

# A day in the life...

Ian Leadley, The British Library

Most of the press coverage on The British Library in recent years has been devoted to the saga of the new building. However, another part of the library has been quietly working away providing documents to the world. Over the last thirty years The British Library Document Supply Centre, now part of the Bibliographic Services and Document Supply directorate, has provided more than eighty-seven million documents to 19 000 customers world-wide.

The customers are from all sectors of the economy and from all over the world. There are 11 000 international customers from more than 140 countries, ranging from Fairbanks, Alaska, to Valdivia, Chile; and from Tromsø, Norway to Invercargill, New Zealand.

More than four million requests are sent to the centre each year, which means that, on average, every working day the seven hundred staff process

16 700 requests. The record total for requests in one week is 103 000 — if all these had been put in a pile they would have been slightly taller than the eight storey building which houses most of the current literature collection.

The Centre has more than 260 000 journal titles and 350 000 conference proceedings on the shelves. Many customers are just beginning to appreciate the scale of the collections now that the Centre's OPAC is freely available on the Web (<http://opac97.bl.uk>).

Normally the staff are too busy processing the requests to speculate on why a particular customer wanted a document. It is only when examples are being collected for possible inclusion in articles like this that we have the luxury to do so. Following are some examples of the requests received:

- an article from the journal *Denki Kagaku* on 'Electrochemically immobilised needle-type glucose sensor' is

going to a university library in the United States.

- a research centre in The Netherlands wants an article 'Nuovi satbilizzanti polimerici per p.v. all'acqua' from *Pitture E Vernici*
- an Australian university requires an article from Vol 50, 1997 of the *Netherlands Journal of Medicine*.
- a Columbian university needs the 1965 article 'The investent decision under uncertainty' from *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*.
- a manufacturer in France was sent a copy of a paper from *Durability of metal aircraft structures* (proceedings of the International Workshop on Structural Integrity of Ageing Airplanes 1992).
- a Scottish university has been sent an article from *Colliers*, 1949, Vol 124. The article by Lee Rogow is entitled 'Tooth Fairy'.

The journal collection dates back to 1664. The oldest article supplied on this typical day is from *Annals of Agriculture and Other Useful Arts*, Vol 13, 1790 and is going to a public library in the United Kingdom.

All these and thousands more documents will be sent to customers by the end of a typical day. A further 795 requests for items not held at the Centre will be passed on to other libraries in the United Kingdom, who will supply the customer with the document.

On average 750 requests will not be satisfied immediately. These will be returned to customers because the details quoted were not sufficient to trace the document, despite extensive bibliographic searching.

Another 430 requests will be returned with the message to re-apply later when the item will be available.

Finally, only 890 of the 16 700 requests will be returned to the customer where the document cannot be provided.

In addition to the service charge for providing the photocopy the Centre collects a publication-specific copyright fee, where applicable, from the customer. An estimated £1.8 million per year is distributed to publishers world-wide via the United Kingdom Copyright Licensing Agency and through agreements with publishers. ■

## Library technicians welcome new sponsors

Yvonne Brock, president, Queensland Library Technician Section

The Queensland Library Technician Section is happy to announce a second major sponsor for their annual Library Technician Student of the Year quest. Queensland Library Supplies have come on board and will contribute \$200 to the prize pool. ALIA Queensland Branch Council have been the major sponsors of the quest since its inception in 1991. Spokesperson for Queensland Library Supplies, Noela Waugh, stated that the company is very happy to sponsor such a worth-while project and anticipate further contributions in years to come.

The current executive has also been able to embark on a more aggressive advertising campaign with the help of DANKA Australia, a leading supplier of paper. DANKA donated a considerable supply of photocopying paper which has allowed the Section to attach a full-page supplement in the ALIA Queensland Branch Council news letter *Quill* over the next few months. It is hoped with the new approach, a more attractive prize and a new selection criteria the competition will attract more participants. The competition is open to all Library Technician students who completed their studies in 1998 throughout Queensland. Further information can be obtained by visiting our homepage at <http://www.alia.org.au/sections/libt/qld/index.html>, reading the 'Quill' supplement or by contacting Yvonne Brock, section president on 07 3896 2229, or Jo-Anne Dusha, project coordinator on 07 3826 8395.

Thank you Queensland Library Supplies and DANKA Australia.