

British Library creates archive of defunct Web

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The library is already charged with keeping a copy of every published work distributed in Britain and Ireland. In 2003 that directive was extended to electronic materials such as compact discs and online publications.

Now the British Library said it has begun trawling through the Web and making archival copies of sites of historic interest - including those once maintained by now-bankrupt companies such as Woolworths, Web pages spawned after the July 7, 2005, terrorist attacks in London and Internet coverage of Britain's last general election that year.

Library spokesman Jacob Lant said the project was aimed at filling "a digital black hole in the nation's memory," noting that the library had been unable to turn up any online evidence of such events as the 1997 death of Princess Diana.

"We've already lost a huge amount of data that we'll never see again," he said.

The library said it has so far archived 6,000 sites.

Several projects around the world are also aimed at archiving Web sites, not just dead ones but those that have changed over the years. Among them is the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine at archive.org.

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