



**Jessica**  
aged 25

**Colin**  
aged 26

**Gaysha**  
aged 25

**Sherborne  
Missal**  
aged 600

# Connecting new generations to inspiration

We want people using our services to have a fulfilling, rewarding experience. We strive to mount exhibitions and run workshops and events of a high calibre that inspire and connect with audiences.

Our public spaces and exhibition galleries are a major part of the Library's attraction. However rich our web resources, people still get a special thrill from seeing the real thing, whether it's Jane Austen's manuscripts or John Lennon's lyrics. Visitors from across Britain and throughout the world come to see the actual *Magna Carta*, revered as democracy's founding document. This year it's the centrepiece of a major gallery refit, and the new display improves its presentation

and interpretation, while maintaining the visitors' focus on *Magna Carta* itself. Multimedia technology is used to give context and enhance people's engagement with the real-life iconic document.

In response to the feedback we get from visitors, we're creating a better experience in the Sir John Ritblat Gallery, *Treasures of the British Library*. For example, we've provided more seating at the listening points, put Turning the

Pages consoles alongside featured works, and improved the labelling and lighting throughout the gallery.

Giving people the opportunity to get close to our greatest treasures is core to our mission – but so is our responsibility to preserve them for future generations. We've begun a programme to bring some less familiar masterpieces to public attention; meanwhile, following international best practice, we're taking certain treasures off display

on a six month rotation to rest them from exposure to light and to minimise the strain on their bindings. Rarely will more than one major work be off display at any time and full information will always be given on our website.

# Connecting with new audiences

75 per cent of Britons know about their national library. That's increased from under 50 per cent of the population five years ago, according to a MORI poll\*. We're building our reputation in the public imagination. Our St Pancras visitor numbers have risen by 3.6 per cent according to the Association of Leading Visitor attractions, during a time when most London attractions have seen visitor numbers fall after the bombings of July 2005.

"The growing popularity of the Reading Rooms has seen an increase in demand for our services. But the teams who run them have responded to the pressure, particularly over the peak periods, and our book delivery times remain four per cent above target. My colleagues are dedicated and go out of their way to help people get their research done."

Sita Gunasingham  
Reading Room Support Manager



## Fairytales romance

Our major summer programme 2005 celebrated Hans Christian Andersen's bicentenary, and brought the *Ugly Duckling*, the *Snow Queen* and the *Emperor's New Clothes* to life in performances, displays, storytelling, origami and a scholarly conference. A giant white swan hovered over the exhibition gallery, and visitors young and old told us they loved the 'magically inventive and playful world' we created.

To extend the reach of the exhibition, we worked with the London Libraries Development Agency to deliver a family reading promotion, *Magical Tales*, to local libraries in London and Yorkshire. 14 library authorities took part, running 53 events over the summer. We also collaborated with Visit Denmark on a 'flying suitcase' promotion, delivering 500 suitcases full of Andersen information to 98 UK regional libraries.



Theatre-rites performed Andersen's tales»  
Audiences expressed their delight

## Readers' lives

In summer 2005 we commissioned MORI to survey people using our Reading Rooms. 75 per cent said they wouldn't think of using any other resource and 95 per cent said they achieved what they wanted to during their visit. One in twelve of the users surveyed said they came to the Library every single day – a response echoed by the art historian Frances Spalding, who recently wrote, 'the British Library is one of my great loves – even something of a second home'. Her enthusiasm is shared by writer Amy Rosenthal, who said in the *Daily Telegraph*, 'this beguiling building provides a warm and gracious sanctuary... a convivial haven, with an ambience both scholarly and sociable'.

We're keen to ensure that everyone who wants to do research feels welcome to use their national library. Whether people are researching for academic, personal, public service or commercial purposes, we've encouraged all who can to benefit from the Library, which has led to a 17 per cent increase in Reader visits over the past year.

In parallel, we've improved services. Registering for a Reader Pass is an easier process. There are extra spaces for Readers to use during busy times. Readers can now order books from our online catalogue before they visit, so that when they arrive, their books are waiting for them in their Reading Room. A new Welcome Team has been formed, comprising staff with wide and varied experience, able to guide people from registration right through to how to make best use of our resources to tackle complex research topics. The ways we communicate with our visitors – signs in the buildings, leaflets, information display screens and our website – have been clarified and standardised to make the Library easier to use by more diverse audiences.

All the above are facets of the top strategic priority that we announced last year – to enrich the user's experience. Notwithstanding the pressure on services of a greater number of Reader visits, the percentage of Readers rating their experience as either 'excellent' or 'good' rose from 92 to 96 per cent this year.

\* MORI survey in summer 2005 of 610 Library users and 1,300 members of the public.

4,000 people participated in London's Family History Day

### Opening the doors to family historians

The British Library hosted London's Family History Day in March 2006. The day proved overwhelmingly popular – 4,000 people poured in, many of whom had not visited the Library before. BBC London broadcast from the Library throughout the day, giving an even wider audience an insight into tracing family roots. Family History Day marked the new series of the BBC's popular *Who do you think you are?* and one of our guest speakers was Nick Barratt, leading genealogist and consultant for the programme. The free activities included a family history fair featuring some 30 exhibitors, a programme of talks by British Library and external specialists, 'meet the expert' sessions, workshops for young people and performance poetry.



### Lifelong learning

An inspirational pair of British Library Readers recently completed their postgraduate studies at an unusually advanced age. Murray Glynn and Dr Ron Lipman have been using the Reading Room at Boston Spa regularly for the past five years. Murray has successfully completed his MA on the social effects of early broadcasting and Ron has just been awarded his PhD by the University of Manchester. His thesis was *The Limits of Jewish Identity: Jewish attitudes to the black Jews of Ethiopia in 19th and 20th century Europe and in contemporary Israel*.



Murray Glynn (left) and Dr Ron Lipman»  
Dedicated researchers in our Reading Rooms

### First appearance of the Ashes

*The Sporting Times* originally coined the term 'the Ashes' in its obituary of English cricket in September 1882. The Chief Executive was at the Brit Oval Cricket Ground to present facsimiles of the original to the MCC, ECB and SCCC at the start of the 2005 final test. The Ashes contest and England's win sparked national interest in the myths surrounding the series. The Library's newspaper collection is a treasury of facts and legends behind Britain's sporting heroes and their achievements. In the run-up to the 2012 Olympics, we're looking at ways to bring this national resource to greater public attention.



Cricketing low»  
*The Sporting Times* 2 September 1882

### Sounds of Africa

The African soundscape echoed around the Library during *Africa 05*, the UK-wide celebration of African culture. One hundred recordings from our Sound Archive – including one that eavesdropped on a cheetah asleep in a tree – juxtaposed the traditional and the modern, the rural and the urban, and challenged common perceptions of Africa. Music, wildlife and literature could be heard on different floors at special sound stations. The Archive's century of sound recordings of Africans and Africa comprises a historic and cultural resource of enormous potential.



African continuity»  
A Gambian kora player on board a buggy