BCIN

Bibliographic Database of the Conservation Information Network

SHORT HISTORY OF BCIN

In 1977, ICCROM developed its first computerized databases, adopting standard formats such as UNISIST and, in the case of the library, reviewing the subject index, to support the interchange of information.

Figure 1: Introduction of computerized databases at ICCROM. Cynthia Rockwell and Monica García at the first WANG processor at ICCROM.

Less than ten years later in 1985, the Getty Conservation Institute proposed that the Art and Archaeology Technical Abstracts (AATA) database be combined with the ICCROM Library database. Another agreement was signed the following year between the Getty and the National Museums of Canada. This collaboration led to the formation of the Conservation Information Network (CIN), to which the Canadian Heritage Information Network (CHIN) and Canadian Conservation Institute (CCI) were major contributors together with the Getty and ICCROM. Plans for a database accessible to the international conservation community were developed under the framework of the CIN.

By May 1986, ICOMOS had agreed to contribute bibliographic records produced by its Documentation Centre to the CIN database, with the Smithsonian Institution's Conservation Analytical Laboratory joining as a partner on the project in June of the same year.

The bibliographic database of the Conservation Information Network, known as BCIN, was finally born in 1987, when it was unveiled at the Eighth Triennial Meeting of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) Committee for Conservation in Sydney, Australia.
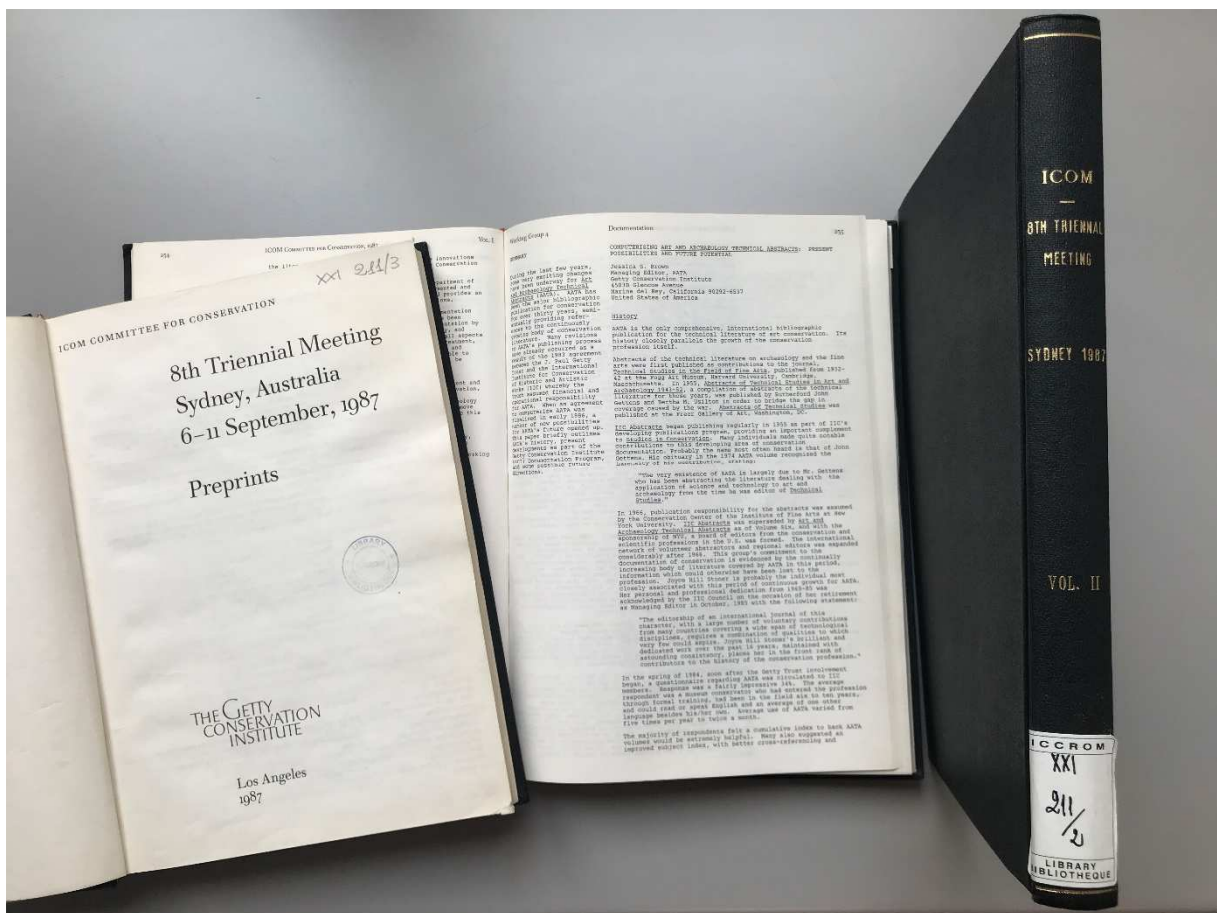

Figure 2: The 3 volumes of the Proceedings of the 8th Triennial Meeting of the ICOM Committee for Conservation held in Sydney, Australia in 1987, published by the Getty Conservation Institute

At its launch, BCIN contained more than 100 000 citations, representing the holdings of seven libraries and documentation centres (listed here in alphabetical order):

- the Canadian Conservation Institute (CCI)
- the Canadian Heritage Information Network (CHIN)
- the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and the Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM)
- the International Council of Museums (ICOM)
- the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS)
- The Getty Conservation Institute
- the Smithsonian Center for Materials Research and Education (SCMRE)

In 1995, BCIN was made available on the World Wide Web. In those early days of the internet, the database was an extraordinary tool, allowing subscribers from countries around the world to access and search bibliographic information and export it to their own local working environment.
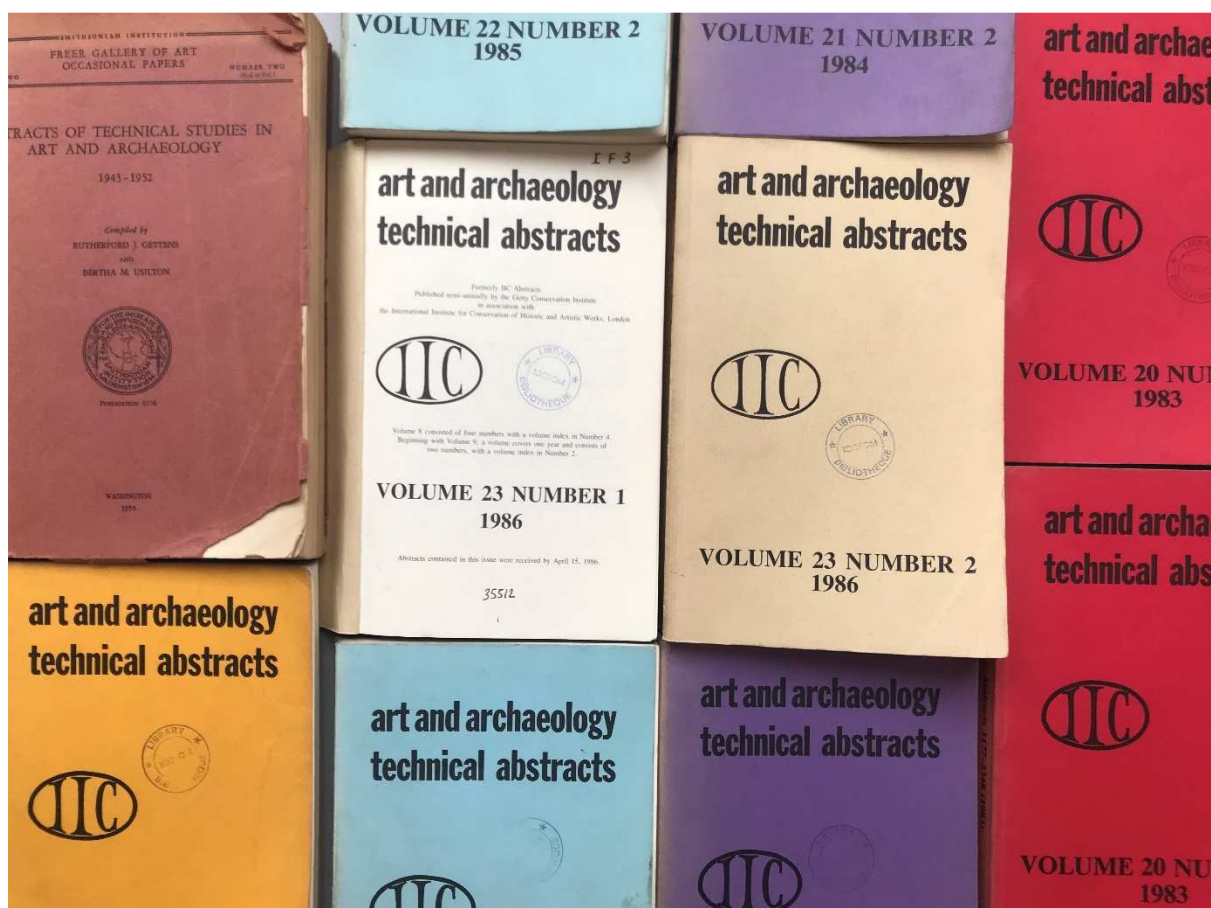

Figure 3: Volume 23, number 1 and 2 of Art and Archaeological Abstracts, printed from BCIN and published by the Getty Conservation Institute in 1986

At the same time, the information stored in the database was used to produce printed materials, such as Volume 23 of AATA, and to compose thematic bibliographies and lists of

acquisitions, which were either printed or put on floppy discs and delivered to subscribers. Institutions with limited budget could also build smaller local databases, which remained compatible with the main system. Over the years, as digital storage mediums evolved, more information was able to be held and shared using CD-ROM and optical disks.

Figure 4: Discs for data storage and transfer

In addition to BCIN, which focuses on technical literature, two other databases were originally maintained by CIN: a database on conservation materials (MCIN) and a product and supplier directory (ACIN). However, BCIN has always been the most popular, as demonstrated by the results of the Conservation Information Survey conducted in 1992-93. Another database on photographic conservation literature (PHOCUS), developed by Klaus Hendricks at the National Archives of Canada in the early 1980s, was also made available through CIN before being merged with BCIN in 2000.

BCIN became widely used by museum and heritage professionals, conservators and researchers in the field. Thanks to the contributions of partners, the database grew steadily with periodical uploads of references of journal articles, books, technical reports, conference proceedings, audio-visual and unpublished materials, as well as the first 34 volumes of the AATA (prior to 1998).

To ensure the database remained comprehensive, easy to use, and affordable, access was provided at a small cost. In 1995, a flat fee of US$100 replaced the previous sign-on charge, with a free one-month trial period introduced a few years later. At the time, the CIN was used by more than 500 institutions and individuals in over 30 countries – mostly from Canada, the USA and Europe but also from Australia and Japan.

The CIN encouraged use of the database through a bilingual newsletter, Network News, published in English and French. Early issues contained articles such as the report of the Clean-up project in 1990, information on training activities, and a section dedicated to technical questions and answers. Since 1993, the newsletter has been published by CHIN, which took over management of CIN from the Getty.
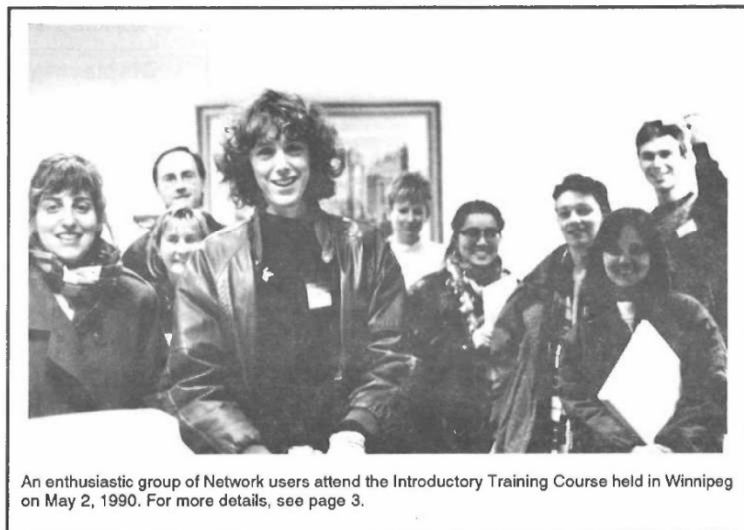

Figure 5: Network News 1990, Vol.3 N. 2 Spring 1990

On the 10th anniversary of the CIN in December 1997, its Board of Directors met in Rome. The agenda included items such as the cooperation and contribution of partners, the criteria for admitting new partners, associated projects, target audiences, payment options, and marketing. During the meeting, the Board took the decision to remove the ACIN and MCIN databases from the CIN, concluding both were outdated.

In 2002, with CHIN hosting the CIN website, BCIN was made available for free. In the following years, statistics showed a considerable jump in usage, from around 396,000 page views in 2005 to 6,580,000 in 2009, with access growing from around 291,000 in 2005 to over 6,453,000 in 2009. However, this trend began to decline during the second decade of the twenty-first century. Recognizing the need to upgrade and modernize, members floated the

idea of migrating to a new open-source platform in 2016. CHIN continued to host the platform during this transition phase, which ended with the launch of the new platform in 2021.
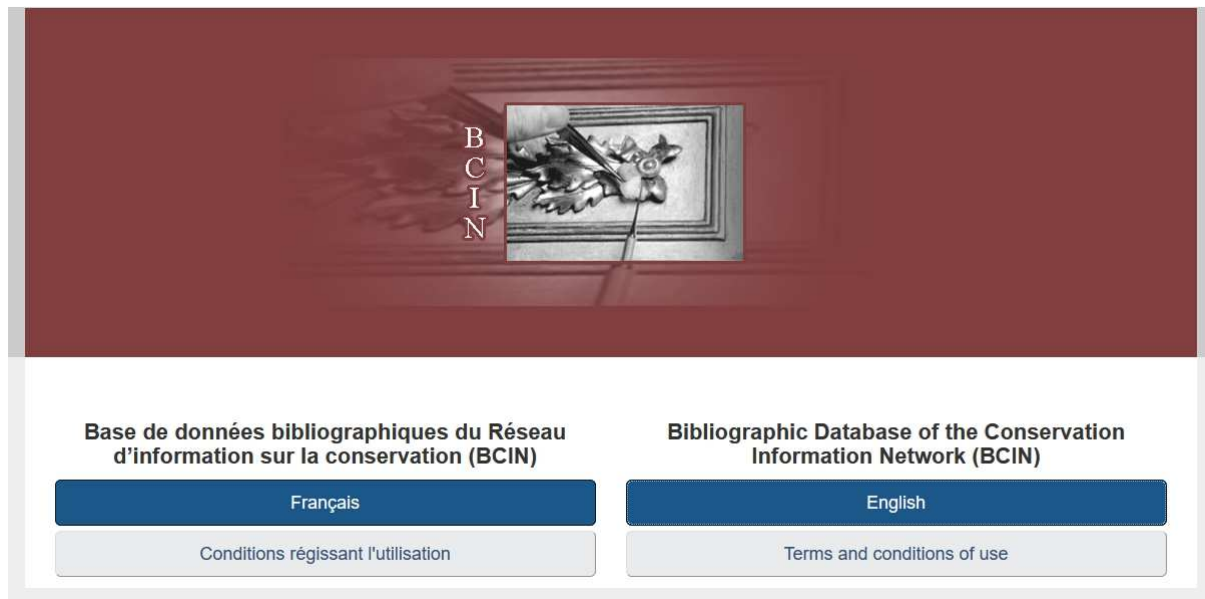
Figure 6: Homepage of the BCIN catalogue hosted by CHIN

The main difference between the original BCIN and the library resources platform built with VuFind is that there is no longer one unique database to which all BCIN Members contribute, but rather a single search surface that browses all contributing catalogues at once. Currently, BCIN provides access to more than 260,000 bibliographic references to relevant literature in the field of conservation and preservation of cultural heritage. Contributing institutions keep steadily adding new resources to their catalogues and consequently the data in BCIN is constantly growing and updated in real time.

References:

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