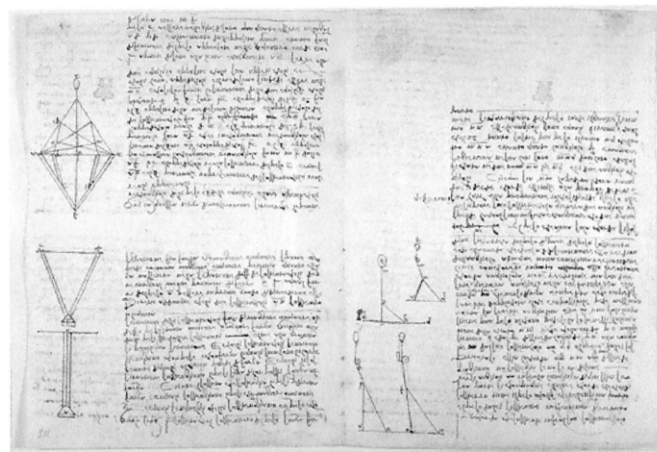




An illustration showing St. Francis from “The Sforza hours”. This manuscript was commissioned about 1490 for Bona of Savoy, widow of Galeazzo Sforza, Duke of Milan.

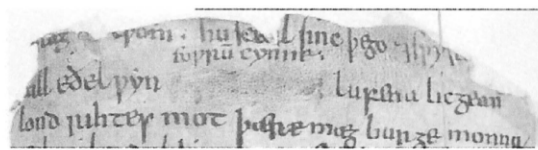


Pages from Leonardo Da Vinci's notebook, the “Codex Arundel”, first acquired in Italy by Thomas Howard, Earl of Arundel in the seventeenth century. The left hand page is about the behaviour of boiling water, the right about the landscaping effect of rivers flowing down mountain peaks. Leonardo's characteristic “mirror writing” is used.

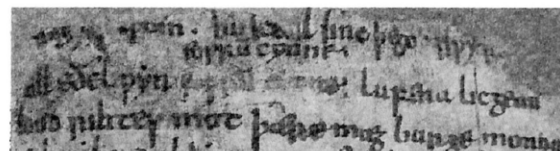


An illustration from "The Sforza hours". This manuscript was commissioned about 1490 for Bona of Savoy, widow of Galeazzo Sforza, Duke of Milan.

Daylight Scan



Ultraviolet Scan



Colour and untraviolet scanning of part of the Beowulf manuscript showing missing characters revealed by ultraviolet light.

Editorial

The British Library has had a bad press about the progress of its new building at St. Pancras, London. Under a *Times* (February 22nd, 1996) editorial headline “books, bits and bungles” the saga of the BL at St. Pancras is described as “a foul-up and a farce”. On the other hand the contractors for the building, into which the BL is waiting to move, are less prominent. Presumably bashing the “establishment” makes a better story.

Libraries and librarians in general have an unexciting reputation; they rarely suffer from the attention of the media. Back in 1986 a well known member of the profession confessed that “librarians suffer from an undesirable image. . . of the buns, beads, and glasses variety”.

If that was ever true the fact is that today many people in the library world have an image which is exactly the opposite – as demonstrated in a seminar entitled “Initiatives for Access” held at the BL’s R&D department earlier in 1996.

The seminar was so interesting that I asked if the material about digitization, indexing, access and reproduction (some of it on the World Wide Web) could be reconstituted as articles for this journal.

The BL kindly agreed and Simon Shaw co-ordinated the author effort. He also sent me discs containing colour photographs of some of the BL’s treasures. They are so good that we are including colour plates of some of them in this issue. Processing from originals to printed page is still a bit of a black art. I hope our reproductions will do them justice.

The BL received the IT Innovation Prize for its Electronic *Beowulf*. Some of its pages may be seen on Internet servers in London and Kentucky. *Beowulf* is the unique manuscript of an English epic poem written in the eleventh century. It was damaged by fire in 1731, and has now been photographed for preservation with such clarity that the microscopic animal hair follicles on its vellum or skin surface are recorded. Erased words have been revealed by ultraviolet scanning (see illustration). After recorded pages are digitized they may be “cleaned” to remove stains or charring, but not written information, by the latest image processing methods.

May I also draw your attention to the important article by Suzanne Keene about the “LASSI” project in this issue. Suzanne dwells upon areas which are not often discussed in this context – and I will quote her remarks:

“A simple overriding principle was applied: technical advice was not to be overruled; if managers disagreed with it or wished to question it, it was to be referred back to authors and re-presented. This avoided a problem invariably found in IT projects: how can senior managers without technical expertise take strategic decisions when these have to be based on technical considerations?”

“Contractual matters receive little attention in the museum IT literature, yet they can be more crucial to success than any other feature of software for both supplier and museum. Contractual negotiation is highly specialised and can be very expensive. The availability of the standard LASSI contract will establish good business relationships between the supplier and the supplier’s agent, and museums, and save vast amounts of time, anxiety and expense.”

A.E. Cawkell