MEMORY OF THE WORLD REGISTER

The Historic Ethnographic Recordings (1898 – 1951) at the British Library
(United Kingdom)

Ref N° 2010-37

PART A – ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

1 SUMMARY

The British Library holds over 3.5 million sound recordings, representing an estimated 66 years of continuous listening, held on virtually every sound carrier known, from tinfoil to hard disc drive. Prominent within this is the collection of Historic Ethnographic Recordings, consisting of more than 3,500 unique mechanical sound recordings made, for the most part, during the era before the availability of magnetic recording.

The Historic Ethnographic Recordings collection contains field recordings of orally transmitted cultures made throughout the world by linguists and musicologists. Some of these recordings represent the earliest extant sources for research into those cultures, and have captured in the most vivid format available at the time, unmediated by foreign textual interpretation, a linguistic and cultural diversity in a precious moment on the cusp of today’s ‘global village’. Not only were these recordings among the first of such to be made but also they may be the last: many of the languages and musical practices that feature in this collection are endangered or no longer exist.

Furthermore, the recordings are examples of historic scholarly endeavour of the highest calibre. Bronislaw Malinowski and Klaus Wachsmann were among the most prominent researchers in their respective fields of anthropology and ethnomusicology. Arthur Fox Strangways’ Music of Hindostan (1914) remains essential reading for anyone interested in north Indian classical traditions while Bogumil Andrzejewski is considered among the most important researchers on Somalian poetry, not only by scholars but also by today’s practicing Somalian poets.

In short, as these recordings were made instantaneously and not reproduced in the manner of, for example, commercial wax cylinders or shellac discs, they are irreplaceable.

The technological and preservation-based restrictions on access to these recordings have gradually been overcome and more and more extensive research of international significance has been carried out on them, resulting in scholarly publications issued from the era of their capture up to the present day.

2 DETAILS OF THE NOMINATOR

2.1 Name (person or organisation)

The British Library Board

2.2 Relationship to the documentary heritage nominated

Custodian or owner

2.3 Contact person (s)
2.4 Contact details (include address, phone, fax, email)

The British Library, 96 Euston Road, London NW1 2DB, UK
Tel: +44 (0)20 7412 7424
Fax: +44 (0)20 7412 7441
email: richard.ranft@bl.uk

3 IDENTITY AND DESCRIPTION OF THE DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE

3.1 Name and identification details of the items being nominated

The Historic Ethnographic Recordings (1898 – 1951) at the British Library

Custodian (full ownership details under 5 below): The British Library Board, 96 Euston Road, London NW1 2DB, UK.

3.2 Description

The Historic Ethnographic Recordings are managed according to recordist or research expedition, each given a BL reference (C number) for identification, storage and retrieval. These are, in BL reference order, as follows:

Klaus Wachsmann [instantaneous lacquer discs] (Uganda (1949-50) BL ref. C4
Baldwin Spencer cylinders (Central Australia, 1901-02) BL ref. C6
EFDSS cylinders (UK/Ireland, recorded by Vaughan Williams, et al, 1907-19) BL ref. C37
Bronislaw Kasper Malinowski cylinders (Papua New Guinea, Trobriand Islands, 1918) BL ref. C46
Northcott Whitridge Thomas cylinders (Nigeria, Sierra Leone, 1908-15) BL ref. C51
Arnold Bake cylinders (Nepal, India, Sri Lanka, 1925-41) BL ref. C52
Charles Gabriel Seligmann New Guinea cylinders (New Guinea, 1898, 1904) BL ref. C62
Arthur Henry Fox Strangways cylinders (India, 1910-11) BL ref. C72
Torres Straits cylinders (Torres Straits, PNG, Haddon, Myers, et al 1898) BL ref. C80
R.A.I. Bougainville cylinders (Papua New Guinea, unidentified recordist) BL ref. C83
Charles Gabriel Seligmann Vedda cylinders [Frazer set] (Sri Lanka, Vanuatu etc, 1907-1909) BL ref. C86
Sir Harry Johnston cylinders (Uganda, 1901) BL ref. C107
W.H.R. Rivers cylinders (Solomon Islands, 1907-08) BL ref. C108
Alice Werner cylinders (Kenya, 1912-13) BL ref. C145
Captain Robert Sutherland Rattray cylinders (Ghana, Ashanti, 1921-22) BL ref. C176
John Layard Atchin cylinders (Vanuatu, 1914-15) BL ref. C177
W.F. Cooper cylinders (Paraguay, pre 1910) BL ref. C332
Arthur Morris Jones [lacquer discs] (Zambia, Ghana, 1936-50) BL ref. C424
Madras Museum cylinders (S. India, recorded by Thurston & Rangachari, ca. 1905) BL ref. C624
Edith Durham cylinders (Albania, Montenegro, 1905) BL ref. C662
Baluchi cylinders (Baluchistan, unknown recordist,1911) BL ref. C663
Borneo cylinders (Borneo& Sarawak, recorded by Haddon, Myers, et al,1899) BL ref. C666
Bosnia cylinders (Bosnia, unknown recordist,1909) BL ref. C667
China cylinders (China, Canton, unknown recordist post 1910) BL ref. C668
James cylinders (Central Africa, pre 1910) BL ref. C669
Japan cylinders (Japan, unknown recordist, post 1910) BL ref. C670
Paul D. Montague cylinders (New Caledonia, 1914) BL ref. C671
W. Scoresby Routledge cylinders (Kenya, 1907-08) BL ref. C672
Sakhalin cylinders (Sakhalin Island, recorded by Bronislav Pilsudski, 1902-03) BL ref. C673
Taraie cylinders BL ref. C674
O. Temple cylinders (Nigeria, 1912) BL ref. C675
John Lancelot Todd cylinders (Mozambique, pre 1910; now believed to be Democratic Republic of Congo) BL ref. C676
Lengua cylinders BL ref. C677
Suffolk cylinders (England, ‘Mrs Walter Thomas’ speech, date unknown) BL ref. C678
American cylinders (USA, 1913, unknown recordist) BL ref. C679
Unidentified cylinders (Solomon Islands, New Georgia etc, date unknown) BL ref. C680
Baldwin Spencer 1912 cylinders (North Australia, 1912) BL ref. C681
Alfred Reginald Radcliffe-Brown cylinder (West Australia, 1910-12) BL ref. C682
John Lorne Campbell cylinders (Hebrides, Cape Breton (1937-42) BL ref. C801
Bogumil Witalis Andrzejewski lacquer discs (Somalia, 1950-51) BL ref. C1388

Access details:

Provenance: prior to the formation of the British Institute of Recorded Sound (BIRS) in 1955, which transferred to the British Library in 1983, no central repository existed in the UK for audiovisual research materials, and such collections were lodged with the academic institutions to which the individual field recordists were affiliated. From 1955 the BIRS was able to offer more appropriate long-term housing, and the prospect of public access. Collections were received on permanent loan from The Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, The English Folk Dance and Song Society, The James Frazer Collection (Cambridge), The Museum of Mankind, The Royal Anthropological Institute, The Royal Museum of Scotland and the School of Oriental and African Studies. From the above list of forty collection series, five (C37, C46, C176, C177, C801) are on permanent loan, the remainder are all owned by the British Library.

Analysis of condition: prior to 1955 many individual collections were held in inappropriate conditions, where temperature and humidity allowed mould to develop on the surface of many carriers. The cylinders and discs are now held in the basement storage areas at the British Library’s London St Pancras site that adhere to BS45454:2000 the key elements of which are 16-19C and 45-60%RH with as few fluctuations within these ranges as possible1.

Bibliography (selective):


1 Ideally, for wax cylinders, the specification is 18-20C and 35-45RH. There is a specific strand in the long-term BL storage strategy to see if dedicated storage areas can be created in the main building to house materials which require a different or more critical environmental spec.
4  JUSTIFICATION FOR INCLUSION/ ASSESSMENT AGAINST CRITERIA

4.1  Is authenticity established?
Authenticity is established through contemporary documentation and unbroken chains of ownership and/or custodianship.

4.2  Is world significance, uniqueness and irreplaceability established?
The items are of global significance and all are unique. In many instances the collection represents the earliest known location recordings of specific cultures or ethnic groups. Many languages and cultural practices captured within these recordings have since become extinct or have fundamentally changed and are therefore irreplaceable.

4.3  Is one or more of the criteria of (a) time (b) place (c) people (d) subject and theme (e) form and style (f) social, spiritual and community significance satisfied

(a) time: many recordings in the collection are the earliest to have been made in their locations. For example: the Torres Strait Expedition recordings were the first British-made ethnographic recordings anywhere and also the first recordings to be made in the Torres Strait Islands; The Sir Harry Johnston collection feature the first recordings made anywhere in sub-Sahara.

(b) place: Many of the locations and cultures represented in the collection were and have remained underrepresented internationally. Together, the collection represents not only the subjects recorded, but the overarching research interests of the collectors, and as such forms a representation of the British Empire during that time.

(c) people: Dating largely from the earliest days of recording technology, the collection represents societies at a time before recording technology – or radio – could have had any influence. As such they are unique and irreplaceable.

(d) Subject and Theme: A large proportion of the collection was originally brought together by Sir James Frazer, during the gathering of data which would subsequently produce his 15 volume work The Golden Bough. Frazer is recognised as one of the founding fathers of social anthropology, and the collection documents the emergence of sound recording as a vital tool in its development.

(e) Form & style: The collection is one of the largest of its type in the world, and is in the most part made up of recordable wax cylinders. Given the rarity of the format and extent of the collection, it represents a significant and valuable subject of study from technological, historical and cultural points of view.

(f) social, spiritual and community significance: The collection demonstrates a complexity of expression and belief not otherwise documented at the time, particularly among non-literate cultures. The value of such recordings is widely acknowledged among the present-day descendants of those
4.4 Are there issues of rarity, integrity, threat and management that relate to this nomination?

Rarity: individual recordings and their content as examples of language, music or other cultural practices are in the main unique.

Integrity: The collection is complete, in the sense that nothing remains to be added to it. Some damage has occurred in the past, in the form of breakages and mould.

Threat: The collection is housed in secure, stable conditions, and is therefore not exposed to threats such as theft or environmental damage.

Management plan: The content of the collection has been digitized in its entirety so the original carriers will remain undisturbed in their controlled environment. About 10% of the collection in digital form is available online and is included within the World and Traditional Music section of the Archival Sound Recordings website at [http://sounds.bl.uk/Browse.aspx?category=World-and-traditional-music&collection=Ethnographic-wax-cylinders](http://sounds.bl.uk/Browse.aspx?category=World-and-traditional-music&collection=Ethnographic-wax-cylinders). Included are recordings from BL refs. C4, C424, C72, C80, C37, C51 (see section 3.2 above).

5 **LEGAL INFORMATION**

5.1 Owner of the documentary heritage (name and contact details)

The British Library Board, 96 Euston Road, London NW1 2DB, U.K.

Apart from:

EFDSS cylinders *BL ref. C37*

English Folk Dance and Song Society, Cecil Sharp House, 2 Regents Park Road, London NW1 7AY, U.K.

Bronislaw Kasper Malinowski cylinders *BL ref. C46*

Royal Anthropological Institute, 50 Fitzroy Street, London W1T 5BT, U.K.

Captain Robert Sutherland Rattray cylinders *BL ref. C176*

John Layard Atchin cylinders *BL ref. C177*

Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Downing Street, Cambridge, CB2 3DZ, U.K.

John Lorne Campbell cylinders *BL ref. C801*

National Trust for Scotland, 26-31 Charlotte Square, Edinburgh, EH2 4ET, U.K.

5.2 Custodian of the documentary heritage (name and contact details, if different to owner)

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2 Torres Strait Islander, Eddie Mabo, challenged the Australian government’s concept of *terra nullius*, to have land formerly returned to the islanders. He used A.C. Haddon’s reports and recordings to prove Islander habitation of the land back as early as 1898. In 1992, the court found that the Meriam people indeed owned their land prior to the annexation of their island by Australia and the *terra nullius* status was overturned.
5.3 Legal status:

(a) Category of ownership

Title or permanent loan (see 5.1)

(b) Accessibility

Original items can be made available for inspection under supervision but cannot be listened to. Analogue and/or digital surrogates are available for all of the collection and a substantial proportion of the digital copies are available online (see 6.1).

(c) Copyright status

While the five organizations listed in 5.1 respectively own the rights to the physical embodiments of the recordings, intellectually those recordings remain the property of the indigenous communities that agreed to be recorded. The British Library is therefore obliged to respect this position, which may involve cultural sensitivities, and seeks guidance from representative, regional authorities about obtaining permissions governing wider forms of access such as CD publication or inclusion on a website. In the case of the Torres Strait Cylinders (BL ref. C80) the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Island Strait Studies was consulted.

Online access for this material is governed by a statement co-written by the British Library and the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO):

Ethical and permitted usage of recordings

The British Library has digitised these collections of recordings and made them available purely for the purposes of safeguarding them and for making them available for non-commercial research, study and private enjoyment. The collections include culturally sensitive materials, among them ethnographic sound recordings. These recordings should not be altered or used in ways that might be derogatory to the indigenous and local communities who are traditional custodians of the traditional music, lyrics, knowledge, stories, performances and other creative materials embodied in the sound recordings.

While the British Library, or contributors to its collections, may be the owner of intellectual property in the digitisations of the sound recordings and in the sound recordings themselves, the Library recognises that broader rights and interests in intangible cultural heritage, including traditional music and other creative materials embodied in the sound recordings may, under national, customary and other laws, reside with the traditional custodians of such materials. Therefore the prior informed consent of the British Library and/ or other contributing third parties, as well as the traditional custodians is required for the republication and commercial use of part or whole of these materials.

The British Library always seeks to take account of cultural sensitivities and any religious or other restrictions in the recordings it possesses and/or owns. Where possible, the location and date of the recording, the names of original performers and traditional custodians of the music, and the lyrics, knowledge, stories and performances embodied in the sound recordings have
been identified. The Library takes considerable care not to distort or alter this underlying material in any derogatory way. In the event, however, that any community or community representative feels aggrieved by the digitisation and making available of these materials, the British Library invites such community to contact it via the link below in order to resolve the matter amicably through mutual discussion.

(d) Responsible administration

(e) Other factors

6 MANAGEMENT PLAN

6.1 Is there a management plan in existence for this documentary heritage? YES/NO

As stated above, all recordings have been digitized and will be managed in perpetuity by the British Library’s Digital Library Programme. Originals will be stored securely in perpetuity in environmentally suitable conditions.

In the interests of international scholarship, online access will be maintained via the Archival Sound Recording website (http://sounds.bl.uk). Copies of all Historic Ethnographic Recordings are made available to researchers in the reading rooms at The British Library. Researchers will find essential information about these recordings in the collection guides included in the British Library’s website http://www.bl.uk/reshelp/findhelprestype/sound/wtmusic/waxyl/waxcylinders.pdf

In some cases, digital copies have been copied for use by national bodies, e.g. C80 for the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies.

Recordings that are on permanent loan (see 5.1 above) are treated no differently from those that the British Library owns. For example, the clauses below are excerpted from the Agreement made between the British Library (BL) and the National Trust for Scotland (NTS) governing the John Lorne Campbell cylinders BL ref. C801:

BL hereby undertakes to NTS that:

1.1.1 during the Deposit it will treat the Collection no less favourably or by no lower a standard than its own collections and shall use all its reasonable endeavours to protect, preserve and maintain the Collection including any part thereof and to that effect BL shall:

1.1.1.1 adopt such practices and/ or procedures that are reasonably required and expected for the protection, preservation and maintenance of the Collection and/ or to avoid the deterioration of the Collection or any part thereof, having regard to the age, composition, condition, nature, historical value and uniqueness of the Collection;

1.1.1.2 have regard to the state of relevant technological developments and the cost of implementing any new measures available to it and any risks associate with adopting and/ or implementing any new measures in relation to the Collection;

1.1.1.3 [shall] not... adopt any practices nor implement any technologies that would have the effect, or are likely to have the effect, of rendering the Collection more vulnerable to deterioration and/ or damage than other items BL has in its possession and/ or under its control; and
1.1.1.4. … [shall] not…. omit any practices or omit implementing any technologies when any such omissions would have the effect, or are likely to have the effect, of rendering the Collection more vulnerable to deterioration and/ or damage than other items BL has in its possession and/ or under its control.

7 CONSULTATION

7.1 Provide details of consultation about this nomination with (a) the owner of the heritage (b) the custodian (c) your national or regional Memory of the World committee

(a) all owners have been approached and have provided consent:

**EFDSS cylinders BL ref. C37**

*Of course we shall support this. Please add our name to the list.*

Malcolm Taylor, Library Director
EFDSS (Registered charity no. 305999)

**Bronislaw Kasper Malinowski cylinders BL ref. C46**

*We would be happy for you to include the Malinowski collection in your nomination.*

Sarah Walpole, Archivist, Royal Anthropological Institute

**Captain Robert Sutherland Rattray cylinders BL ref. C176**

**John Layard Atchin cylinders BL ref. C177**

*Needless to say MAA would be tremendously pleased if these materials were included in your registration nomination.*

Professor Nicholas Thomas

**John Lorne Campbell cylinders BL ref. C801**

*Thank you for your email regarding the Canna Wax Cylinders. I forwarded your email to some of my colleagues for their thoughts, which were very positive. I think the consensus is that as long as there is no physical impact upon the collections then we are happy for this nomination to proceed. It would be a great enhancement to their status.*

*Thank you for letting us know about this and please do keep in touch to let us know how this proceeds.*

Ian Riches (Archivist), National Trust for Scotland

(b) the initiative has been discussed and approved by Peter Barber from the British Library, who is also a member of the UK Memory of the World Committee

(c) the nomination has been reviewed and endorsed by the UK Memory of the World Committee (their formal letter of support is included with this nomination).
PART B – SUBSIDIARY INFORMATION

8 ASSESSMENT OF RISK

8.1 Detail the nature and scope of threats to this documentary heritage (see 5.5)

9 ASSESSMENT OF PRESERVATION

9.1 Detail the preservation context of the documentary heritage (see 3.3)