A History of the British Library
Slavonic and East European Collections:
1952–2004

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Preface

The purpose of this article is to provide an introduction to the British Library Slavonic and East European Department oral history interviews project. The project was carried out over two years, and nineteen former Slavonic and East European department staff took part in it in 2011 and 2012. The material from the oral history project and description in more detail can be accessed via the British Library Sound and Moving Image Catalogue (http://cadensa.bl.uk/cgi-bin/webcat) as the entry ‘the British Library Slavonic and East European Oral History Interviews’.

This article is limited only to information that has not been discussed in interviews or published in previous research on the British Library collections. It draws on two main sources of information. The unpublished primary sources which were consulted are held in the British Library Archives in the DH 2 series and the published sources were derived from P. R. Harris, A History of the British Museum Library, 1753-1973 (London, 1998). The British Library staff office notices were also consulted for the period 1973 to 2000, but this period is examined to a lesser extent. This is partly due to the information already provided in the interviews and partly to the time limits imposed upon the research for this article. Much more attention is needed for the post-1973 period, and without a full grasp and understanding of the archive sources it would be not possible properly to assess the available information held in the British Library.


Archives. The author wishes to express his gratitude to Lynn Young, the British Library Archivist, for allowing him to use the archival material, and to colleagues in the Library, Jeffrey Barrow and Michael Woods, for facilitating access to the archives. Without their generous help and invaluable advice and guidance this research would not have been possible. Sincere thanks are due to Michael McLaren-Turner for his valuable contribution in describing the process of manual cataloguing in the library in the 1960s. Robert Henderson very kindly gave me permission to use and quote from his private records.

The author hopes that this article will provide the necessary framework for in-depth research into the departmental history. The next envisaged stage of the project is the production of verbatim transcripts of the interviews followed by a critical edition of the Slavonic and East European Department oral history interviews. A collaborative study on the subject would be a welcome study on the subject would be a welcome final product of this project.

Introduction

The British Museum Department of Printed Books began systematic foreign acquisitions in 1837. The Assistant Keepers and Assistants in the Department of Printed Books selected and catalogued Slavonic and East European books among other foreign books and periodicals acquired for the British Museum Library. Thanks to Harris’s meticulous research and a masterly synthesis of a large amount of archival material previously mentioned, the most important developments in the history of Slavonic and East European collections in the second part of the nineteenth century and in the first half of the twentieth can be derived from this source. Harris’s history records all of the Department of Printed Books staff and book suppliers who dealt with Slavonic and East European material in this period. For the purpose of this article, I will only mention the most relevant staff of the Department of Printed Books in this period, widely known for their work as librarians and Slavonic and East European specialists and authors.

Thomas Watts (1811–1869), Assistant, Assistant Keeper and Keeper in the Department of Printed Books 1838-69, was closely associated with the early development of many foreign collections including Slavonic and East European collections. William Ralston (1828–1889), Assistant in the Department of Printed Books 1853-75, was the first in-house library specialist to develop Slavonic expertise to the full, and the first to travel to Russia in 1868. John Theophilus Naaké, Transcriber and Assistant in the Department of Printed Books 1860-99, was another Slavonic specialist and the first native speaker in the department, born in Warsaw. Robert Nisbet Bain (1854–1909), a prolific translator from Slavonic, Scandinavian, and Finno-Ugrian languages and historian, was Assistant in the Department of Printed Books 1883-1909. Leonard Cyril Wharton (1877-1943) was Assistant and Assistant Keeper in the Department of Printed Books 1902-43. These five Slavonic experts shared between them all the Slavonic and East European languages, and actively took part in and contributed to early Slavonic scholarship in Britain. By the time Wharton became Assistant Keeper in 1921, Slavonic was a growing area in the Department of Printed Books. In 1927 the

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3 The Department of Printed Books was the largest department in the British Museum (founded in 1753) which operated in the British Museum from 1756 to 1973. It was one of the library departments of the British Museum which helped in the creation of the British Library in 1973 and continued to function until 1985.
4 Harris, op. cit.
5 Various national and international biographical sources provide more detailed biographical information about the Slavonic specialists mentioned. See the online and printed resources, such as Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Who’s Who and Who was Who, the World Biographical Information System, etc. To see bibliographical information for these authors, search the British Library online catalogue at http://explore.bl.uk/ for commercial online newspaper and periodical indexes, freely available on the British Library site.
6 DH 2/9, p. 96. Ralston’s letter to Watts from Moscow dated 5 June 1868. On another occasion Ralston was allowed extra leave of absence for two weeks with pay to visit Russia in 1870. See DH 2/11, p. 209, dated 14 May 1870.
7 Ralston lectured at the Royal Institution, at Oxford University, and throughout Britain. Wharton taught at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies (SSEES) at King’s College, University of London.
Slavonic area had a budget of £270, which was 5.5% of the Department of Printed Books total foreign acquisition budget. In the financial year 1929/30 Wharton was a selector for Slavonic material and Joseph Horne (1900-71), another Assistant Keeper, was a selector for Hungarian material. Their combined budget was £360 or 7.2% of the Department of Printed Books acquisition budget.

Before the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, the Slavonic and East European area had four staff to manage the increased intake of Slavonic material in the inter-war period. Wharton was Assistant Keeper in charge, the other Assistant Keeper was Horne, and two Assistant Cataloguers, Annie Emslie Dean and David Barrett, were also working in the Slavonic area. At the time of the Second World War, while Horne and Barrett were away in the service of the War Office, Prince Dimitri Obolensky was appointed as temporary Assistant Keeper to attend to Slavonic matters in the Department of Printed Books 1944-45. When the war ended, Horne continued to serve as a Slavonic specialist in the Department of Printed Books. He started as Wharton’s assistant and continued as his successor in charge of the Slavonic area.

This article focuses on the period when what was known as the Slavonic area became the Slavonic Department in 1952, continuing as a separate entity within the library until 2004. In 2005 the Slavonic and East European Collections merged with the West European Collections to form the European Collections department in the British Library.

Organizational and grading structure

Over the period of fifty-two years the Slavonic and East European department underwent at least six departmental changes and four major, library-wide, reorganizations. While in the British Museum Library, the Slavonic and East European department experienced four relatively minor changes which took place within the Department of Printed Books. During this period 1952-1973, the Head of the Slavonic department, which was a separate functional entity, reported directly to the Principal Keeper of the Department of Printed Books. The exception to this line of reporting was in the period 1957-1960, when the Slavonic department

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8 The value of £360 in 1929 was about £17,100 in 2010 according to the retail price index. See http://www.measuringworth.com/index.php
9 Harris quotes Wharton as Head of the Slavonic Section since 1926. See Harris, p. 559.
10 Annie Emslie Dean (nee Gibson) was Assistant Cataloguer in the Department of Printed Books 1934-1943. David Barrett was Assistant Cataloguer 1936-1946. See Harris, p. 546.
12 Harris, p. 559.
13 Wharton died in 1943, Dean resigned in 1943 and Barrett left in 1946.
14 The changes were as follows:
I. The Slavonic Department 1952-1955;
II. The Slavonic Division 1955-1957;
III. The Slavonic Sub-Division 1957-1960 (from 1959 the Slavonic and East European Sub-Division)
IV. The Slavonic and East European Division 1960-1973 (in 1968 part of the Processing Divisions and from 1970 part of the Special Materials Divisions);
V. The Slavonic and East European (initially Section) Branch 1973-1985 (in the Department of Printed Books of the British Library Reference Division);
VI. The Slavonic and East European Collections 1985-2005 (in Collection Development of the Humanities and Social Sciences until 1990; then in the European Language Collections of the Humanities and Social Sciences until 1996; then in the Modern Collections 1996-2001 of the Reader Services and Collection Development until 2001; and finally in the European and American Collections 2001-2010 of the Scholarship and Collections until 2005 when the department merged with the West European Collections into the European Collections department.
was a sub-division of the Cataloguing and Book Selection Division (from 1959 the Cataloguing Division). The Slavonic and East European department was therefore officially founded in 1952 as the Slavonic Department, which bore this title in 1952-1955. The Slavonic Department was then part of the General Library which consisted of ten departments: the Acquisition Department, the Production and Maintenance of the Catalogues, the Reading Room, the State Paper Room, the Departments of Maps and Music, the Slavonic Department, the Newspaper Library, the Stamp Collections and the Bindery. Then in 1955 the Slavonic Department was renamed as the Slavonic Division, which bore this title in 1955-1957. In this year the General Library had twelve departments in the following order: the Acquisitions Division, the Production and Maintenance of the Catalogues, the Reading Room, the State Paper Room, the Map Room, the Music Room, the Slavonic Division, the Newspaper Library, the Stamp Collection, Photography, Visitors, and Exhibitions. With the reorganization of 1957 the Slavonic department became the Slavonic Sub-Division (and from 1959 changed its title to become the Slavonic and East European Sub-Division), a constituent part of the Cataloguing and Book Selection Division. The main reasons for the 1957 reorganization, according to C. B. Oldman, the Principal Keeper, who was hoping that it would be successful, were these: (i) to ensure the full development of the collections; (ii) by decentralisation, to allow a fuller degree of responsibility to Assistant Keepers, thus making sure that all sides of the work are fully covered; (iii) to encourage the further development of the specialised knowledge already possessed by Assistant Keepers. In the new arrangement of 1957, the General Library had ten departments: the Acquisitions Division, the Cataloguing and Book Selection Division, the Reading Rooms, the State Paper Room, the Map Room, the Music Room, the Newspaper Library, the Stamp Collections, Photography and Exhibitions. In 1959 the Slavonic and East European Sub-Division was part of the new Cataloguing Division which replaced the Cataloguing and Book Selection Division. From 1960 to 1973 the Slavonic and East European department was once again one of the divisions of the General Library, known as the Slavonic and East European Division.

The completion of the photolithographic edition of the General Catalogue known as GK III and the formal incorporation of the Patent Office Library (founded in 1855), which then officially

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16 The General Library as used here does not refer to the other two departments in the British Museum Library (the Department of Manuscripts, and the Department of Oriental Printed Books and Manuscripts).

17 The General Library catalogues were the General Catalogue (GK I), the Revised Edition of the General Catalogue (GK II), the Catalogues of Maps and Music, the Incunabula Catalogue, the Short-title Catalogues, the Subject Index and the Special Catalogues. For more information about the British Museum Library and the British Library printed catalogues, see the: [http://www.bl.uk/reshelp/findhelprestype/catblhold/printedcatalogues/printedcats.html](http://www.bl.uk/reshelp/findhelprestype/catblhold/printedcatalogues/printedcats.html).

18 In 1954 the eleventh department was Photography. The Departments of Maps and Music were renamed as the Map Room and the Music Room.

19 Arthur Hugh Chaplin (1905–96) was Deputy Keeper in charge of the Cataloguing and Book Selection Division 1953–1959.


22 The Acquisitions Division consisted of the Copyright Receipt, Purchases, Gifts and Exchanges, and Replacements. In 1958 the Acquisitions Division consisted of Copyright Receipt and Purchases and Donations.

23 The Cataloguing and Book Selection Division consisted of the following sub-divisions: the Book Selection and the Cataloguing of Accessions, the Catalogues, and the Slavonic Sub-Division.

24 The General Library was arranged into twelve departments: the Acquisitions Division, the Cataloguing Division, Services to the Public (which were the Reading Room, North Library, Book Supply, Photography, Information Services), the State Paper Room, the Map Room, the Music Room, the Slavonic and East European Division, the Newspaper Library, the Philatelic Collections, Exhibitions, the Placing Division, and the Binding Division.

25 On 1 April 1966.
became the National Reference Library of Science and Invention, in 1966 were far-reaching cornerstone events for the Department of Printed Books and for the library as a whole. After the incorporation of the National Reference Library of Science and Invention, the General Library consisted of three divisional groups: the Processing Divisions, the Public Service Divisions, and the Divisions for Special Materials. In 1968 the Slavonic and East European Division was part of the Processing Divisions. In the last three years before the creation of the British Library, the Department of Printed Books was made up of three distinctive groups. In this period (1970-1973), the Slavonic and East European Division was part of the Special Materials Divisions, also referred to as the Specialized Divisions. Apart from the National Reference Library of Science and Invention and the Specialized Divisions, the third group of the Department of Printed Books was the Functional Divisions which comprised the Acquisitions Division, the Cataloguing Division, the Book Accommodation, Conservation and Binding Division, and the Public Services Division. On the formation of the British Library in 1973 the Department of Printed Books was transferred to the British Library Reference Division, which operated during the years 1973-1985. In the final twelve years of the Department of Printed Books, the Head of the Slavonic and East European (initially Section) Branch reported to the Director and Keeper of the Department of Printed Books. With the first major reorganization within the British Library in 1985, the Humanities and Social Sciences Division, which operated from 1985 to 1996, replaced the British Library Reference Division. This reorganization created two distinctive subject areas in the British Library: the humanities and social sciences area on the one hand and the science, technology and industry subject area on the other. In this period the Head of the Slavonic and East European Collections reported to the Director of the Collections Development, which operated from 1985 to 1990. The 1990 reorganization brought the first amalgamation of the West European and the

20 This change brought to the Department of Printed Books a collection of 400,000 volumes organized as an open access reference library (this was the Holborn Division which had 102 staff). In October 1966 an additional 100 staff joined with the library stock of 60,000 volumes at Bloomsbury under the guidance of Maysie Webb, Keeper of the National Reference Library of Science and Invention 1966-1968, which were then transferred to the new quarters at Bayswater. DH 2/132, 6, DPB Report to the Committee on Printed Books 1966-67, p. 3.
21 Four divisions formed the Processing Divisions: the Acquisitions Division, the Slavonic and East European Division, the Cataloguing Division, and the Placing Division.
22 The Special Materials Divisions, the Functional Divisions, and the National Reference Library of Science and Invention.
23 The Special Materials Divisions were the Antiquarian Division, the State Paper Room, the Slavonic and East European Division, the Oriental Exchange Unit, the Language and Area Sections, the Map Room, the Music Room and the Newspaper Library.
24 As an integral part of the Department of Printed Books, the National Reference Library of Science and Invention was divided into two physically separate divisions which were administered separately as the Holborn and Bayswater divisions.
25 Between 1973 and 1985 the Slavonic and East European department was one of the units within the Department of Printed Books. In 1973 the Department of Printed Books comprised the Acquisition Branch, the Cataloguing Branch, the Antiquarian Branch, the Slavonic and East European Branch, the Newspaper Library, the State Paper Room, the Map Room, the Music Room, and the Philatelic Collection, and in 1974 the Library Association Library was transferred to the Department of Printed Books.
26 The British Library Reference Division (1973-1985) consisted of the departments which were inherited from the British Museum Library in 1973: the Department of Printed Books, the Department of Manuscripts, the Department of Oriental Manuscripts and Printed Books, and the Science Reference Library (formerly the National Reference Library of Science and Invention (NRLSI)).
27 The official name was Slavonic and East European Branch in 1973-1985.
28 The last Keeper and Director of the Department of Printed Books was R. J. Fulford 1967-1985.
29 In 1985 the Slavonic and East European Branch was renamed the Slavonic and East European Collections. This was the final official name in 1985-2005.
30 The Director was B.C. Bloomfield. The Collection Development consisted of the so-called core collections (inherited from the Department of Printed Books): English, West European and East European languages; the India Office Library and Records; and Oriental Manuscripts and Printed Books.
East European Collections. The Head of the Slavonic and East European Collections was also Head of the European Language Collections (1990–1996), and reported directly to the Director of the Humanities and Social Sciences Division. The 1995–1996 reorganization created Reader Services and Collection Development, which operated from 1996 to 2001. The Reader Services and Collection Development department inherited most of the functions of the Humanities and Social Sciences Division. In the years 1996–2001 the Head of the Slavonic and East European Collections reported to the Head of the Modern Collections 1996–2001 within Reader Services and Collection Development. The creation of the Scholarship and Collections Directorate in 2001 was the final reorganization for the Slavonic and East European Collections. In its final five years as a separate library entity, the Head of the Slavonic and East European Collections reported to the Head of the European and American Collections, which operated in the years 2001–2010, of the Scholarship and Collections Directorate.

The formation of the British Library in 1973 was a long process which took several years to complete, before and after the inception date. The British Museum Library was united with the National Central Library and the National Lending Library for Science and Technology in the same year; three more organizations were added the next year, and another three in the 1980s. At some point twelve constituent departments of the British Library were housed in fourteen

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37. M. McLaren-Turner was Head of the European Language Collections, and was also Deputy Director of the Humanities and Social Sciences Division (A. B. Phillips was Director of the Humanities and Social Sciences Division).
38. Reader Services and Collection Development 1996–2001 was part of the Collections and Services Division 1995–2001. In 1999 the Science Reference and Information Service (SRIS) merged with Reader Services and Collection Development (RS&CD) and from then it was known as Science Technology and Business (STB) within Reader Services and Collection Development. M. Crump was the only Director of the Reader Services and Collection Development department.
39. With the exception of the National Sound Archive, this department went to Special Collections. The Reader Services and Collection Development department’s sub-departments were Reader Services, Newspaper Library, Modern Collections, Modern English Reference and Information Services, Early Printed Collections, Information Sciences Service, Science Technology Business, and the Eccles Centre for American Studies.
40. The heads of the Modern Collections were G. Smith 1996-1999 and A. J. Byford 1999-2000. The Modern Collections constituted of English Language and the post-1850 European Language Collections. The Modern Collections later incorporated the Newspaper Library.
41. The post of Director-General which was created at the inception of the British Library in 1973 was abolished. Scholarship and Collections became one of six directorates with Directors as part of the Executive Team. The Scholarship and Collections Directorate initially inherited the British, European and American, and the Oriental and India Office Collections (from the Collections and Services General Directorate), the Collection Acquisition and Description, and the Collection Care from the Library Support Services. A small department, Collection Development (which operated from 2001 to 2003), concerned with collection development strategy, coordination and data analysis, was part of the Scholarship and Collections Directorate.
42. The European and American Collections inherited from the Reader Services and Collection Development (of the Collections and Services General Directorate), the West and East European Collections, Maps, Music, Philatelic, and the Eccles Centre for American Studies. The National Preservation Office was also part of the European and American Collections. S. Bury was the only Head of the European and American Collections in the years 2002–2010.
43. Nine organizations were brought together into the British Library. The dates of their transfer were:
   I. British Museum Library (Department of Manuscripts; Department of Printed Books; Department of Oriental Printed Books and Manuscripts; National Reference Library of Science and Innovation) 1973
   II. National Central Library 1973
   III. National Lending Library for Science and Technology 1973
   IV. British National Bibliography 1974
   V. Library Association Library 1974
   VI. Office for Scientific and Technical Information 1974
   VII. HMSO Binderies 1982
   VIII. FCO-India Office Library and Records 1982
   IX. British Institute of Recorded Sound 1983.
different locations. The unification of different institutions into one organization called for a system of unified grading which also took several years to complete. On the staff level the unified grading policy meant the end of the status of secondment for a number of staff from the predecessor institutions unwilling to accept the employment offers the British Library was able to make in 1973. By 1984 the British Library introduced the new civil service grades which replaced the old grades in the British Museum Library.44

Staff and their responsibilities

Before the creation of the Slavonic Department in 1952, Assistant Keepers who dealt with Slavonic books were part of the Acquisition of Books by Purchase, Gift and Exchange Department.47 By that time current foreign purchases of books were coming in normally as they had been since before the Second World War. A significant improvement was also made with the acquisition of books from Eastern Europe. Books and periodicals from this part of Europe started to be acquired on an unprecedented scale. These acquisitions were seen in the Department of Printed Books as ‘liberal buying’ and the reasoning behind this was that certain government departments48 were showing an increased interest in the British Museum Library’s acquisitions from these countries. From 1951 the Acquisition department contributed lists of recent accessions of Russian scientific and technical books as an appendix to the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research’s monthly publication ‘Translated contents lists of Russian periodicals’. It was understood that the British Museum Library was clearly providing a valuable national service; however, Oldman, the Principal Keeper, was concerned that this additional purchase entailed a severe drain on the Library’s limited resources. He recommended that the Treasury should be approached with a view to obtaining an additional grant and the recruitment of an additional Assistant Keeper who would help to catalogue the increased intake of Russian material.49 The further expansion of the Slavonic area, the increasing recognition of the service offered to the nation by the Library, and the wealth and value of Soviet material acquired for the Library led to the creation of the Slavonic department as a new department within the British Museum Library. In practical terms

44 BL. Archives, Office Notices, ON 1973-2009, ON 40/77 of 14 July 1977. See the Alphabetical Telephone List. Three more locations were added to the Library’s portfolio when the HMSO Binderies, the FCO-India Office Library and Records, and the British Institute of Recorded Sound were transferred to the British Library in the 1980s.

45 The grading structure and policy over the period discussed in this article were as complex as the Library’s organizational structure, and for this purpose only grading that bears some relevance to the departmental history is mentioned in the article.

46 Keeper became Director; Deputy Keeper initially Curator B and later Civil Service Grade 6 at Deputy Director level; Assistant Keeper became Curator C and later Civil Service Grade 7; Senior Research Assistant became Curator D; Research Assistant I became Curator E; Research Assistant II became Curator F. By 1988 Clerical Officer became Administrative Officer. Executive Officer, Paper-keeper and Typist were the only British Museum Library grades in existence until the last Pay and Grading restructure took place in the mid-1990s. In 1996 the new grading structure was introduced based on job weights using the JEGS evaluation system for grades A to E, which replaced previous grades from Curator D to Clerical Officer. The Senior Band grades SB 2 to 4 replaced the previous grades for staff at Civil Service Grades 5 to 7.

47 The General Library consisted of the Copyright Office, the Acquisition of Books by Purchase, Gift and Exchange Department, the Production and Maintenance of the Catalogues, and the Special Sections (the Reading Room, the State Paper Room, the Map Room, the Music Room, the Newspaper Library, the Bindery, and the Stamp Collections).

48 The Ministry of Defence, the Joint Intelligence Bureau, the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research. DH 2/116, 6, Report to the Sub-Committee of the Trustees on Printed Books 1951, p. 3.

49 Ibid.
the reason for this decision was that a separately organized library department could best ensure the proper spending of the allocated budget, and that a proper service for library users could be provided in this way. The large number of countries involved and the complicated acquisition procedures for books and periodicals from Eastern Europe were also the reasons given for the creation of a separate library unit. In Horne’s words, this department was created to acquire, process, arrange and make available Slavonic material: ‘in a way calculated to attract scientists, industrialists and economists to whom the bulk of it could be of first-rate importance’. At the inception of this department there was a strong and clear emphasis on the selection of scientific and technological material which he found invaluable to the Library’s users and for the scientific and technological progress of the nation as a whole. By 1955 the Slavonic Department had four Assistant Keepers and one Clerical Officer. The Department was called Slavonic, but was equally responsible for non-Slavonic East European material: Estonian, Hungarian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Romanian, Finnish and Modern Greek. Horne’s responsibility, apart from being in charge of the department’s administration, was Russian, Hungarian, Finnish, Estonian, Albanian, Latvian, and Lithuanian selection. Horne’s external responsibilities varied from being the Trustees’ representative on the Sub-Committee on the Transliteration of Cyrillic and Greek of the British Standards Institution (from 1948), and the Trustees’ representative on the School of Slavonic and East European Studies Library Committee (from 1953) to being the Trustees’ representative to the Conference of Research Workers on the Soviet Union in London (from 1957).

Richard Bancroft was responsible for Yugoslav, Ukrainian, and Modern Greek selection, for subject indexing and for the purchase of antiquarian books in the department. Robert Fulford was responsible for Polish, Czech, and Slovak selection, for cataloguing and revising catalogue entries in all Slavonic languages, for the proofreading of Slavonic acquisitions, and for the incorporation of Slavonic entries into the General Catalogue. Pat Fairs was responsible for Bulgarian and Romanian selection, for cataloguing in all Slavonic languages, and assisting with the incorporation of entries. Since James Norton, the Clerical Officer, left the department on promotion in December 1955, Fairs was in charge of the business side of the by then Slavonic Division. The activities of the Slavonic Division, later the Slavonic and East European Division, then Branch, and finally Collections, only briefly summarized here, consisted of the acquisition, registration, cataloguing and subject indexing of books and periodicals, which included Finnish and Modern Greek until March 1962 and the proofreading and incorporation of new entries into the General Catalogue. Eight countries (the Soviet Union, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Albania) were the department’s responsibility within the library. The department processed material in seventeen main languages, of which eleven were Slavonic languages (Russian, Ukrainian, Belorussian, Polish, Serbo-Croat, Slovene, Macedonian, Bulgarian, Czech, Slovak and Lusatian) and six were non-Slavonic languages (Albanian, Estonian, Hungarian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Romanian).
The department dealt with enquiries from readers and the general public in relation to its countries and also assisted the other divisions (Maps, Music, GK III, Photographic Service, Scientific Department, et al.) of the Department of Printed Books (later the Humanities and Social Sciences, then Reader Services and Collection Development, and finally Scholarship and Collections) when specialist knowledge and Slavonic and East European expertise was required. These services of the Slavonic staff were occasionally needed in other British Museum departments. The Slavonic department had a special, if not always perfect, relationship with the State Paper Room. Before the setting-up of the single accession units in the Slavonic department, which became possible in the mid-1960s, the library staff found it very difficult to differentiate between government publications and other publications. The origin of material could not be used as a guide, and material received by international exchange came to the Slavonic department, while a great deal of its own material ended up in the State Paper Room. For this reason all Slavonic material had to be registered in the Slavonic department to prevent duplication of material. A special relationship was also developed with the National Reference Library of Science and Invention when this department was established in 1966. The department originally used to order Slavonic and East European scientific and technical material for the National Reference Library of Science and Invention. At some point in the late 1960s the Slavonic and East European Division included a small unit which was engaged in the international exchange of official publications in Oriental languages. One of the most significant developments in the history of the department was the opening, after much delay, of the Slavonic and East European Periodicals Reading Room on 15 February 1960. Two Clerical Officers were added to the staff, Miss Carrington and Alexander Newton, to assist readers in the new reading room. At that point, the Slavonic and East European Division was seen in the library as the Department (of Printed Books) in miniature, with its own acquisitions section, its own cataloguing section, its own exchange techniques, and subsequently with its own reading room. Unfortunately, this reading room had to be closed at the end of August 1963 owing to the small number of its users. Another significant event in the history of the department was the retirement of Joseph (Christopher William) Horne on 14 July 1961. Horne abandoned his plans to visit the Soviet Union and asked to be allowed to retire for family reasons. In a report to the Trustees, Wilson, the Principal Keeper of the Department of Printed Books, stated the following: ‘Mr. Horne has devoted himself untiringly to the task of building up the Library’s collections in the Slavonic field. This task has not been an easy one. Ordinary channels of supplies are not always available and Mr. Horne and his lieutenants have constantly had to find ways round all kind of obstacles. That they have succeeded in doing this is largely due to Mr. Horne’s devotion to his work and to his refusal to be defeated by the difficulties which

60 The State Paper Room dealt with official publications and managed the international exchange programme in the library.
61 DH 2/127, 6, Report to the Sub-Committee of the Trustees on Printed Books 1962, p. 50.
62 The sanction for staff recruitment was withheld by the Trustees from 1956, which was seen in the library as a short-sighted decision. DH 2/122, 6, Report to the Sub-Committee of the Trustees on Printed Books 1957, p. 9.
63 Miss Carrington, Clerical Officer in the Slavonic and East European Division 1960-[1963?]; Alexander Wray Newton, Clerical Officer in the Slavonic and East European Division 1961-[1963?].
64 DH 2/125, 6, Report to the Sub-Committee of the Trustees on Printed Books 1960, p. 28.
65 The Slavonic and East European Periodicals Reading Room ceased to be the responsibility of the Slavonic and East European Division on 31 May 1962. For two years and three months the department was looking after a large number of Slavonic and East European scientific, technical, social sciences, and humanities periodicals available on open access in this room. Between May 1962 and August 1963 the former Slavonic and East European Periodicals Reading Room continued as a General Periodicals Reading Room.
66 This visit was given first priority in the programme for 1961/62 as it had been cancelled for lack of funds in the previous year. DH 2/126, 2, 51, Minutes relating to the staff, 8 April 1961.
relations with Eastern European countries so frequently involved. His efforts to improve the Library’s standing in the Slavonic field were properly rewarded with the conferment of the O.B.E.,68 and Mr. Wilson recommends that the Trustees, in accepting Mr. Horne’s resignation, should express to him their thanks for his long and devoted service and should take the necessary steps to secure for him the allowances to which he is entitled.69 Soon after Horne’s retirement, the Hungarian publisher Corvina Press published his translation of Imre Madách’s masterpiece The Tragedy of Man.70 Only a few years afterwards, the Library came round to provide for what Horne constantly and repeatedly called for: a larger staff to deal with the volume of material received in the Slavonic and East European Division. What Horne requested initially was more Clerical Officers, then one Executive Officer, and finally more Assistant Keepers. In the end, in his vision, eight Assistant Keepers and a corresponding increase in the staff supporting them were needed for the normal functioning of a department with a large range of languages and duties in the library. The lack of staff was an issue constantly present for the next forty years, and Horne’s successors repeatedly asked for more, especially cataloguing, staff so that material acquired could be efficiently made available to library users. Very often ordering of new material fell behind, and considerable backlogs of uncatalogued books were held up in the department over the years. It can also be said that when the department was at times near the full complement it ranged from fourteen staff (Deputy Keeper,71 five Assistant Keepers, two Research Assistants, one Executive Officer, four Clerical Officers and one Copy Typist) in 1966 to an unprecedented level of twenty staff in 2003. The structure and organization of the department required a Head to look after the department’s administration, five Assistant Keepers as book selectors, and a corresponding number of Clerical Officers organized into language units to process and register accessions. An Executive Officer was in charge of these units.72 The full complement of staff included four cataloguers from the mid-1960s to the 2000s. In the final four years, owing to specially funded projects, the number of Curators, Cataloguers and Administrative Officers significantly increased. The department had a Copy Typist and its own Stamper.73 Many of the job activities of a Curator/Cataloguer in the 1980s can be summarized as follows: about half of the time was spent in cataloguing and subject-indexing, and the other half in collection development, public service duties, reading room enquiry desk duties, editorial work or catalogue maintenance and other activities such as special projects and research.74

Horne succeeded in organizing the department into five sections with Assistant Keepers in charge of each: the Soviet Union, Polish, Yugoslav, Czech and Slovak, and Romanian/Bulgarian sections. It was not to be until the 2000s that the department achieved the requirement which

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68 To be Ordinary Officers of the Civil Division of the said Most Excellent Order: - Joseph Christopher William Horne, Esq., Assistant Keeper, First Class, Department of Printed Books, British Museum. I owe thanks to Lynn Young and Michael Woods who very kindly provided the date of Horne’s conferment published in Supplement to the London Gazette, 1 January 1958, p. 13.

69 In the same report Wilson recommended Fulford to the vacant post, which carried a £100 allowance for an Assistant Keeper in charge of a department. DH 2/126, 2, 63, Minutes relating to the staff, 8 July 1961.


71 Fulford was the department’s first Deputy Keeper 1965-1967.

72 The last Executive Officer in the Slavonic and East European Collections was Alan Coster, Executive Officer 1974-1987. Coster was a Clerical Officer in the Slavonic department and left on promotion in 1974 to return later in the 1970s.

73 Stamper was in the grade of Paper-keeper. Harry Johnson (Paper-keeper 1974-1985), John Worker (Paper-keeper 1985-1999) and in 2000-2001 Bill Jordan were dedicated stampers of Slavonic and East European books. The last Copy Typist in the department was Jola Grynkiewicz in 1987-1999.

74 This information is extracted from the personal records of Robert Henderson, Curator in the department 1984-[1993?].
Horne initiated for a separate Ukrainian selector. Horne’s Hungarian expertise was to some degree covered by the help of Geoffrey Arnold,75 Assistant Keeper in the Cataloguing Division, who assisted as Hungarian adviser and cataloguer, and by Lóránt Czigány a part-time Special Assistant in the department 1962-1969. Their work was greatly appreciated and highly praised in the department. By the end of his assignment in the library, Czigány produced a catalogue of the collection of Hungarian pamphlets (1780-1850) which he catalogued in the department.76 The essence of the repeated requests for more cataloguing staff was that Assistant Keepers should be relieved from daily routine work in the department to give their time and expertise to the production of much-needed scholarly bibliographical works and specialized catalogues on their collections.

By the 1970s, the creation of a separate department for Slavonic and East European languages, which proved to be successful in a wide range of responsibilities, was seen in the library as an effective model for other European language and area sections. By then the Slavonic department had a complement of Assistant Keepers as specialists in one or more languages, a complement of Research Assistants77 responsible for cataloguing, and a complement of Clerical Officers, who recorded acquisitions and became familiar in the job with the languages and alphabets involved in the work of the department. The acquisition of books from Communist countries required another specific responsibility in the Library. As the material was largely acquired by exchange, Assistant Keepers had to keep regular correspondence with their partners, and occasionally to plan and prepare study visits to various libraries, academies, research institutes, museums and other institutions for study, the arts and culture. These visits were exceptionally useful to staff for getting to know their Slavonic counterparts and to understand the conditions and circumstances in which they worked, as well as learning about library provisions, print and publishing, and different cultures and customs in Eastern Europe. At least fourteen such study visits were made to all the Eastern European countries, except Albania,78 between 1956 and 1972.79

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76 L. Czigány, The László Waltherr Collection of Hungarian pamphlets in the British Museum (London, 1969). In the introduction to his catalogue, ‘The László Waltherr Collection’ (reprinted from The British Museum Quarterly, xxxiii (1969), pp. 92-102), Czigány states that ‘the nucleus of the rich collection of Hungarian books […] was formed by Thomas Watts’ and mentions the work of the lesser-known E. D. Butler and the important acquisitions made between 1870 and 1873, e.g. the acquisitions of the valuable collections of two Hungarian bibliophiles, István Nagy and László Waltherr, purchased from the firm List und Francke of Leipzig.
77 Jim Dingley was the department’s first Research Assistant 1964-1966.
78 Stephen de Winter, Clerical Officer/Administrative Officer in the department 1969-2004, paid a private visit to Albania in July-August 1965 and later spent a proportion of his time on the job developing Albanian expertise.
79 Bancroft, the Assistant Keeper, had 23 days special leave as the library’s Yugoslav expert to attend the Summer School of Slavonic Studies in Zadar and Zagreb on 2-28 August 1956. DH 2/121. Report on his visit to Yugoslavia of 17 September 1956. Later, as Deputy Keeper and Superintendent of the Reading Room 1959-1979, Bancroft visited for the British Council, and reported to the British Museum Library, on libraries and library provision in the Soviet Union in October-November 1970, and Hungary in March 1972, among other countries which he visited in a professional capacity.
Fulford, the Assistant Keeper, visited Poland and Czechoslovakia as the library’s Czech and Slovak expert. DH 2/124. Report from Mr Fulford on the visit to Poland and Czechoslovakia of 20 July 1959. He also visited the Soviet Union as the library’s Soviet expert in September-October 1961. DH 2/126. Report on his visit to the Soviet Union of 10 November 1961.
In October 1966 the Director of the British Museum authorized special leave to Poland for Dr Hanna Swiderska, Assistant Keeper/ Curator C, 1961-1990 as the library’s Polish expert. DH 2/131, 5, 79b, 6 October 1966.
In 1966 Geoffrey Arnold, Assistant Keeper, visited Országos Széchényi Könyvtár (Hungarian National Library) in Budapest. (Reference to this visit is made in Atkins’s report of 23 November 1969.)
considered these travels to be of the greatest value for the library. Assistant Keepers projected these visits as a method of careful and close study of library provision in Eastern Europe and, above all, as a way of making useful and important personal contacts. The system of exchanges was constantly analysed, tested and compared for possible improvements. The visits served as exploratory and fact-finding missions about book markets, book dealers, etc. Their reports are invaluable sources for the state of printing and publishing and the culture in general in this part of Europe from the mid-1950s.

By the mid-1960s the number of British universities offering courses in Slavonic and East European studies was increasing as was the number of British libraries with Slavonic collections. In March 1965 the newly formed SCONUL Committee on Slavonic and East European collections in Britain had its first meeting with Fulford as Chairman. The aim of the Committee was to assist collaboration between British Slavonic and East European libraries and collections.  

In the period 1952-2004 about ninety-five staff worked in the department. The majority of staff served for more than ten years; 20% of staff remained in service for over five years before leaving or transferring to another library department, and 30% of staff stayed in the job for less than five years. Among those who served more than ten years, fourteen staff were long-serving, mainly in professional grades. Before the creation of the Slavonic department, the staff who worked in the Slavonic area were mainly British, and from the 1960s the department was British but increasingly international.
Acquisitions

After the Second World War the acquisition of Slavonic and East European books was re-established on the basis of the British Museum’s pre-war network of contacts with libraries, museums, institutes, and other cultural organizations in Eastern Europe. In 1950 the Department of Printed Books had direct contacts with at least seven Eastern European countries, eighteen cities and forty-one pre-war exchange partners and donors. The British Museum initially exchanged only its own publications with these exchange partners. The pre-war exchanges, which constituted the exchange of publications of institutions in the programme for British Museum publications, as well as a large number of donations, became unsustainable after the rapid expansion of publishing in Eastern Europe from 1945. By the time the Slavonic department was created in 1952 the volume of received material was considerable, as was the need for British books in Eastern Europe. Collet's Russian Bookshop, the chief agent for Russian books in Britain, and some other dealers such as Maison du Livre Étranger, H. P. Kraus of New York or Krakowia and later Ars Polona for Polish books could not match the role and position which Asher of Berlin enjoyed over a century as the chief supplier of Russian and East European books to the British Museum Library. The system of exchanges was the least preferred acquisition method in the British Museum Library, and was regarded, in any case, as uneconomic and difficult to maintain. This system was in use in the library only rarely, when direct purchase was not possible, or as part of the international exchanges of government publications programme, with British official material supplied by the Stationery Office. The exchange agreements with Eastern Europe were reborn spontaneously and out of necessity, as no other channels of supply were available either to the British Museum or to Eastern European book dealers in Britain and Western Europe. Soon after the creation of the Slavonic department, Assistant Keepers took direct control of this process and established personal contacts with their counterparts in Eastern Europe. Slavonic and East European second-hand material was mainly acquired from booksellers in Germany, Holland and Austria. Microfilms, largely Russian, were acquired from commercial firms in Western Europe and the United States or directly from exchange partners or their state agencies. Slavonic and East European antiquarian material was acquired rarely, and only if funds for current material allowed. Antiquarian material was acquired above all through individual book-buying visits, or indirectly, as part of the British Museum bidding

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The bookseller Asher had offices in Berlin, London and St Petersburg.
processes at auction sales. The Slavonic department’s Assistant Keepers argued regularly for the need of a local special fund for ad hoc purchases when opportunities arose. The Slavonic department, like other departments in the British Museum, could bid for special grants from central funds. For example, when in 1968 the Slavonic and East European Division initiated a programme of acquisition of microfiche copies of Russian nineteenth-century periodicals destroyed during the Second World War, a special grant of £9,000 was made from the Shaw Fund. In subsequent years, as the allocation of money for purchase was limited to current books and serials, the department made many applications for larger contributions from central funds. These applications were also made for material not previously held in the collections. Donations were a significant source of book supply to the library. Horne himself bought and donated a great many books and periodicals. On one such occasion, Oldman, the Principal Keeper, acknowledged his donation in a letter to the Trustees: ‘Mr. J. C. W. Horne, the Assistant Keeper in charge of Slavonic books, has purchased and presented to the library a run of the official Law Gazette of Poland Dziennik Ustaw Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej from 1st February 1918 to 3rd September 1939. The Museum has hitherto possessed no number of this gazette earlier than the issue for 31st October 1939, published in France, after the removal of the seat of the Polish Government to Paris.’

The principal method of acquisition specific to the Slavonic department was the exchange, with national, academy, university and regional libraries in Eastern Europe, of British commercially acquired publications for publications of their countries. This was necessary, and the only way to secure publications from the countries where books were published in small print runs and went out of print quickly. In general, Eastern European books were not available through commercial channels at all. For the duration of the period of exchange from the 1950s to the 1990s, at least 85% of publications were received by this system. Large numbers of publications were received by direct exchange of publications of the British Museum for those of institutions in Eastern European countries, but even greater numbers of publications were acquired by a system of indirect exchange. In the system of indirect exchange British books were bought or ordered by the British Museum and shipped to the partners in Eastern Europe. The Slavonic department policy in the mid-1960s was to acquire what was then regarded as purchased material, which Assistant Keepers selected from the national bibliographies from principal centres in Eastern Europe, which were able to cover their countries’ publishing activities. These direct orders were then paid into specified English accounts, such as International University Booksellers and Bryce, which, in turn, sent the material ordered to Eastern Europe. Direct orders were supplemented by a network of (direct) exchanges negotiated with individual libraries, museums and other institutions in Eastern Europe. A balance sheet was kept for these exchanges locally. Parallel exchanges of official publications were conducted by the State Paper Room, but from 1967 were administered by the Slavonic department.

The system of exchanges of publications was seen in the Department of Printed Books as ‘a striking development in the library’, but accepted to be the only satisfactory way of acquiring publications from Eastern Europe: ‘These are, in part, the reasons why the expenditure on Russian books has tended to be larger in proportion than that on books from other countries’. The Slavonic department had to justify that the selection of current material from Eastern Europe was commensurate with the amount of money they spent at the expense of other library purchases. It seemed that the opportunity was arising for the newly created department to find more space for itself, and for its collections and activities in the library. The management of a complex operation (selection of titles, checking, ordering, accessioning, registering, cataloguing...
books and periodicals, etc.) was additionally hindered by the circumstances in which the Slavonic department operated, initially in two, and as the department grew, in four different, physically scattered, localities in the library in 1965.

In 1955, the annual number of periodicals titles received was 546, and 74 newspaper titles were received. The number of Slavonic title slips sent to the printers was 6019. The number of books received in 1960 was 9311, and 7729 in 1961. The number of books received steadily rose over the years to about 12,621 acquired in 2004 and 13,992 in 2005. The total expenditure of the Slavonic department for the period 1 April 1959 to 31 March 1960 was £6644. Horne reported that: 'the prices of Soviet scientific and technical books are considerably higher than formerly, and the cost of the annual subscription rates for 1960 to Soviet periodicals shows an increase of 24% to 25% over that for 1959.' Then he argued: 'if the Library is to continue as one of the chief repositories in Western Europe of material concerning the sciences and arts published in Eastern Europe, both the purchase grant and the staff of this section of the Library will have to be increased considerably.' By 1964 the Slavonic department accounted for about 14% of the British Museum Library intake. In this year a great increase in Slavonic second-hand material was registered, for which 25% of the department's £7,500 budget was spent. On average the Slavonic department acquisition budget accounted for about 12% of the Department of Printed Books' total annual grant.

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89 Special purchase of ‘a collection of microfiches of Slavonic periodicals of which the Museum’s copies were destroyed during the war: £3,930’, DH 2/133, 6, Reports to the Committee on printed books 1967-1968, paragraph 11.
90 DH 2/115, 4, Reports relating to the acquisitions of books, 8 March 1950, p. 160.
91 Harris, op. cit., p. 588.
92 DH 2/120, 6, DPB Report to Sub Committee of Trustees, June 1955, p. 8.
93 Until then no separate figures were kept for books and series. DH 2/120, 6, DPB Report to the Sub-Committee of Trustees on Printed Books, 1955, p. 10.
94 DH2/125 for 1960 and DH 2/126 for 1961. See Reports to the Sub-Committee of the Trustees on Printed Books, respectively.
95 G:\SLAVONIC\STATISTICS held locally in the European Studies department and the Slavonic and East European Cataloguing and Processing section.
96 The Slavonic and East European Division’s expenditure accounted for about 12.5% of the total actual expenditure of £53,063 17s. for 1959/60 of the Department of Printed Books. The Slavonic and East European expenditure was split between languages as follows: Russian [and Ukrainian and Belorussian] £2,549 1s. 8d. (figures are in pounds, shillings and pence); Polish £877 7s. 10d; Czech [and Slovak] £439 2s. 1d.; [J]Yugoslav £948 0s. 6d.; Hungarian £372 18s. 0d.; Bulgarian £379 16s. 3d.; Rumanian £253 16s. 1d; Finnish £332. 5s. 4d; Greek £334 0s. 2d; Miscellaneous £157 17s. 10d. Total £6,644 19s. 9d. (Last year [i.e. 1958/59] £5332 7s.9d.). See DH2/125, 6, 193, Report to the Sub-Committee of the Trustees on Printed Books, 1960, p. 28.
97 Ibid.
99 The total of the Department of Printed Books annual grants from 1919/20 to 1939/40 was £160,850; the annual average was £7,660. In the inter-war period the Slavonic and East European annual average spent was 7.2% or about £551 annually.

The total of the Department of Printed Books annual grants from 1946/47 to 1958/59 was £5329,000; the annual average was £25,300. In this period the Slavonic and East European annual average was 12%, or about £3036 annually.

The total of the Department of Printed Books annual grants from 1959/60 to 1972/73 was £1,599,000; the annual average was £114,200. In this period Slavonic and East European annual average was 12% or about £13,704 annually. See Harris, op. cit., pp. 512, 590, and 648 respectively.
Cataloguing

The main product of every library is a catalogue record. The arrangement of catalogue records into library catalogues is the central function of a library. The final product is a catalogue of library holdings which is the essence and the backbone of any institution which aims to organize information and knowledge. This product and the arrangement of it have retained a central place in every library well into the digital age. This article focuses on manual cataloguing only, as automation in the library was discussed to some extent with the interviewees in the oral history project. Cataloguing and revising in the British Museum was the job of Assistants and Assistant Keepers until 1960, when Research Assistants were employed primarily to catalogue books. In the Slavonic department Assistant Keepers carried on cataloguing books into the 1960s, since Research Assistants did not arrive until 1964. Cataloguing was done on a blue paper slip which was coded by language and alphabet. For example, capital ‘D’ on a blue slip was for Cyrillic script, followed by a code for the language. The description of a book was handwritten according to the British Museum cataloguing rules, and from 1963 the subject indexing was done by the cataloguer on the same slip. The provenance of a book was handwritten on the back of the slip. Revision of cataloguing was done by line managers, senior cataloguers, language specialists or by peer revision. As the next stage in the process, the slip and book would go to Placers for labelling and press-marking, initially according to the size or subject of the book. Then slips would be sent off to be printed, and galley proofs would come from printers to senior cataloguers for proofreading. After the proofreading stage, the corrected proofs would be sent back to the printers for final printing. Corrected sheets would come back to the Cataloguing shop for cutting and pasting, and to Incorporators for incorporation into the General Catalogue. Incorporators would usually receive three copies of an entry for the three sets of the folio size General Catalogue: the blue set for the Reading Room, the red set as a backup set, and the green set as a working set. The Catalogue shop staff would paste printed slips into the catalogues, and they were responsible for filing title slips into the title slips boxes held in the Title Room.

Cross-referencing was done on blue paper slips, which meant that a book could have as many title slips as needed. The Slavonic department produced some 16,000 title slips per year. The number of title slips should not be misunderstood as actual cataloguing figures, which were much lower. The Slavonic department cataloguing output could never match the intake of books and periodicals, and considerable arrears in cataloguing occurred as early as 1956. In 1959 some 10,000 books and a large number of periodicals awaited cataloguing. A survey of all uncatalogued books in the General Library at the end of 1964 revealed about 6,500 Slavonic (mainly donated) items out of a total of 150,000 uncatalogued items in the library. The postal strike of early 1971 and delays in receiving booksellers’ catalogues and national bibliographies was turned to good account by Slavonic staff in reducing the backlog of unrevised cataloguing. In that year Research Assistants produced a record 18,750 entries, more than 7,500 in the previous year and the backlog was reduced to 9,000. The following year was a record cataloguing year with 11,816 catalogued items, which was an increase of 4391 over the preceding year.

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96 An exception to this was the employment of twenty Assistant Cataloguers who were in so-called unestablished posts (with no pension rights unless appointed to permanent posts) in 1934. Harris, op. cit., p. 492.
97 Description based on a conversation with Michael McLaren-Turner, but any inaccuracies are solely mine. After the blue paper slips, cataloguing was done manually on A4 size yellow slips which were sent for keyboarding for online catalogue input. The yellow slips were retained until the 2000s in parallel with off-line computer cataloguing.
98 The Cataloguing shop was industrial staff (with their own terms and condition of employment) and Incorporators were Clerical Officers.
This left a total of about 8600 uncatalogued items. During 1972 as many as 17,419 titles were sent to printing, and a further 3000 titles were completed by December 1972.\textsuperscript{100} By the end of 1988, however, the post-1971 backlog had accumulated to some 40,000 items, which was due to the combination of the workload and lack of cataloguing staff in the Slavonic and East European Branch.\textsuperscript{101} The Branch’s cataloguers could not cope with an annual intake of over 11,000 items, and the backlog increased annually by over 2000 items. By 2003 the backlog stood at about 50,000 items.\textsuperscript{102} Another source of frustration for the Slavonic staff was the delay in the incorporation of entries into the general catalogue. In March 1964 the entries which were going into the catalogue had been written at the end of 1961. At some point there were over 30,000 Slavonic and East European entries catalogued but waiting to be incorporated into the catalogue: ‘One regrettable consequence of the delay in incorporation is the fact that during the year many “suggestions” filled in by readers and sent on to the division have been for books which were in the library and had been catalogued, but for which the entries had not yet been incorporated. One wonders how many readers go away from the Reading Room thinking that what they want is not here when it is.’\textsuperscript{103}

Exhibitions and publications

The routine day-to-day work in the department took up most of the specialists’ time over the years, which consequently left very little time for much-needed specialized work. The overriding priority was to deal with what was then current intake or the backlog of material, but the higher the cataloguing figures, inevitably the more revision work and proofreading were needed. Due to the priority workload in the department, any plans and special projects had to be carried over year by year, and therefore took longer to complete.\textsuperscript{104} Despite the heavy workload on a daily basis, the Slavonic department seized the opportunities to promote its collections and activities around major anniversaries and important events. Events were organized for library users and visitors, the general public and the library staff. In 1952 and 1953 a number of monthly exhibitions were held in the King’s Library to mark the bicentenary of the British Museum and to display and promote a range of different fields in the library. In November 1953, Horne, Bancroft, Fulford and Norton set up the first Slavonic (co-)exhibition, with the other colleagues in the department,\textsuperscript{105} as the eleventh in the series of monthly exhibitions, which was devoted to the Dutch, Scandinavian, and Slavonic and East European collections. Oldman, the Principal Keeper, duly praised to the Trustees this series of exhibitions, together with Frank Francis,\textsuperscript{106} the Keeper who planned and supervised these exhibitions, for ‘the stimulating effect the exhibitions have had on the staff of the department and to the interest and enthusiasm which they have aroused in the public’.\textsuperscript{107} In fifty years the Slavonic department organized at least fifteen major, special and anniversary exhibitions\textsuperscript{108} in

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\textsuperscript{101} This information is quoted from Henderson’s personal records.
\textsuperscript{102} The backlog on 31 March 2004 was 40,677 items. This figure was reduced by 7622 items catalogued in 2003 (see n. 91 above).
\textsuperscript{103} DH 2/129, 6, 173, 33, Department of Printed Books 1964, p. 59.
\textsuperscript{104} For example, to this day a number of short-title catalogues of early Slavonic and East European books are still in preparation or due to be completed.
\textsuperscript{105} H. Townshend, A. Simoni, L. Painter, A. Ahmad. For more information about the Library staff see Harris, op. cit.
\textsuperscript{106} Frank Francis, Keeper in the Department of Printed Books, 1948–1959.
\textsuperscript{107} DH 2/118, 6, 125, Department of Printed Books, 4 November 1953.
\textsuperscript{108} Six exhibitions were presented as part of the British Museum Library and nine as part of the British Library; thirteen organized in the King’s Library of the British Museum, and two in the British Library at St Pancras until 2004.
\end{flushleft}
which the department presented its collections and treasures and promoted the most important events and historical processes, publishing and printing, cultures, nations and nationalities, politics, religion, arts, music, languages and literatures, sciences and technologies as well as leading historical personalities in the Slavonic and East European studies field. Public lectures by British experts which coincided with anniversaries were organized; concerts, film and music programmes, talks and other events accompanied these exhibitions. The Slavonic department staff took part, advised and helped other departments of the British Museum and British Library on Slavonic and East European matters, or closely collaborated on events and exhibitions organized by other library departments. Similarly, there were, for instance, important library events in which the Slavonic staff were not immediately involved, such as the exhibition co-organized by the British Library and the Committee for Culture.

The information about the exhibitions, places, occasions and dates collated so far is as follows:

I. The Dutch, Scandinavian, and Slavonic and East European collections exhibition held in the King’s Library which marked the bicentenary of the British Museum, November 1953.

II. The Polish Millennium exhibition held in the King’s Library, November-December 1960.

III. 500 years of Czech Printing exhibition held in the King’s Library, February-March 1968.

IV. The Lenin in London exhibition which commemorated the hundreth anniversary of his birth, held in the King’s Library, March-May 1971.

V. Comenius (Jan Amos Komensky) exhibition held in the King’s Library, September-December 1971.


IX. Pushkin exhibition on the 150th anniversary of his death, held in the King’s Library, February-June 1987.

X. Vuk Stefanović Karadžić 1787-1864 exhibition, which marked the bicentenary of his birth, held in the King’s Library, June-September 1887.

XI. Christianity in Eastern Europe exhibition held in the King’s Library, December 1988-March 1989.

XII. The Eastern Question: Gladstone and Bulgaria exhibition held in the King’s Library, February-May 1992.

XIII. All-Change: Russian Avant-Garde Books 1912-1934 exhibition, held in the King’s Library, June-September 1994.


XV. Chekhov the Dramatist: Russia and Britain, a small exhibition which commemorated the centenary of his death and the first performance of The Cherry Orchard in 1904. Exhibition held in the Rare Books and Music Reading Room in the British Library, August-October 2004.

For example, Celia Hawksworth (former Research Assistant in the Slavonic and East European Division 1967-1968), a School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University of London, expert on Yugoslav literatures, gave a lecture in the British Museum Lecture Theatre entitled: ‘The Remarkable Life and Enduring Achievement of Vuk Karadžić’ on 3 July 1987.

in Bulgaria, ‘Slavonic Manuscripts from the British Museum and Library’, shown first in Bulgaria and then in Britain in 1977 and 1978.\textsuperscript{112}

The Slavonic and East European curators participated in the British Library lecture series in the British Museum Lecture Theatre and later at the British Library Conference Centre.\textsuperscript{113}


\section*{Conclusion}

There were two distinctive periods in the history of the British Library Slavonic and East European collections. In the first period, from 1837 to 1952, three generations of Slavonic specialists worked in the Department of Printed Books. Ralston was best known in the first generation of Slavonic specialists, Naaké and Bain were equally significant representatives of the second generation in the nineteenth century, and Wharton was the leading expert of the third generation which marked the first half of the twentieth century. These specialists in the Department of Printed Books were not only Slavonic Assistants in the British Museum, but also widely known throughout Britain for their scholarship. The importance of their knowledge and good judgment applied in the selection and description of books and periodicals which were acquired for the British Museum Library can be even better valued today, considering the small budget they had at their disposal in relation to rising book production in Eastern Europe.

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  \item[\textsuperscript{112}] The exhibition was held at the Alexander Nevski Cathedral Crypt in Sofia, April-July 1977. It is not clear where the exhibition took place for the British public, but it can be assumed it was in the King's Library of the British Library and the dates were December 1977-June 1978. See British Library, Department of Manuscripts, \textit{Slavonski riкописи ot Britanskia muzei i biblioteka = Slavonic Manuscripts from the British Museum and Library / [sustavitel na kataloga i nauchen komisar : Aksinia Dzhurova ; nauchen konsultant Ivan Dulchev]} (Sofia, [1977]); British Library, Reference Division, \textit{Slavonic Manuscripts from the British Museum and Library} (London, 1978).
\end{itemize}
Horne was another representative of the old-world courtesy and scholarship which prevailed in the British Museum well into the second half of the twentieth century. He led the first generation of the second period, during which the Slavonic department was created in 1952. In ten years Horne’s department grew to become one of the processing divisions, a self-contained independently operating division with a wide range of activities and responsibilities in the library. These activities were initiated on such a scale that a whole new generation, first in the Slavonic and East European Division 1960-1973 of the British Museum Library, and then in the Slavonic and East European Branch 1973–1985 of the British Library, had to see them through. This was a period, 1961–1987, of establishment, consolidation and staff expansion. The final generation of the Slavonic and East European department, the Slavonic and East European Collections (1985-2005), oversaw at least four major periods of change and transition, in which systems, services and processes were modernized in the British Library as outlined in this article. These six generations were responsible for the formation of one of the major collections in the field of Slavonic and East European studies in the West. The Slavonic and East European collections of about one million titles acquired to this day represent about 6% of the total current British Library holdings of approximately 16 million books and periodical titles.

Epilogue

After the retirement of the last Head of the Slavonic and East European Collections in November 2004, an acting head was appointed. This interim arrangement lasted until May 2005, when a new Head of the European Collections at the British Library was appointed. European Collections was a new library department which amalgamated the Slavonic and East European Collections and the West European Collections departments within the British Library. At the point of this merger, which coincided with political changes in Europe, the Slavonic and East European Collections ceased to exist as an independent library entity and continued to function as part of the newly formed department. The three far-reaching and significant developments in the period up to 2012 were the confirmation of two cataloguing posts as permanent in 2005; the regrading of four Administrative Officers’ posts to Slavonic Acquisitions Specialist and Cataloguer posts in 2008, and the successful clearing of the historic cataloguing backlog of books in 2012. These three splendid achievements testify to the exceptional ongoing contribution of the cataloguing team to the growth and development of the Slavonic and East European collections within the British Library.

115 Dr Christine Thomas, Head of Slavonic and East European Collections 1996-2004.
116 As a result of the Scholarship and Collections Directorate restructuring in 2009, the Slavonic and East European cataloguing team was transferred to the Cataloguing South department of the Operations and Services Directorate in 2010. The welcome part of the last restructuring was that the Slavonic and East European cataloguing team shared the same office and continued its work in the same physical location with curators in what became (from 2010) the European Studies department within the British Library.