Love's labours . . . creation of a union list of art, architecture and designserials

Miranda Stead

The Union list of art, architecture and design serials, an online database of periodicals on fine and applied arts, film and television held by academic, public, national and special libraries throughout the UK and Ireland, has been some ten years in the making and work is still progressing. In autumn 2000 funding was obtained to allow for greater progress on this critical research tool, extending the coverage of participating libraries and enhancing the bibliographical records. However the work of increasing the level of participation in the Union list has largely been taken forward by direct approaches to individual institutions and by July 2002 there will be over 60 participating libraries as well as fuller bibliographic citations.

The National Art Library (NAL)1 is now some ten years into the work of producing a comprehensive online listing of art, architecture and design periodicals (or 'serials') held throughout the UK and Ireland. The Union list includes titles in the fine and applied arts, photography, film and television and covers, amongst its 27 specified subject areas, advertising, book arts, ceramics, comics, costume, fashion, furniture, garden design, interior design, printing, and theatre design.

By definition the project, which is overseen by ARLIS/UK & Ireland, the Art Libraries Society,2 is one which can never be 'finished' as participating institutions are always adding, disposing of and terminating subscriptions for serials.

Nevertheless the NAL and ARLIS would like to see the number of participating institutions increase significantly to ensure comprehensive coverage for those who use the list. It should be an invaluable tool
- helping researchers and institutions to locate documents
- assisting institutions in making acquisition and disposal decisions (for instance, by identifying other institutions that hold a particular serial)
- leading to a degree of rationalisation
- providing details of the serials holdings of institutions that do not currently have an online presence
- providing dedicated subject access for journals.

Background

1978 saw the publication of the first edition of the ARLIS Union list of art periodicals under Graham Bullock's editorship. A second hard copy edition edited by John Kirby was published in 1982 and contained over 3,000 titles. By the time of the third edition the List had grown to some 6,500 titles. Although it was always ARLIS's intention to produce a further edition, the task of maintaining the list proved beyond its resources and the 1984 edition became increasingly inaccurate and out of date.

However, the case for an updated and properly maintained union list remained as relevant as ever and the need became more pressing with the ever-increasing growth of serial holdings. The NALs move in 1991 to computerise its own serial records, which would in any case constitute a major part of any updated union list, provided the opportunity and the impetus to produce an online edition of the list.

The NALs offer to produce this online edition, which would be easier to maintain and offer easier and wider access, was agreed by ARLIS.

Producing the new online list

An ARLIS Working Party, reporting to the ARLIS
National Co-ordination Committee, was established to oversee the project, which has essentially proceeded in three stages.

The first stage consisted of placing the NAL's serial lists on the Internet. It was generally felt that breaking the back of this physically large task would make it much easier to incorporate the serials of other institutions. The second stage was the online listing of the holdings of a restricted number of institutions, which were selected on the basis of the known size and relevance of their holdings and with the specific intention of keeping the information received to manageable proportions. Not all the selected institutions proved to be in a position to respond immediately but progress was made. By 1999 around 26,000 locations were recorded for 14,000 serials held by some 40 libraries.

The third, current, stage is the listing of all other institutions with relevant holdings. These are institutions which have been (or will be) directly approached for details or who respond to notices placed in the ARLIS publications. Past experience suggested, however, that the projected expansion in the list's coverage would be very slow unless a dedicated resource could be committed to the task. For instance, one very practical problem was the large number of libraries unable to provide ISSNis for the titles on their lists, requiring detailed investigation to ensure the correct identification of the serial before a search on bibliographic databases for a suitable bibliographic record to which to attach holdings information. In addition new bibliographic records had to be created for serials not held by the NAL and minimal level bibliographical records already included in the union list from contributing libraries enhanced. It was therefore decided to seek additional funding for the project.

Award of additional funding and management

In spring 2000 the NAL and ARLIS submitted a bid to the British Library's Co-operation and Partnership Programme to enable further development and expansion of the Union list. In July the British Library (BL) announced that the project had been awarded £67,500, jointly funded by the BL and the Research Support Libraries Programme (RSLP). The express aims of the project were to extend the coverage of the online database so that it recorded the art and design serials held by some 60 libraries in the UK and Ireland, to improve the bibliographic records or the holdings already listed, and to produce an online Directory of art resources in the UK and Ireland.

In August 2000 a Project Officer was appointed and a new phase of the project effectively commenced in September. Within the NAL the Project Officer reports to the Chief Cataloguer and the ARLIS National Co-ordination Committee continues to monitor the project at its quarterly meetings. In addition a Project Management Group has been established to oversee the project, including Stephen Bury (British Library), Douglas Dodds (NAL), Stephen Holland (National Library of Scotland and also ARLIS Treasurer), Beth Houghton (Tate Library & Archive), Ruth Kamen (British Architectural Library), and Deborah Shorley (University of Sussex and Chair of ARLIS).

Publicising the project

A number of initiatives have been taken to increase awareness of the project and to maximise participation. The success of the bid was announced at the ARLIS Conference held in Cambridge in July 2000. Press releases were sent to various email lists, including ARLIS-LINK and ARLIS-L and the project has been publicised through the websites for ARLIS and the NAL. Brief articles have been written for the ARLIS News-sheet and for the UK Serials Group journal, and members of the project team have given presentations at the British Library, Boston Spa and at the ARLIS conference in 2001.

In truth, however, the levels of response to these various efforts have been mixed and direct approaches to individual institutions have remained the most effective way of increasing the number of participating libraries.

Progress in developing the list

Some 60 libraries are now included in the Union list and there are online links to national and regional lists such as the British Library Catalogue and the Cambridge Union List of Serials. An additional ten libraries have submitted details of their holdings and these are being worked on at the moment.

There is a very good spread amongst the types and locations of libraries participating. These include the Barber Institute of Fine Art; the British Architectural Library; the British Council Visual Arts Library; the British Film Institute; Cheltenham School of Art; Cleveland College of Art & Design; the Courtauld Institute; Coventry University; Cumbria College of Art and Design; Edinburgh City Libraries (Fine Art Library); Glasgow School of Art; Kingston University; Leeds College of Art and Design; Liverpool John Moores University; the London Institute; Queen's
University of Belfast; the Royal College of Art; University of London; Sheffield Hallam University; the Tate Library; Westminster Reference Library (London).

Since the new phase of the project began, large lists have been received from the British Film Institute and Kingston University and these have been added to the database. The former provided information for over 400 serials, 200 of which have full bibliographic records, while Kingston supplied the titles and holdings of 680 serials, over half of which have full bibliographic records.

Wherever necessary and possible, full bibliographic records have continued to be added, in order to enhance the basic information provided by participating libraries. These records conform to MARC21 and AACR2 standards. When a match can be found on OCLC WorldCat a bibliographic record is transferred and serial holdings are attached where the NAL does not hold the title. When it has not been possible to identify an exact match from the information supplied, minimal records have been created and the effort to enhance these records continues. Details of the increasing number of serials available in print and online are being added in the 530 and 856 fields of the bibliographic record. This has thrown up a number of potential problems since the links need checking regularly to ensure they are functioning and that the information is correct, and research has begun into how best to proceed, given limited ongoing staff resources for this work.

Related Directory

The Union list will be linked to a related directory of art, architecture and design resources including all the libraries which are participating as well as libraries involved in the related HOGARTH project. But the directory is not confined to these participants; it will endeavour to give as wide a coverage as possible of all art resources available to researchers in the UK and Ireland. It will contain information on accessibility and will describe the collections, including details of collection strengths. There will be links to the institution’s web page and any relevant electronic catalogues. This data is being compiled: a survey form has been sent to a large number of libraries to solicit information on their libraries and their collections. In the meantime, a list of organisations included in the union list database is available online.

An Excel spreadsheet is being used to maintain a working list of libraries participating in the project. This indicates those libraries that are already included, those that are in progress, and those that have still to be approached. A prototype Filemaker Pro database has also been established for the directory of art libraries, but alternative solutions are being considered for the live system and a final decision has yet to be taken.

Web interface

Autumn 2000 saw the launch of the prototype web interface to the Union list and the software was subsequently upgraded in February 2001. The union list data is also accessible via the NAL’s own catalogue. The websites for ARLIS and the NAL provide links to the Union list and Directory of art resources.

The future

Work on developing the online union list will continue and considerable progress will have been made by the time the BL and RSLP funding for the project ceases in July 2002. The NAL is currently committed to maintaining the Union list within its database but its ultimate longevity will be determined by the use made of it and the continued participation of contributors in sending details of current holdings, to ensure that the information remains up-to-date.

The Union list would seem to have come to fruition at a propitious time in view of the present discussions about the desirability and feasibility of establishing a National Union Catalogue for the UK. The latest report identifies some interesting points raised during a survey of academic staff, researchers and postgraduates about the appeal amongst this group of the ability to locate journals by subject area. As well there are issues of comprehensiveness, interface functionality, and the expected desirability of having links to full text, particularly in the case of journals. Access to full text raises the thorny questions of authorisation and authentication. The online environment makes union lists potentially a more flexible tool, but does also raise many new expectations and challenges.

References

1. URL for the National Art Library is http://www.nal.vam.ac.uk
2. ARLIS/UK & Ireland: the Art Libraries Society, subsequently referred to in this article as ‗ARLIS‘. URL: http://www.arlis.org.uk
3. URL: http://www.bl.uk/concord/concord.html
4. URL: http://www.rslp.ac.uk
5. Stead, Miranda. ‘Union list of art, architecture and design serials’. *ARLIS news-sheet* no. 147
7. See article by Sarah Gilmour on p.40-43 of this issue of the *Art libraries journal*.
8. The web interface is available at http://catalogue.nal.vam.ac.uk/ulist

9. URL: http://catalogue.nal.vam.ac.uk
URL: http://www.uknuc.shef.ac.uk

Miranda Stead
Project Officer, Union List of Art, Architecture and Design Serials
National Art Library
Victoria & Albert Museum
Cromwell Road
London SW7 2RL
UK
Email: m.stead@vam.ac.uk

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