An academic perspective on libraries supporting research

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A family interest in librarianship?
The library as guardian of knowledge printed in books (mainly).

Librarian as curator.
The library as provider of information - journals and some books.

Librarian as supplier.
The library as gateway to an information network. Librarian as web manager.
But do we now need libraries?
Information is easily accessible.
Even high quality technical information is accessible. With a “pay per download” policy and subscription management, you can get what you want.
Consider:
• Many researchers have never held in their hand the journals they are publishing in. They may not be available in print copy.
• Segmentation and specialisation and proliferation have undermined journal loyalty.
• Much information is open-source downloadable from institutions publicising their work and ideas.
But, what about quality control?
We surely don’t need a lot of poor quality/wrong information? In serious research work, we need to be sure of what we are reading. Example – the doubts about Wikipedia.
But even peer-reviewed material (the best (?) we have) still needs a critical approach from the researcher.
The research library of the future?

Storage space for material that can be ordered up.

And a subscription department that pays for the material we order from the web.
Most researchers (NOT all) no longer need their institution to provide “mainframe” computing power, because all we need is available through a small and cheap machine operated by us.

Costs are devolved to the user.

Towards the personal library where costs are also devolved?
Conclusions

• For research there is still a (limited) place for archived printed material
• But there is no need for libraries to attempt to hold ALL possible information themselves. E-access is mostly sufficient
• The role of library managers in deciding what information is accessible is anachronistic
• Individual researchers could control their information budget.
• Quality control remains an issue for the research community. Peer review as operated by most editors needs rethinking.