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Legal and Copyright Issues

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Museums and Art galleries are storehouses of cultural heritage - from recent and distant times.

We are all aware of the problems and concerns relating to the large volume of material that is seldom on public display or available to public access. In some museums such material is sometimes of higher quality and interest than much of the material that takes pride of place in main displays of other museums.

But this is only the beginning of the matter. It leads to concerns about how material is displayed, including how we provide context for (non-specialist) publics - and we are all members of non-specialist publics in wide areas of cultural and other contexts. What published materials are available (and in what forms) to give the collections life beyond the museum fortress?

These matters are becoming of increasing concern to many in the museum world and in new thinking about the re-ordering of museum priorities. However, as we all know, good displays, good documentation and context take a lot of time and can cost a lot of money - both commodities being in increasingly short supply.

In some ways the recent rapid emergence, in practical and more affordable terms, of image database technology, interactive multimedia and the very rapid developments in digital imaging are ideal times to offer exciting tools and opportunities to the museum world.

Inevitably they also bring new problems and raise old problems running sores in new contracts.

The potential of the new technology, particularly in relation to digital imaging raises a range of questions that make the tariffs of museums and artist's rights societies look like primary school reading material.