IDCC2015 Welcome
Adam Farquhar, 2015-02-09

Good evening. My name is Adam Farquhar. I'm Head of Digital Scholarship here at the British Library and was also able to serve on the Programme Committee for IDCC this year. On the committee's behalf, I hope that you've had a stimulating day at the conference.

I am delighted that we were able to host you here for a drink and dinner in this lovely space. Perhaps in the context of IDCC, we may think of organisations like the British Library as digital, data-driven, open, and focused on the latest research. And indeed we are.

One of the things that I like about this space, though, is that, in the most visible way, it puts the core collections of the British Library at the centre. Behind me, you can see the collection of King George the Third's books – one of the great foundation collections of the British Library that was offered as a gift to the nation in 1823. For the first 145 years, it was consulted by readers at the British Museum reading rooms until 1998, when it came here to its new home.

The tower was designed Sir Colin St John Wilson. The bookcases holding King George the Third's collection are actually movable. Behind them are more shelves containing a similar key collection formed by Thomas Grenville.

The King's Library is, of course, a working library, and throughout the day volumes are retrieved for readers in the Rare Books and Music Reading Room.

Living Knowledge

The last time that I was here in this space was for the launch of the Library's new strategy "Living Knowledge" by our CEO Roly Keating.

Living Knowledge highlights the revolution that we are living through – in the creation, analysis and exploitation of data in all its forms - from scientific and social datasets to innovations already being derived from analysing digitized cultural content in the humanities.

We are only beginning to appreciate the distinctive and dynamic roles that libraries have to play in this revolution. We curate the rapidly growing collections of digitised historic items as well as born digital content. We create and analyse new datasets. We are becoming expert in setting standards, improving data, and enabling links in a complex digital landscape. We are becoming centres for working across disciplines and stimulating innovation.

Fittingly, we are increasingly digital and data-driven and we look to working with the community that forms around IDCC to address these new challenges and deepen our understanding.

Knowledge Quarter/Alan Turing Institute

Indeed, just a few weeks before the launch of Living Knowledge, I was at another event right here.

George Osborne, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, was here to formally launch the knowledge quarter. The Knowledge Quarter is a partnership of over 30 academic, cultural, research, scientific and media organisations based within a mile or so of where we are standing.

As Roly put it "The area around King's Cross, St Pancras and Euston stations is a gateway to the most valuable commodity of the 21st century – knowledge. Just as the great Victorian railway engineers built a revolutionary transport hub for people and goods in this part of London, so the Knowledge Quarter will establish an interchange for creative ideas, research and innovation: a centre for the knowledge economy in the 21st century."

When you see the amazing range of organisations involved – The BL, the Francis Crick Institute – to be one of the nation's largest biomedical research facilities just behind us, the British Museum, UCL, the Wellcome Trust, the Guardian, Google – all in this compact area – the possibilities are astounding.

The Chancellor had another task that day. He also announced that the headquarters of the £42 million Alan Turing Institute for Data Science would be headquartered right here at the British Library.

The institute is dedicated to that British computer pioneer and WW2 Enigma code-breaker Alan Turing. It will be based around a joint venture formed by leading UK universities – UCL, Oxford, Cambridge, Warwick, and Edinburgh. Its research will focus on new ways of collecting, organising and analysing large sets of data.

This is beautifully aligned with the enduring mission of this institution.

Data

As data become increasingly important in research, they are also increasingly important that it be integrated – seamlessly into the scholarly record. This is why we've been so engaged with activities such as DataCite, ORCID, and ISNI – and why we are working towards an infrastructure layer for identifiers that helps to make every researcher digital, increase creativity and efficiency of research.

I was able to participate at CrossRef's annual conference, and hear Laurie Goodman of GigaScience give a lovely keynote. GigaScience is an online open-access open-data journal that publishes 'big-data' studies in the life sciences. They work with the BL's DataCite service to assign persistent identifiers to datasets. She provided compelling evidence that support

for data citation encourages researchers to share data earlier. And sharing data can speed research, shorten the time to identify pathogens, and save lives.

Labs

I want to mention some of the work done by my digital research team and the British Library Labs. We are actively engaged with researchers across the UK and beyond to unlock the potential of digital content in research, innovation, and creativity.

For example, last year at IDCC I spoke briefly about our then very recent release of over one million public domain images extracted from our 18th and 19th century digitised books. Since that release in December 2013, this has seen over 220 million image views – every image in that huge collection has been viewed, some thousands of times. But not only viewed, they have been taken up in research projects, they've inspired large-scale artwork, and triggered commercial activity. They've become a powerful example of what open content can contribute.

Working with the Wikimedia community and that collection, we have identified over 50,000 maps. These are now running through our crowd-sourced geo-referencing programme. This can give a new lens on the collections.

On Thursday this week, we will be running a "Big Data Investigation" workshop with IDCC. This will be giving people experience working with varied digital content at scale refining, visualising, and analysing terabytes of data.

And if people are hungry for more, they can stay on to Friday and participate in the THATCamp – a one day un-conference bringing humanists and technologists together to explore and learn from each other.

Finally, I would like to mention two opportunities that I hope you will find interesting.

As part of our Labs, we run an annual competition for great ideas that make use of our digital content. We bring the winners in, provide them with the best access to data and technical support that we can, and work with them in residence. Entries need to be in by Aril 24th

This year, we are introducing a new BL Labs Awards – a kind of Oscars for outstanding work that makes use of our digital content. We are looking for entries in three categories – Research, Creativity, and Entrepreneurship. Submissions need to be in this September.

Check for information about the Competition and Award at http://labs.bl.uk

Through these, we hope to learn with you and also highlight to the world the impact of the digitally driven research that you do.