

Visit to British Library Thursday 2 Nov 2006

This visit has been organised by Ian Williams

The British Library is, as national libraries go, relatively young. Its roots lay in the report of the National Libraries Committee under the Chairmanship of the late Lord Dainton issued in 1969, followed in 1971 by a White Paper recommending the setting up of a national library for the UK ('the British Library'). In 1972 [The British Library Act](#) was passed by Parliament bringing the Library into operation with effect from 1 July 1973. Under the Act the following institutions were administratively combined to form the British Library: the library departments of the British Museum (which included the National Reference Library of Science and Invention), the National Central Library, and the National Lending Library for Science and Technology (the centre for interlibrary lending, located at Boston Spa in Yorkshire). In 1974 the British National Bibliography and the Office for Scientific and Technical Information joined the UK's new national library. Two additional institutions subsequently became part of the Library increasing the breadth of its collections: the India Office Library and Records (1982) and the British Institute of Recorded Sound (1983).

Shortage of storage space for the collections was not new. As early as the 1910s it was clear that the Museum's library was suffering from a lack of space as the ceaseless intake of books, periodicals and other materials continued without interruption. (By this time newspapers had been transferred from Bloomsbury to premises originally outside London, now the [British Library Newspapers](#) at Colindale. The Museum building and collections sustained a number of direct hits by German bombers in the early 1940s which caused some of the original bookstacks to be rebuilt after 1945. By now lack of space was a major problem, and solution to this - leasing storage space in the Royal Arsenal at Woolwich in the early 1960s - was a short-term expedient. In the 1960s the Museum considered extending its library premises in Bloomsbury, abandoned in 1967. However, in 1974, in response to local opposition to a building of that size being constructed in an historic area of central London, the Government abandoned the idea of housing the Library in Bloomsbury. The nearest vacant site to the environs of the Museum (where much of the Library's large collection of books and other material was kept) capable of housing so many items, staff and services was a derelict goods yard immediately to the west of St Pancras station.



Two tours have been provisionally booked, the first at 14.00 and the second starts at 14.30. The tour will meet the tour guide at the chained (!) bronze sofa in the foyer and will take about 1hr 30min. REMS can meet from 13:30 onwards in the "Second Floor" café. The library is on the north side of the Euston Road midway between Euston and Kings Cross St Pancras stations. Approaching from Kings Cross affords the chance to see the magnificently refurbished St Pancras Station building. The cost will be £5 pp and the numbers limited to 15 per group. Please indicate any preference for time. The 14.00 group will be filled first and then the 14.30 if there is sufficient demand.