

ENABLING RESEARCH...

...The St Pancras Reading Rooms enjoyed another busy year, with over five million items consulted in the course of 407,000 reader visits. The satisfaction rate among readers - measured as those who said the service was 'excellent' or 'good' - stood at 92 per cent. We aim to deliver all material held in our basement stores to readers within 70 minutes of an order being entered on our automated request system. Our target is 90 per cent, but this year we achieved a 92 per cent success rate.

Staff were delighted by A N Wilson's acknowledgement in his new book, *The Victorians*: 'The friendliness of the staff in this stupendously well-run library is a very bright light in life. Though we, the readers, enjoy all the seemingly magic computerised catalogues and comfortable reading rooms, the books do still have to be lifted and heaved and wheeled.'

We've recently brought more 'magic computerised' resources into the Reading Rooms - the number of electronic titles available has increased over the past year by 25 per cent. Creating catalogue records for DVDs, online databases and e-journals so researchers can find the material they need is a challenge for our new digital cataloguing team. Cynthia McKinley, who's leading the team, says, 'we're working with cataloguing standards that are very new, and still evolving. We're applying them at a practical level, then feeding back to the Task Force we've established with the American Library Association to refine the international cataloguing rules. Standards for cataloguing and interpreting digital content have got to be consistent so records can be shared between libraries or searched across different databases.'

'The British Library, by being part of a tradition of providing open access to sources of information and knowledge, has given Edna Kyrie, and through her, many others, the chance to change their world.'

Elisabeth Klaar,
thyroidhistory.net user

Use of these resources in the Reading Rooms is growing rapidly - the number of online articles accessed more than doubled last year and we increased the number of terminals by 20 per cent. The majority of these are networked, making online resources accessible across all Reading Rooms, regardless of subject, and so enabling inter-disciplinary research.

We continue to improve access for researchers with disabilities, providing keyboards with large type and large screen monitors, and there are magnifiers and a 'text to speech' reader. We're working with the RNIB to ensure that visually-impaired users can get the most out of our website. We're also making our web-content accessible from the keyboard, for the benefit of people with disabilities that prevent them using a mouse. The Readers' Adviser, Mark Walton, makes contact with new

Readers who indicate that they have a disability. He says, 'I help with the practical things: the easiest routes to the Reading Rooms and reserving special desks, for example. We've produced large print versions of our guides for Readers, as well as an audio guide to using the collections. The heavy oak doors of the Reading Rooms now open automatically, and other improvements include adjustable chairs and induction loops.'

Edna Kyrie is a Reader who uses a wheelchair and has found the Library's staff especially helpful. 'Getting things off the shelves is tricky for me, and so's photocopying, but staff always come to my rescue.' Edna compiles the website thyroidhistory.net, a guide to all the research published on the diagnosis and treatment of thyroid-related illness. She uses the Science Reading Rooms and says, 'the sheer range of material available is breathtaking. Occasionally I've had difficulty tracking down older American articles, but I've had marvellous letters written on my behalf by Library staff and a while later, photocopies have magically appeared.' Staff have also advised Edna on copyright law so she can be confident that what she provides on her site complies with legislation.

Lyn Mynott, who chairs Thyroid UK, the support group for patients and their families, says, 'thyroidhistory.net is not only a great help to patients, but also to doctors and medical students. The site is excellent for medical professionals looking for specific research articles.' Edna Kyrie has received moving testimonials from people who have 'got their lives back' after seeking treatment on the basis of research found on the site. Elisabeth Klaar, for example, was suffering from an undiagnosed illness and was no longer able to walk. 'I discovered the site and was persuaded by the research to try treatment for hypothyroidism. I approached the diagnosis with caution, but what followed is a series of miracles - symptoms vanishing one-by-one, and strength and energy returning. I no longer use a wheelchair. This would never have been possible without thyroidhistory.net.'



From late Victorian surgical manuals to the latest research articles, thyroidhistory.net lists all publications on thyroid conditions. Using the site helped Elisabeth Klaar identify her illness and seek treatment, with the result that she's now able to walk again.

