British Library cyber-attack – some tips for workarounds

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Following the cyber-attack, our colleagues in the British Library are working very hard to restore operations and services. As the disruption is likely to continue for a few weeks, below is a list of tips for some workarounds.

BL updates and contacts

Regularly check the British Library blog and their Twitter feed @BLpressoffice for updates on the current status of their services. You can contact the BL via Twitter or by emailing customer@bl.uk (be prepared for delay in responses).

Do you have a BL login? Reset your password

Following last week’s confirmation that this was a ransomware attack, we now have evidence that indicates the attackers might have copied some user data, and additional data appears to have been published on the dark web. We will continue to work with cybersecurity specialists to examine what this material is and we will be contacting our users to advise them of the practical steps they may need to take. If you have a password for British Library services that you use on other websites, we recommend you change it elsewhere as a precaution. NCSC provides guidance on staying secure online, including how to create a strong password: https://bit.ly/BLNCSC. You can also find specific guidance for individuals who may have been impacted by a data breach: https://bit.ly/BLNCSCData

Geospatial Data Application (GDAS) – Legal Deposit Map Data

Please note that Geospatial Data Application (GDAS) – the viewer on which the legal deposit digital map data is viewed – is not directly affected. Normal service is available from a single PC in the Map Room.

Tip 1: Finding alternative copies

Researchers can obviously double-check iDiscover for alternative copies, but may also want to consider HathiTrust or Archive.org for older and out-of-copyright material.

Although the British Library catalogue is not available, you can still check for British Library published material in Library Hub Discover. This resource is a database of 204 UK and Irish academic, national & specialist library catalogues. If you want to easily find a copy in another library in the UK, then make friends with Library Hub Discover!
Recommend a Purchase for the Cambridge University Libraries (Cambridge staff and students only)

The university library has a policy which allows for some purchasing of materials which usually are available via non print legal deposit terminals in the libraries. This policy is available here.

If, when you check iDiscover, an item is not held in Cambridge or it is not accessible because it is a Non-Print Legal Deposit item, you can suggest a book for purchase using our Recommendation form.

Document delivery services

These alternatives are available to Cambridge University staff and students. Although Interlibrary Loan services mediated by the British Library have been impacted by the cyber attack, there are alternative sources of materials such as RapidILL. The Scan and Deliver service can also provide copies of materials from within Cambridge University Libraries. You can find out more about what is available here.

Tip 2: Finding and locating BL open shelf collections

The BL reading rooms are still open for private research and collections which are on the open shelves, can therefore be used. So, how do you find those when the BL catalogue is down?

In Library Hub Discover’s Advanced Search, you can limit your search to BL St Pancras in the Library section. You can at least copy the shelfmark and make your way to London.

Admissions

The BL can only issue temporary reader tickets at the moment. If you already have a card and it needs renewing, this will probably be slightly easier than those who need to register for the first time. Contact customer@bl.uk if you need help but be prepared for a delayed response as our colleagues will be terrifically busy with enquiries.

Tip 3: Accessing British Library website content

BL websites will have been archived, probably to varying degrees of depth, by the Internet Archives Wayback Machine.
If you have the URL of the webpage you want to access, just type it into the search box and you will be presented with a calendar indicating the days and years when a snapshot of the webpage was taken:

Wayback Machine showing when the BL website on its Collections (http://www.bl.uk/collection-items) were archived.

Some formatting may be a bit odd and, depending how deeply the content was crawled, you may not always get the full content. It also loads quite slowly. However, as an example some sound recordings are available:
So, how do you find the URL of a BL website?

This becomes a little more ‘interesting’. The easiest is to Google, hopefully find the webpage you are interested in, make a note of the URL string and put it into the Wayback Machine. Please note that this may not always work, if e.g. names of URL were changed over time.

You may also come across links to the BL webpages from other sources. This can of course include the BL’s own Blogs which don’t appear to be affected by the cyberattack. A list of BL blogs is webarchived at the Wayback Machine, you will need to enter https://www.bl.uk/blogs/ into the search bar.

Please note that this technique will not work for URLs of content in databases with dynamic content such as library catalogues, archive catalogues, etc. none of these are crawled by the Wayback Machine.

Tip 4. Looking for the ESTC?

The English Short Title Catalogue (ESTC) is the definitive union catalogue for early British or English language books, covering publications printed before 1800. The BL website for ESTC is down. A temporary version of the pre-1700 ESTC is hosted at https://estc.printprobability.org/.
However, if you are fortunate enough to have access to a library which has Early English Books Online and the Eighteenth Century Collections Online, then that is a great alternative because you can then also look at the digital copy.

**Tip 5. Looking for BL Special Collections?**

You may be able to use other sources to find descriptions of BL Special Collections. It can be a bit tricky but here are some suggestions:

Both The National Archives and The Archives Hub describe collections held in repositories in the UK, including the British Library. You can limit your search to just the British Library and get some description and shelfmarks. In some instances, the description also mentions microfilmed versions which may be accessible in another library.

A search in The National Archives Discovery tool for India Office material held in the British Library.

Many BL archival and rare book materials have been digitised in source databases, such as the East India Company. You can get a list of these databases by searching our A-Z Databases for "British Library". Current staff and students can then of course access these, using Raven for remote access.
If you are an external reader and would like to register with the Cambridge University Libraries, check out our information who can use the library.

NEED HELP? THEN JUST GET IN TOUCH!

There are a few other things one can try. If you need any help, do get in touch by emailing your subject librarian, details can be found on this list. If you have a disability, you can also contact disability@lib.cam.ac.uk to ask if we can find an alternative.