

## **Book Review: Preservation Management for Libraries, Archives and Museums**

**G.E. Gorman and Sydney J. Shep (eds.). London: Facet, 2006. ISBN-13: 978-1-85604-574-2, ISBN-10:1-85604-574-9**

G. E. Gorman and Sydney J. Shep, of Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, have brought together an impressive array of practitioners and scholars from Canada, Britain, the Netherlands and Australia, to produce a collection of eleven essays, which attempts to give an overview of some of the most important issues in preservation management today. It also aims to show that memory institutions (the editors' collective name for libraries, archives, museums and galleries) share many of the same concerns when it comes to the preservation of the collections in their care.

The scope of the contributions is very wide, covering, amongst other things, preservation policy and planning, the preservation of collections in times of conflict, the importance of preserving intangible cultural heritage, a method of ranking paper conservation research proposals, the preservation needs of the digitally-born artefact and the preservation of audiovisual materials.

The breath of coverage of this collection is reflected in the very different contributions of the Dutch team of Henk J. Porck, Frank J. Ligterink, Gerrit de Bruin and Steph Scholten and the Canadians, David Grattan and John Moses. The Dutch team's contribution is focused on a very specific area, while the Canadians' contribution is much wider in scope. Porck and his colleagues have developed a model to help rank paper conservation research proposals with the aim of effectively allocating scarce resources. The model weighs the potential success of the proposals using three key indicators, namely, preservation, access and economy. The authors invite readers to participate in the discussion of the model's merits because, as it is new, there is little practical experience of its use. By contrast the concerns of Moses and Grattan are much broader. They are concerned with preserving the intangible cultural heritage of the aboriginal communities in Canada, such as language, ceremonies and traditions. For them the need to preserve contextual information about cultural artefacts, such as stories about their creation and information about how they were used is as important as preserving the objects themselves. Documenting such information necessarily means committing it to videotape, audiotape or some digital media, raising a number of familiar preservation issues discussed in other essays in this collection.

In an essay that would be of practical use to anyone charged with drawing up a preservation policy, Mirjam Foot argues that a robust preservation policy is of the utmost importance for memory institutions and gives guidance on formulating one. She emphasizes that preservation policies, to be useful, must be realistic and take into account all available resources and that they should be monitored, reviewed and updated frequently or be 'living documents', as she puts it. These are not novel points, but the value of her essay lies in the wealth of experience that lies behind it and its comprehensive treatment of the topic. The extensive bibliography which follows the essay is particularly useful.

One of the themes which run through this book is that of the access/preservation balance. John Feather touches on it in his essay dealing with the issues surrounding the management of our documentary heritage. Feather lays great emphasis on the importance of promoting access to our documentary heritage, and the duty of libraries and archives to help interpret that heritage to the widest possible audience, making the point that the 'duty to preserve is fundamental, but the duty to interpret is the ultimate objective'. Helen Forde also takes up the access/preservation balance theme, arguing that access to information is an absolute right and is part of the 'social contract'. She believes that heritage institutions have been slow to honour this contract in the past but that things are now improving. She charts some of these recent improvements in access to collections and information, citing many examples, including recent freedom of information legislation in

various countries, projects such as the People's Network and large-scale digitization projects, among other things. She stresses that current access needs should not put access for future generations at risk, arguing that access and preservation can and must be balanced; institutions must take every opportunity to raise awareness of preservation issues, explicitly state that preservation is one of their primary aims, plan for it and fund it properly.

Another recurrent theme in this collection is the relationship of surrogates to their originals. Both Marilyn Deegan and Yola de Lusenet raise this question. Deegan discusses both analogue and digital surrogates, paying particular attention to the need to guarantee the authenticity of the data in digital surrogates and strategies for doing this. She also covers such topics as the acceptability of surrogates to users and under what circumstances it is acceptable to dispose of an original when a surrogate is available. The acceptability of surrogates to users is also discussed by de Lusenet, who focuses on the acceptability of digitized versions of old photographic material. However, her contribution also deals with reformatting as a preservation strategy for a wide variety of materials. She argues convincingly for a dual microfilm/digitization strategy in the case of paper documents, making the point that a stable microfilm copy made for preservation purposes can later be digitized for the purpose of providing access. She makes several interesting observations in the conclusion to her essay, including that, in a world where there is a generation entering university which relies heavily on services such as Google, the day may come when only what has been digitized will be used and what has not been digitized may lie forgotten on the shelf.

De Lusenet also discusses the reformatting of audiovisual materials, but this subject is dealt with in greater detail by Bob Pymm. He examines the preservation issues surrounding both analogue and digital formats, discussing the problems associated with maintaining them. The correct storage requirements for various types of media and how their condition should be monitored are discussed, as are copying and digitization as strategies for maintaining material in the long-term. It is clear from Pymm's essay that much of the world's audiovisual heritage is in a poor state of preservation and is in danger of being lost. He makes the important point that the preservation of audiovisual materials cannot be seen simply as a one-off task, but is a resource-intensive continuous process.

Barbara Reed addresses the particular preservation problems of the digitally born object, discussing the problems of hardware, software and storage media obsolescence, as well as the problems associated with the huge amount of digital data being generated. She also discusses approaches to digital preservation, such as emulation and migration and briefly deals with initiatives in the area of digital repositories. Reed outlines a number of challenges to professional practice in her piece, but she does not have the space to discuss her points in great detail. For example, she discusses metadata in relation to preservation and decries what she calls the 'old cataloguing mindset relating to metadata', an issue I felt warranted more space. This shows that the strength of this book is also its weakness; it gives a good overview of the subject but the reader will have to go elsewhere for a detailed discussion. This observation should not be seen as a criticism, however, as the aim of the book is to give an overview of the subject, and the bibliographies attached to each essay give ample opportunities for more detailed study of individual points and topics.

For me, René Teijgeler's contribution is the most thought-provoking in the collection. Teijgeler, who has advised the cultural heritage sector in Iraq in its efforts to mitigate the effects of the recent conflict on its collections, argues that the risk of major armed conflict is often not taken seriously by those charged with the care of collections, even though the effects of war can be as damaging as natural disasters or the ravages of time. Teijgeler gives many examples of the destruction of cultural heritage during war, including in Iraq and the countries of the former Yugoslavia, and he surveys the various international initiatives aimed at protecting our heritage in times of war. In his examples Teijgeler outlines the resourceful ways those in charge of the collections have found to protect them, and argues that we must learn from them and plan for the worst.

In the concluding essay, the editors speculate on the future of memory institutions. They see a new coordinated cross-domain approach to collection management developing under the influence of bodies such as the UK-based Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) and the American Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), and think that new hybrid cultural institutions may

emerge to replace libraries, archives and museums. The most important point they make, however, is that if we are to balance ever-growing demand for access with preservation needs, we will need to cooperate on a global scale.

The index to this book is quite disappointing and detracts from its usefulness. While it is generally adequate, even a casual examination of it will reveal a number of problems. The US format for broadcast television, NTSC (Never Twice the Same Colour) is mentioned in the text (p 47) but there is no index entry for it. Television is mentioned elsewhere in the book but it has no separate entry in the index. However, there is an entry for 'radio broadcasts', which is mentioned alongside television. Also on p.47 there is discussion of the large number of analogue videotape formats that are in current use, but there is no reference to p.47 in the entry 'videotapes'. The entries for 'facsimile' and 'surrogate' are not cross-referenced, although they appear in the same context. The introduction does not seem to be indexed, and there are other omissions. For example, the journal *Microform Review* is mentioned in the text (p.60) but does not appear in the index. This is a shame because, overall, this book is well produced.

The need to balance preservation with increasing public demand for access, the preservation needs of the huge amount of digital data being produced and the uncertainties, problems and opportunities caused by constant technological change are some of the challenges for the future identified by the contributors. While both the public and the funders of memory institutions may more easily be attracted by access projects, it is vital to engage their interest and raise their awareness of preservation issues so that access to collections can be ensured for future generations. This wide-ranging collection gives a good account of the most important issues in preservation management today, and shows clearly that libraries, archives and museums share many of the same concerns when it comes to preservation and that they can benefit from working together. I recommend it.

Hugh Cahill, Special Collections, King's College London ([hugh.cahill@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:hugh.cahill@kcl.ac.uk))