

Small Changes – Big Difference: Bournemouth University Library and its learning community.

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Abstract

The design of The Sir Michael Cobham Library at Bournemouth University (BU) represents an holistic approach to meeting student expectations. This paper will consider how the latest innovations in Library design are shaped by technology and learning. Parallels will be drawn with the libraries of the ancient world, printing revolution of the fifteenth century and their impact on learning. Best practice was used in the design of BU Library and continues to inform enhancements to the learning space. The big differences made by small changes are discussed; especially the changes in the boundary between group social and silent study space to ensure that library buildings are still seen as relevant in an increasingly digital world.

The student experience at BU is enhanced by innovative pedagogical frameworks that bring together learning activities and academically- led quality e-resources within the unit of study. In this environment the JISC (2007) description of ICT “fading into the foreground” becomes a reality as students embrace new technologies and own the library space in which they are available.

In our reckoning there have been three ICT revolutions.

The first was the development of writing. Beforehand the only vehicle for storing information was the human memory. Transmission relied on speech and signs. If content was not to perish with the individual, replication needed time and personal contact. After writing’s invention, portable storage media decreased the restrictions imposed by time and space. Knowledge was much less vulnerable: more could be stored and passed from generation to generation and to distant lands. Critical thinking was enhanced.

While writing represented a huge advance, scholars in the world of manuscripts knew severe limitations. They tended to travel to manuscripts, which were often in jeopardy: witness the destruction at Alexandria. It was very difficult to determine provenance and authority, and to compare texts. Dissemination by copying tended to corrupt texts.

It is very difficult for us now to appreciate the scale and impact of the second ICT revolution – printing with movable type. Scholars in the late 15th and early 16th centuries were however under no illusions. We hear of Johann Fust having to flee Paris, whose inhabitants believed that only someone in league with the devil could produce so many perfect copies of the bible. Later Fust was conflated with Georg (later Johann) Faust, who was of course reputed to have sold his soul to the devil in return for knowledge (Eisenstein 1993, pp19-20). Particularly telling is the association of a technology, so marvellous that it could only be achieved through necromancy, with the pursuit of that most dangerous commodity – knowledge.

For the scholar the advances represented by printing were marked. The possibilities of *obtaining* texts were hugely enhanced. By 1503 8 million books had been printed, more, it is estimated, than the number of manuscripts produced between 330AD, the founding of Constantinople, and 1453, when it fell to the Turks; the cost of copying one manuscript equated to the cost of producing over 300 printed books (Eisenstein 1993, pp13-14). Provenance and authority were enhanced by the use of title pages; texts became more organised and exploitable through indexes, tables of contents etc. Later editions *improved* texts; they did not corrupt them.

Other advances are echoed in today’s electronic revolution. Luther nailed his Ninety-five Theses to the door of Wittenberg’s Schlosskirche on 31 October 1517. Within two weeks they were translated and known throughout Germany, throughout Europe in a month (Eisenstein 1993, p153). For contemporaries this lightning speed was as fantastic as the speed of electronic communication today.

Eisenstein (1993, p45) also notes that printing fostered social and intellectual combinatory activity. Much innovative scholarly work was undertaken outside the established academic centres. Printers developed networks of contributors and researchers, to improve their texts and give a competitive edge. Again this strikes a chord with the development of virtual research communities today (Borda *et al.* 2006).

Eisenstein (1993, p80) also quotes Thomas Jefferson on the preservative powers of print:

How many of the precious works of antiquity were lost while they existed only in manuscript? Has there ever been one lost since the art of printing has rendered it practicable to multiply and disperse copies? This leads us then to the only means of preserving ... that is a multiplication of printed copies.

These points forward to the LOCKSS initiative –Lots Of Copies Keeps Stuff Safe.

These echoes of very current concerns and issues remind us that there is every reason to believe that the current, third ICT revolution will have as far-reaching effects as the first two. Our duty as librarians is to embrace, lead and harness change. As David Penniman of the University at Buffalo remarked, “To remain what it is, the library must change . . . if it does not change, it will not remain what it is”. It is with this remark, and the historical context, in mind that we have approached the design of our library and its services.

In 2007 the Sir Michael Cobham Library won the quinquennial SCONUL Library Design Award. This recognised the “intelligence” of the building and its ability to adapt. Shelia Cannell, Chair of the SCONUL Working Group on Space Planning, said “This building can continue to respond to changes in library service, because it is so flexible”.

Since opening in 2003 six years of making small changes has created a space to meet the needs of the digital student. Use of the space has increased in spite of continuing growth in the use of e-resources and decline in the use of print (Ball, 2007; Beard and Dale, 2008).





Figure 1: Bournemouth University Library User Activity Analysis

The ability to succeed is the ability to adapt. It's about embracing and leading change, drawing on support from those around you. We must create an active learning environment not only by maximising space but also by ensuring it is sympathetic to the developing pedagogy and to students' expectations.

These words were written by David Ball to encapsulate the 50th anniversary of the Library at Bournemouth, a celebration that, like this article, drew parallels with the history of writing and printing.

Good library design demonstrates agility and adaptability in the use of space (Heppel *et al.* 2004). Virtual environments enable integration of resources within the unit of study. The rate of change for higher education libraries in the UK is exponential but is full of opportunity (Guardian 2008).

Student feedback and observations as well as evolving pedagogy have led to the introduction of technology-rich areas for learning. Enhancements include interactive smart boards and WiFi zones for silent study. During summer 2008 the spaces for social learning were extended. This has proved popular with students, especially the introduction of six "techno booths" that allow groups to work interactively with a range of technologies.



Figure 2: Techno Booths

Attention to detail - for example signing, choice of fixtures, fittings and technology or the introduction of machines for drinks and snacks - considerably enhances the experience of using the library. Background to the choices which underpinned the design is given in the article by Beard and Dale (2008) and images are displayed on the University website.

As well as reflecting on changes and adaptations at BU, there is value in looking for examples from across Higher Education and other sectors. The Liber and Designing Libraries sites give examples including those from BU.

In a world increasingly dominated by technology the academic library has become a place to learn that is constantly adapting and changing, reflecting “what the student does” (Biggs 2007). The JISC Student Expectations Study (2007) described ICT “fading into the foreground”. This succinctly describes the BU experience as students embrace new technologies and readily own the library space in which they are available. The successful personal and silent space but with good access to wireless technology is as important as the technology rich group spaces.

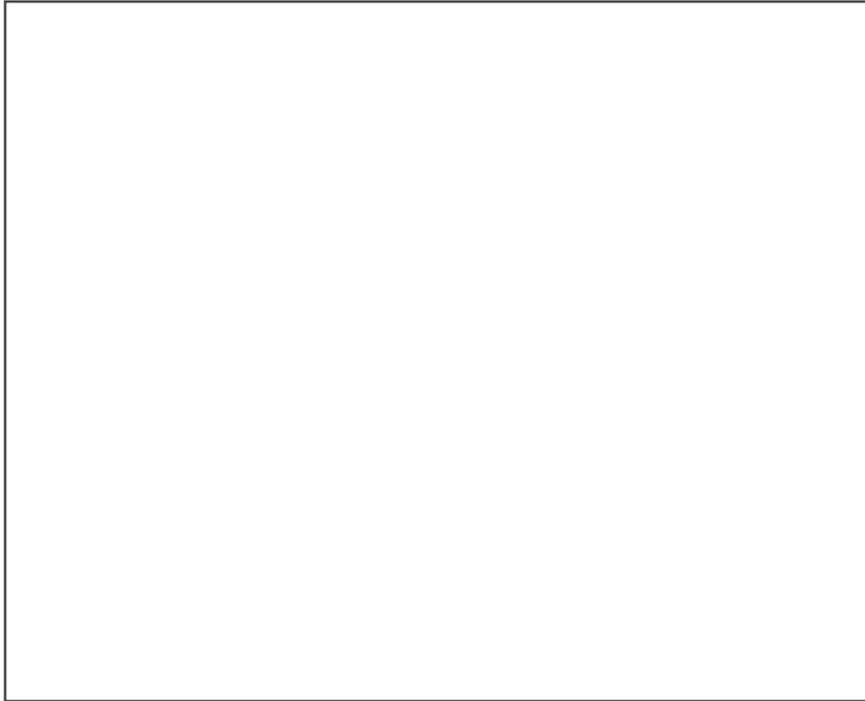


Figure 3: Silent Study

The big differences made by small changes has resulted in the opening in 2009 at BU of a paperless library for postgraduate business students where each student will be equipped with an e-book reader to access their e-resources. The positive student feedback on “techno-booths” with their versatility offering possibilities for group research, ideas generation, report writing and presentation preparation is at the centre of the group technology rich space in the new Executive Business School Library.

Following the introduction of a University-wide virtual learning environment (VLE) in 2006, BU library has developed a number of innovative ways to exploit the possibilities it provides. The high profile Library Tab brings together all library resources and services.

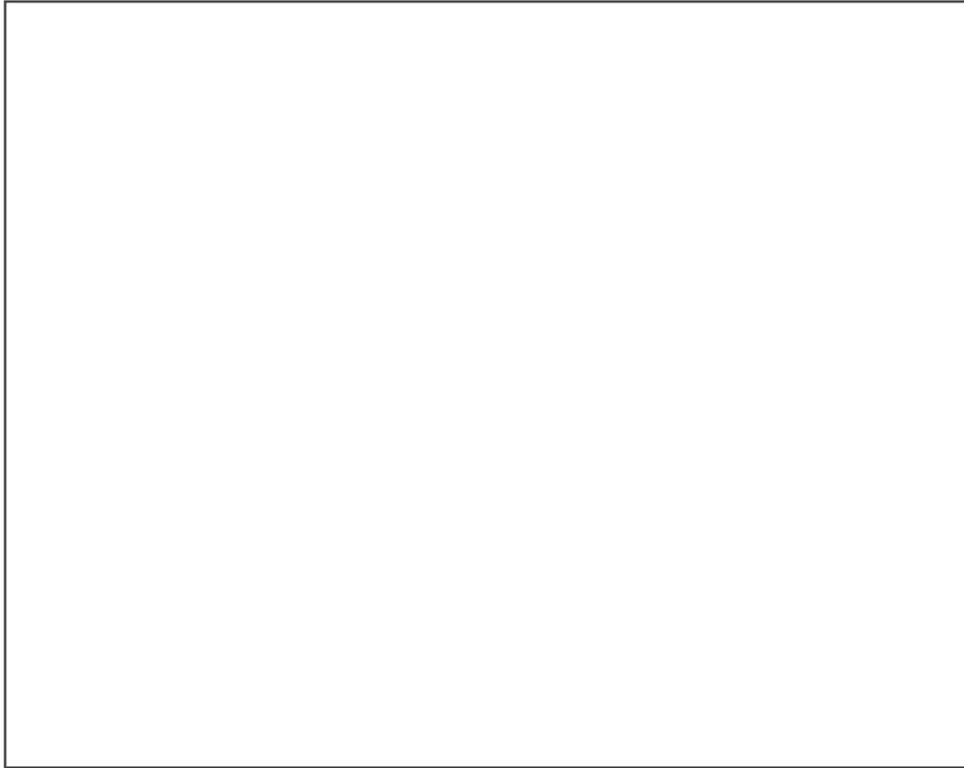


Figure 4. myBU: Library Tab

The potential of the Library Tab was enhanced by the helpful timing of a vital external factor. The UK Copyright Licensing Agency (CLA) introduced a trial licence for photocopying and scanning in 2006, enabling BU to scan sections of books and make them available at unit level on the newly commissioned VLE. In August 2008 the CLA licence was established and extended to US publishers (subject to exclusions). Making material available on my BU at unit level has not only embedded important e-resources within the unit of study, but has freed up space in The Sir Michael Cobham Library to disband the poorly used short loan collection and re-figure the space within the social learning area of the library. This example of the synergy between the pedagogies of e-learning and an important space where learning occurs is explored further in the decision to integrate reading lists into the VLE. As Beard and Dale (2008) note "Reading lists are part of a directional package on a route to resource discovery".

Our next innovations will endeavour to save the time of the user. We have established a VLE community focusing on getting the best out of all the learning resources provided by the library and are introducing ways of saving the academic time when identifying e-resources to include in reading lists and our collections.

In 2007 funding from the Higher Education Academy enabled BU Library to accelerate work already in progress to support learning and teaching in rapidly evolving digital environments. The project, entitled "eRes: Innovative e-Learning with e-Resources", aimed to enhance the student learning experience by developing and disseminating:

1. innovative pedagogical frameworks which bring together learning activities and academically led quality e-resources within the unit of study
2. an e-reading strategy which encompasses models for resource discovery and e-literacy

3. guidelines on the appropriate support required by academics from librarians, staff developers and learning technologists

Academic staff from across BU contributed case studies, describing how Web 2.0 technologies embedded in their teaching materials were benefiting students. The pedagogical frameworks described in the eRes project were designed to stimulate and encourage learning in a variety of situations. Examples include motivating large cohorts, encouraging meaningful revision and stimulating interest in subjects perceived as difficult. A number of the case studies considered how to promote effective reading strategies in a digital environment using tools including wikis, blogs and social bookmarking. Full details of the case studies and the briefing papers generated by the project are available from the eRes web page.

The sweeping changes brought about by the introduction of printing in late 15th and early 16th centuries took time, in some cases several centuries, to impact on the general population of Europe and the wider world. By contrast, the technological revolution of the last few decades has quickly reached all sectors of most societies. The relative speed with which Luther's Ninety-five Theses were spread across Europe has been surpassed by the instantaneous dissemination of communication technologies. The individual is the common denominator in all of this; the scholar who takes advantage of the opportunities available to them. Libraries are still a vital linchpin, enabling learning and supporting scholarship and research.

Our building delivers inspiration and we hope our services facilitate learning within our community. Each small change delivers a big difference to our users.

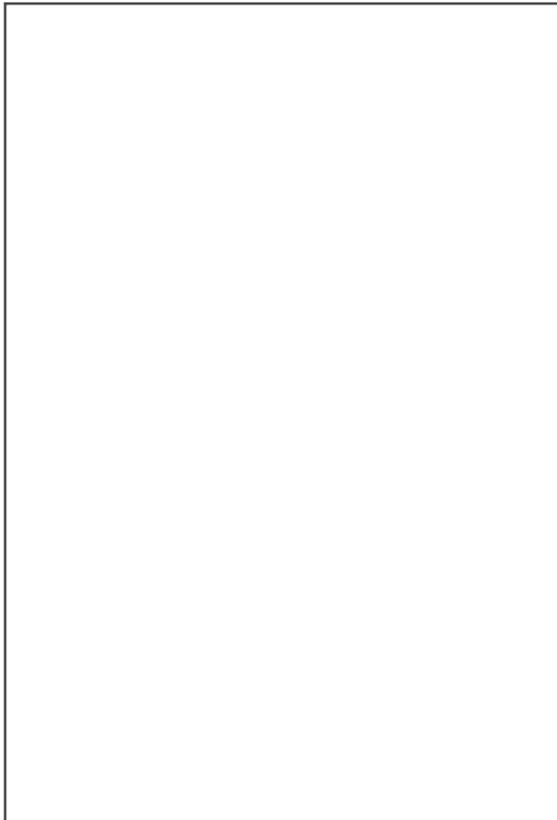


Figure 4: The Sir Michael Cobham Library.

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