

Royal Anthropological Institute

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I should start with a couple of disclaimers. Firstly, I retired seven years ago, so nothing that I say today will be at the cutting edge of technology. Secondly, I am not an anthropologist, so I cannot profess to have any deep understanding of the contents of the Centre for Anthropology library. After 28 years in the Research Library of the Greater London Council and its successor bodies I took early retirement and began temping. In 2008 I was employed by the Royal Anthropological Institute on a short term contract to be their Library Officer in the CfA library. My remit was to keep things running, represent the RAI's interests and write a report with recommendations on the future of the Library from an RAI standpoint. What I would like to do this morning is give you my impressions of this Library as an 'outsider', detail some of the problems we have faced and mention some steps we have taken.

Obviously I find my present library different from the GLC. There we were often asked to acquire documents on the day of publication. At the CfA we rely on book reviews in academic journals for the selection of material and find that we often order titles that are three, four or even five years old. I also work to a library committee which meets two or three times a year to discuss current issues. Furthermore the RAI has the position of 'honorary librarian', which is filled by an anthropologist who acts as a link between me and the RAI Council, our governing body.

Some of the Library's practices were somewhat traditional. Budgetary control was exercised by a handwritten accounts book with sums spent on publications totalled and reconciled every month – we now rely on a monthly print out supplied by the RAI's finance officer. Security of material was entrusted to an abundance of rubber stamps rather than any form of electronic tagging. I think that the record number of stampings that I counted on one journal was 101 - I'm pleased to say that these numbers have now fallen. The Library Officer was an anthropologist rather than a librarian. I'm debating this point with management, but I'm not sure that I'm going to win the argument. However in my opinion if you want someone to run your library or information unit you rely on a librarian or information worker – subject knowledge is important but the main requirement is a library qualification or extensive library experience.

In common with many libraries our main challenge is financial. As has been mentioned, the CfA library is supported by both the British Museum and the Royal Anthropological Institute. Although the commitment from the RAI would not appear to be significant in financial terms, it is a major commitment in terms of its size. The RAI is not a large organisation, employing 12 staff, of whom nine are part time; furthermore it is a charity. The publications budget is small and I am employed for only two days a week. Clearly one can provide only a limited service on this basis. I think it is to the RAI's credit that it recognised this problem long ago and merged its library to bring about the Centre for Anthropology Library. The RAI thus benefited from the Museum's greater resources of stock, staff and space. There is no way that the RAI library could have survived as an effective, independent unit without this support.

Even with the merger of the libraries there are still financial problems. Our objective is to make the best possible use of our budget – and to obtain free and discounted publications where possible. Every month we compile a list of possible items for purchase and circulate it for recommendations. These lists average over 150 titles and even restricting our purchases to 'must have' recommendations would soon lead to a budget deficit. I attempt to deal with this

situation by buying paperbacks where possible, by having regular purchasing freezes and by imposing an arbitrary limit of £50 on purchases. This might be an effective method of budgetary control but it is not an effective way to acquire a balanced stock. What does enable us to widen our stock is the system of review copies. The reviews editor of the Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute receives an abundant supply of books for review – a number well in excess of the number of reviews contained in each issue. By liaising closely we receive a regular supply of surplus review copies for stock. However, the review of books is not an overnight process and we often find that by the time we receive a publication we have already bought a copy. We are attempting to streamline the process to avoid this waste, but I think that we still have some way to go. We are also trying to raise extra funds by selling unwanted material to a local bookseller – and by taking payment in kind rather than cash we can add 30% to the value of our sales.

The situation with journals is even worse. With books we can regulate spending: with journals we are committed for the year. Cancellations are not an option if we are to maintain the range of our collection and we also have to maintain a number of titles to support our Anthropological Index Online. In effect the journals budget will always be overspent and this seems to be accepted as inevitable. All we can really do is attempt to limit the overspend. Whenever possible we acquire titles in exchange for our own publications and a significant proportion of the stock arrives in this way. A number of publishers offer us complimentary or discounted copies, because we are a charity or because their titles are covered by the Anthropological Index Online. RAI cooperation with the Museum's electronic resources policy should lead to significant financial savings with the cancellation of multiple copies, as well as giving greater accessibility for our users. We also investigated the handling charge imposed by our journals agent and were staggered to be told that it was 37.25% - a change of agent swiftly followed. I should add that from my previous experience in local government I have found that it is possible to negotiate a reduction in this charge.

As well as these financial initiatives, we are also trying to improve matters for our users, both by broadening the level of our service and by becoming more efficient in the ways that we deliver it – the latter point being essential in the current climate of staff and budgetary cuts.

At the CfA we do have the slightly unusual situation of having merged two libraries, whilst leaving the staff structures separate. I am completely independent of the CfA library staff structure and report to the director of the RAI. I can choose my own suppliers, develop my own procedures, have my own stationery and effectively go my own way. Again, this is a matter that I am debating with management. The RAI feels, with some justification, that it is essential to have an independent voice to represent its interests, whereas I feel that integration and rationalisation, both in procedures and structure, can only increase our efficiency. We are gradually moving away from the separate ways of the past and our watchword is 'One Library' - all policies and documentation are now considered and implemented from a library-wide, as opposed to a BM or RAI, perspective.

I mentioned that we are making a number of improvements to our service. Stock purchases are now mostly made on recommendation, so that we buy what our users want, rather than what we think they want. In the past there was no attempt to publicise new acquisitions: now a monthly list is available electronically on request. Our electronic resources policy is making a range of material available for remote and multi-user access – not merely journals, but a whole range of reference works. This is particularly beneficial to RAI users who are scattered throughout Britain, and indeed the world.

Even allowing for limited finances and pressures on staff time, there is really no excuse for the CfA not to provide a top class library service. We are located in the middle of London's academic community with many colleges nearby and the British Library less than a mile away. Furthermore, many of the country's learned societies are also located in London; wouldn't it be nice if we had an agreement whereby BM and RAI users could access the information resources of these organisations and they could access ours? Perhaps we could have a learned society libraries co-operative. Again, it's a matter of making a little go a long way by pooling our resources.

With the number of initiatives that we were launching I felt that the Library should have a higher profile. Visits from RAI Fellows had been falling before my arrival and I was charged with reversing this situation. We noted that there was no personal touch to our publicity – users were just invited to contact the Library or the Library Officer. So at every opportunity the Senior Librarian and I made sure that our names appeared on library material to give our users a personal contact – I'd like to use photos as well but I think that might be one for the future. The two RAI journals made little mention of the Library. We have now designed an advert for Anthropology Today urging RAI Fellows and Members to 'Use **Your** Library' – this will be followed by adverts highlighting individual aspects of our service. The frontispiece of JRAI extolled the benefits of Fellowship, but with no mention of the Library – this has now been rectified. We have rewritten the Library pages on the RAI website to give them a more positive slant rather than just reciting facts. We use the news pages of the website to detail any initiatives and we have emailed Fellows promoting our services. Casting our net wider we have also contacted local colleges asking anthropology lecturers to publicise the Library to their students and we follow this with annual open days. However, the result of this barrage of marketing measures is - that I have been an abysmal failure. The number of visits to the Library from RAI Fellows is still falling – and this after a year and a half of my best efforts. So if any of you have alternative suggestions or can tell me where I am going wrong – please see me afterwards.

The title of today's event is the 'changing face of learned and professional society libraries' and I feel that this is appropriate for what we are trying to accomplish – even though we have not always been as successful as we would have wished. I would like to leave you with a quote which seems quite appropriate.

'If you always do what you always did, you will always get what you always got'.

Let us examine every aspect of our services to see what we can initiate, what we can do better and indeed what we can do without.