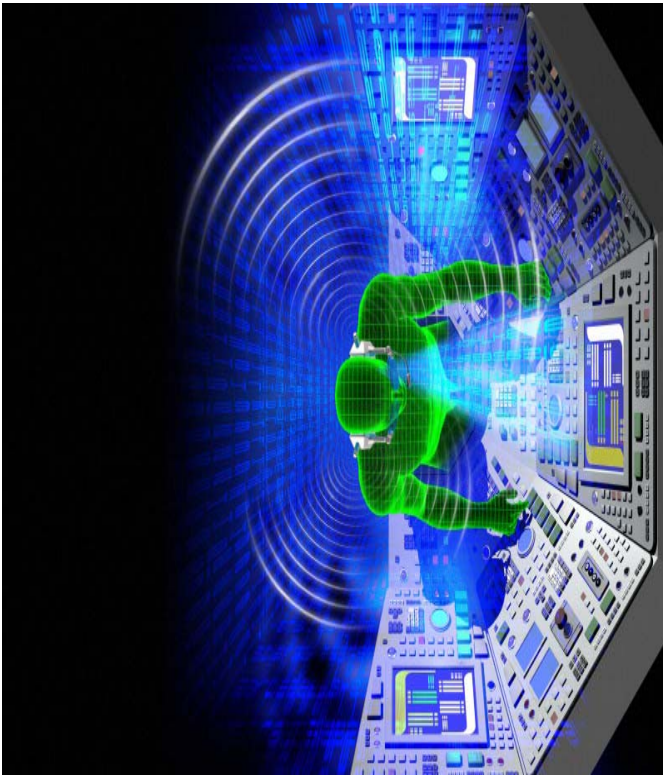
- Increasingly archival materials, especially ‘personal papers’, produced in digital form only, today's email & word processed documents are tomorrows research material
- If we don't engage with born digital material then Library collection growth is going to be limited, & the Library will cease to be outstanding as an historical, evidential & cultural resource of national & international importance in the field of the history of medicine (Museums, Libraries & Archives Council, 2005)
- Library Strategy 2006-2009 acknowledges the importance of digital material in the future of the Library

Archivists Rule the World!

- Using archival practice allows Library to use existing skills/staff to build a sustainable foundation for dealing with digital material
- Different requirements of digital material are challenging the ways we think about roles & responsibilities within the Library, strengthening the role of the archivists
- Support of archival staff is essential, going digital is changing work patterns, but archival practice is proving relevant to the management of digital material
- Archivists supported by one new FTE, a Digital Curator, whose role is to adapt archival practice & support archivists with technical issues

How are we going digital?

Digital Curation in Action Project:



- Adapting current archival & Library procedures, sound archival basis
- We're not working in isolation; project & ad hoc collaboration with other institutions a valuable way to build capability & gain experience
- Real material, real experience, real lessons
- Educating & supporting donors & depositors, e.g. FAQs
- Digital Curation pages on the Wellcome Library website

Digital Preservation System

What do we need?

- Standards based system, e.g. OAIS
- Safe & secure system that can be trusted by staff, donors & users
- Metadata creation & management
- Preservation functionality built into system, e.g. technology watch
- Integration with existing Library systems
- High levels of automation
- System able to meet the diverse needs of Archivists, IT staff & Library system administrators

Digital Preservation System 2

What were we offered?

- 5 responses, variety of proposed approaches
- No system offering everything we wanted
- Most were not preservation systems
- Poor understanding of archival practice
- Designed for the academic or library community
- Some misunderstanding of our needs



Digital Preservation System 3

Is it better to buy an imperfect system today or wait & see whether something better comes onto the market tomorrow???

- 4 proposed solutions rejected for not offering what we are seeking
- We have a preferred system, but still some negotiating to be done...
- Speed of obsolescence of digital material means we can't wait around for a tomorrow that may never come
- *However*, there will be a lot of work to be done before we can make digital material available to our users

The Future

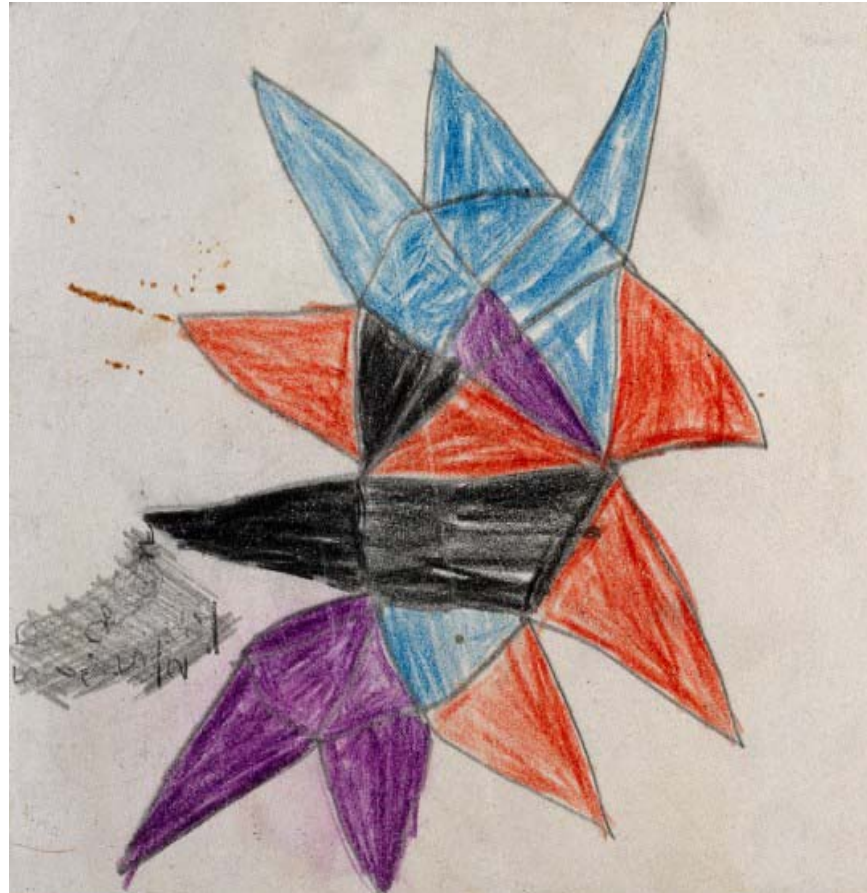


- Provide information, support & encouragement to our existing donor community in moving from physical to digital transfers
- Target key individuals working in medicine & the allied sciences
- Work with sister organisations to target those currently working in the field, & raise awareness of the possibility of depositing material in an archive (hopefully ours!)
- Begin to make digital material available to our users

Aim to eventually create a hybrid collection: paper, born digital & digitised material together in one collection

Known Issues

- Data Protection issues
- “Widow’s Deposit”
- Donor reluctance to hand over digital material
- Restricted access
- Need to communicate with donors earlier in the records life-cycle
- Cataloguing backlog



For More Information

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

Questions?

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