

## EDITORIAL

SCOLMA (the UK Libraries and Archives Group on Africa) celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> birthday in June 2012 with an Anniversary Conference at the Rothermere American Institute, University of Oxford. The two-day event looked analytically and critically at the impact of and response to the digital revolution on African Studies, drawing together over ninety librarians, archivists, academics and NGO staff from the UK, continental Europe, Africa and the United States.

Presentations at the conference ranged over many digital formats and techniques, including digitised archives, published material, photographs and maps, born-digital materials, digital scholarship, and social media. Access to, and the effects of, digital resources in Africa were considered, as was the impact of digitisation for scholars in African Studies generally.

Some important issues and challenges raised at the conference concerned 'digital gaps' and the mass of material that remains unavailable in digital form, and risks that digital resources will be overly privileged by researchers. There was also discussion of the importance of information literacy skills; the need for co-ordination and collaboration among digital projects; and the preservation and sustainability of digital resources. Concerns were raised about access to digital content, not only from within Africa, but also by non-governmental organisations more widely, as well as about meeting the changing expectations of researchers while being constrained by the cost of digitisation, copyright restrictions and the lack of metadata. It was also noted that digital access to mainstream journals may perpetuate the view that regional publications are of lesser value. However, developing open access journal models has potential for overcoming this problem.

This issue of *African Research and Documentation* attempts to 'bottle' and preserve the flavour of this conference. It reproduces the keynote address by Christine Kanyengo, the Deputy Librarian at the University of Zambia Library, three conference papers from African librarians and a paper from Uganda which was prepared for the gathering although, sadly, the presenter was, in the event, unable to travel. It also includes the after-dinner speech of SCOLMA's Elder Statesman and former editor of this journal, John McIlwaine, which with characteristic wit and erudition, combines a commemoration of past activity with a challenge for the future. This should be read alongside SCOLMA: *A chronology of fifty years, 1962 to 2012*.

Further papers from the conference will be published in a near future issue of *ARD* and others, along with some newly commissioned chapters, in a specially commissioned 'book of the conference', plans for which are well advanced. Watch this space and the SCOLMA website for news of its publication.