

Creating and Archiving Electronic Literature during the Pandemic

Giulia Carla Rossi

The British Library, giuliacarla.rossi@bl.uk

Introduction

The 2020 COVID-19 pandemic has had a considerable impact on the way cultural heritage organizations engage with their audiences. At a time when public exhibitions and events have to be postponed indefinitely or cancelled, many institutions have chosen to increase their online presence instead, looking at virtual platforms as a means to deliver content, showcase their collections and drive engagement.

The British Library Simulator

The British Library Simulator (<https://giuliac.itch.io/the-british-library-simulator>) is a short browser-based game created using Bitsy, a free game engine developed by Adam Le Doux. It was published online in May 2020, while the Library buildings were closed due to lockdown restrictions. In the game, players wander around a pixel-art version of the British Library building in St Pancras, London; by moving their avatar and interacting with other characters, players can learn facts about the history of the building and discover some of the projects the library staff have been working on during the pandemic.



CREATING

The British Library Simulator was created as a fun way to engage with our audience during the pandemic, giving users a chance to visit a different version of the Library. It was also a way to make the public aware of the services the Library continued to provide even during lockdown, by highlighting some of the digital content that could be accessed from home – such as the **Sound Archive** (<https://sounds.bl.uk/>) and the **UK Web Archive** (<https://www.webarchive.org.uk/>). Finally, it provided an example of the digital interactive narratives that are being collected as part of emerging formats work.



ARCHIVING

Another reason behind the creation of the Simulator was to raise awareness about the **Emerging Formats** project. The British Library, together with the other five UK Legal Deposit Libraries, has been researching different examples of new media writing and analysing how these can be best preserved and given access to, within the specific requirements of a library environment. We curate growing collections of web-based interactive narratives hosted in the UK Web Archive:

- **Interactive Narratives collection** (<https://www.webarchive.org.uk/en/ukwa/collection/1836>)
- **The New Media Writing Prize collection** (<https://www.webarchive.org.uk/en/ukwa/collection/2912>)



What an innovative way to learn!

I wasn't sure what to expect, but this was charming and relaxing.

Thank you

Really nice, and a reminder of a strange and distant time when we could 'visit' 'places'.

Players' comments from the Simulator itch page (<https://giuliac.itch.io/the-british-library-simulator>)

 The British Library Simulator has been viewed over 6,000 times to date (April 2021). The blog post it originally appeared in was the most viewed British Library Digital Scholarship blog post in 2020, with over 4,000 page views (<https://bit.ly/3gP4qZs>)

 The British Library Simulator won joint first prize at the 2020 British Library Lab Staff Awards (<https://bit.ly/3gl78jK>)

 The British Library Emerging Formats work is still ongoing! You can nominate a UK web-based interactive narrative (or any UK-based website) for inclusion in our UK Web Archive collections: <https://www.webarchive.org.uk/en/ukwa/nominate>