

## Redefining our public spaces



**Green thoughts**  
The popular winter exhibition, *The Writer in the Garden*, displayed the great tradition of garden writing and design. Philip Larkin's lawnmower added a quirky appeal and reviews agreed it was 'an exhibition of dazzling breadth and variety'.



**Sacred display**  
The Guru Nanak School in Hayes, Middlesex, sponsored the conservation of an early copy of the principal Sikh scripture, the *Adi Granth*. It was then lent to the school for display during a religious festival and drew 10,000 visitors to pay their respects.

**Twitter's guide**  
The *Sherborne Missal* is celebrated for the lavish illustrations of bird life that decorate its religious texts. It returned in virtual form to Sherborne this year for the 1,300th anniversary of the Abbey's foundation. We worked with the Abbey and Museum on a display, lectures and a *Turning the Pages* kiosk so visitors could explore the Missal in detail.



**Colour wheel**  
Pali Chadra, a dancer from North India, charms the crowds on the piazza during the summer's world music series. The cross-currents of Silk Road cultures brought epic storytellers, musicians and masked actors to our oasis on the Euston Road.

\* **Great place! Fine time!**  
Our exhibitions and activities cross boundaries and draw diverse audiences. The feedback tells us that 98% of our visitors rate their experience as 'excellent' or 'good'.

# 真棒! 真好玩!

From public spaces equipped with the latest WiFi technology for nomadic internet users to the virtual space of the web itself, the British Library is accommodating record numbers of users in innovative ways.

The British Library's St Pancras building is now the largest WiFi hotspot in the UK measured by numbers of users and one of the largest in Europe. Researchers, students and business people with laptops through public areas that are buzzing with activity. It's a symbolic transformation for the public areas of a building that people might assume would be hushed and reverential.

The accent on WiFi – technology that enables users to connect to the internet without wires or cables – epitomises the way the Library is making services more responsive to a new generation of users. A trial of WiFi furniture with built-in power supplies proved a great success and four

designs are now being installed in the Library's public areas and Reading Rooms. In addition 145 workstations are available to give Readers free web access.

'We wanted to demonstrate that we were responding to our Readers' needs and the needs of the public as a whole,' says John de Lucy, Head of Estates. 'At the same time we have become a popular meeting place. Our cafés, restaurants and public areas are being used by growing numbers of business people and other visitors.'

With the Library's exhibitions and public events increasingly popular, the number of visitors to the Library has risen sharply. The official 'footfall' measure was up from 75,000 to 100,000 a month by the end of the year. The *Silk Road* exhibition broke all records, drawing over 150,000 visitors to see a wealth of treasures from Chinese Central Asia on show for the first time. Many visitors

attended linked attractions, including music on the piazza and a series of workshops and talks. World renowned cellist Yo-Yo Ma and his Silk Road Ensemble took part in a special workshop for teenagers from London's Turkish, Chinese and other Asian communities organised in partnership with BBC Proms.

'We set out to make people in the UK and abroad aware of the Library as a major public attraction,' says Heather Norman Söderlind, Head of Public and Regional Marketing. 'The *Silk Road* was a huge success and our biggest summer show to date. Increasing numbers of people are now coming back to the Library's exhibitions for the fourth or fifth time, whereas a year ago the vast majority were visiting the galleries for the very first time.'

We showcased the Library's creative resources in partnership with the London Design Festival, and worked with typographic

designers and writers to produce a special exhibition and book, *26 Letters*, celebrating the creative power of the alphabet. 'The Library is a marvellous resource for the creative industries,' says Carol Meads, Manager, Creative and Media Marketing. 'People involved in *26 Letters* found the project changed their view of the Library and helped them to appreciate its true value.'

Through its regional programme the Library has raised its profile at public libraries and schools around the country, reaching out to local people. An exhibition at Leeds Central Library gave a taste of the treasures on offer, including a facsimile of the *Lindisfarne Gospels* and a kiosk with the *Turning the Pages* system that displayed ten of the Library's most beautiful and historic works. 'The Library is not just the physical space here in London,' says Stephanie Kenna, Manager, Regional and Library Programmes.

'It's a virtual space and a local space too because increasingly people will be able to gain access through their local library.'

The biggest public space of all is the web. Since the Library set up its own website ten years ago it has pioneered new ways of making its resources available online and interpreting them in ways appropriate for specialist researchers, schools and colleges and the public. Demand has reached record levels, exceeding 2.9 million unique users during the year. The new *Online Gallery* brings together all of the Library's web offerings for a public audience, including a guide to what is on in the galleries, an opportunity to experience highlights electronically and in-depth information about some of the greatest treasures.

Digital technology is transforming access for both the public and researchers through new initiatives such as the *Collect*

*Britain* website, which showcases 100,000 items of regional significance. The selection represents a cross-section of the Library's British collections – from medieval manuscripts and maps to sound clips and photographs. In the *Expressions of Faith* section, Ravi Shankar and Lord Robert Winston are among prominent people from different faiths and walks of life who express their personal views on a selection of favourite sacred manuscripts.

