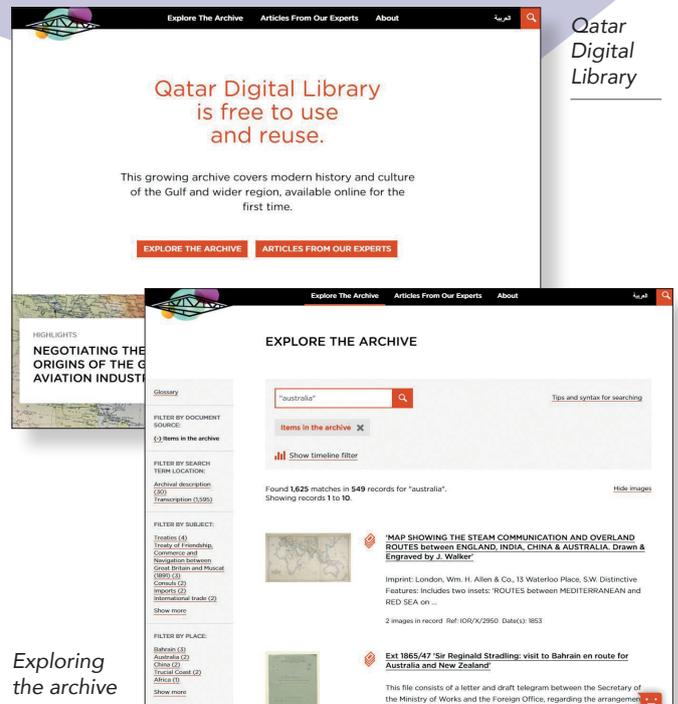


LEARNING FROM INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION AT THE **BRITISH LIBRARY**

When I entered the library and information profession in Australia, I never thought that I would soon be observing and contributing to an international collaborative project based at the British Library in London. As a new graduate, the options seemed endless – from archives and records management to customer services and digital literacy. When searching for jobs, especially when I moved to a new country, it was interesting to see the diversity of roles and the skills sought, but it was also daunting. Recently I have been privileged to join the team responsible for creating the Qatar Digital Library (QDL) as part of a partnership between the British Library (BL) and Qatar National Library (QNL). The project has revealed many practices and skills, such as workflow management, relationship management, continuous improvement and project scheduling, which are key to project management, but also relevant to other library and information work.

The QDL provides free, online, bilingual, searchable, accessible, previously un-digitised material from the BL's collection about culture and history in Qatar and the Gulf region. The diverse material includes India Office Records, maps, personal papers, sound, video, visual arts and Arabic scientific manuscripts, and is enhanced by articles from the BL's subject experts. Material chosen for digitisation is often used by researchers within the BL Reading Rooms in London. Digitising it provides wider access as well as continued preservation. Usage is reported worldwide but is particularly high by people in the Middle East, who are unlikely to be able to easily access the BL's Reading Room. Now in its third phase, and with over 1.5 million images already added to the QDL, the project is an impressive example of how institutional collaboration for mass digitisation is valuable as it shares both knowledge and resources. Furthermore, for the people involved, especially recent graduates such as myself, it is an eye-opening experience and an important cross-disciplinary professional development opportunity.

I have been fascinated to learn about and become part of a mass digitisation project, where all aspects of the workflow are completed in one space with one team. It has also been a unique opportunity to meet and learn from highly qualified people working in a wide range of roles. For example, I have learnt about the practicalities of translating metadata and the challenges of applying



Exploring the archive

optical character recognition to Arabic text. All aspects of the digitisation process are completed at the BL's London building, with a team of more than 45 dedicated and talented staff retrieving it from storage, carrying out conservation checks and imaging the item then cataloguing, copyright clearing, translating, reviewing, and loading the final product on to the QDL. Through discussion with the QNL, the BL staff work to meet agreed standards and deadlines so that output is consistent and reliable. An added challenge is working with colleagues in another country and another time zone.

The project demonstrates how careful workflow management, coordinated teamwork and regular innovation are vital to cross-institutional communication and long-term project success. With all the challenges currently facing libraries and staff, this type of collaboration is vital; sharing knowledge, resources and development opportunities that may not otherwise be available and ensuring access to and preservation of valuable material.

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