



Library Management

Preservation and Library Management: A Reconsideration

Paul Eden John Feather Graham Matthews

Article information:

To cite this document:

Paul Eden John Feather Graham Matthews, (1994), "Preservation and Library Management", Library Management, Vol. 15 Iss 4 pp. 5 - 11

Permanent link to this document:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/01435129410060284>

Downloaded on: 01 May 2016, At: 01:07 (PT)

References: this document contains references to 14 other documents.

To copy this document: permissions@emeraldinsight.com

The fulltext of this document has been downloaded 1375 times since 2006*

Users who downloaded this article also downloaded:

(1990), "PRESERVATION AND LIBRARY MANAGEMENT", Library Management, Vol. 11 Iss 4 pp. 4-9 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/01435129010003236>

(1999), "Developing a method for assessing preservation needs in libraries", Library Management, Vol. 20 Iss 1 pp. 27-34 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/01435129910248650>

(1999), "Preservation of library materials in China: Problems and solutions", Asian Libraries, Vol. 8 Iss 12 pp. 480-483 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/10176749910303496>



Access to this document was granted through an Emerald subscription provided by emerald-srm:393177 []

For Authors

If you would like to write for this, or any other Emerald publication, then please use our Emerald for Authors service information about how to choose which publication to write for and submission guidelines are available for all. Please visit www.emeraldinsight.com/authors for more information.

About Emerald www.emeraldinsight.com

Emerald is a global publisher linking research and practice to the benefit of society. The company manages a portfolio of more than 290 journals and over 2,350 books and book series volumes, as well as providing an extensive range of online products and additional customer resources and services.

Emerald is both COUNTER 4 and TRANSFER compliant. The organization is a partner of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) and also works with Portico and the LOCKSS initiative for digital archive preservation.

*Related content and download information correct at time of download.

Preservation and Library Management

A Reconsideration

Paul Eden, John Feather and Graham Matthews

Introduction

It has been argued, with some justification, that the 1980s “probably witnessed the highest point ever in preservation awareness”[1, p. 282] This awareness, stimulated by the publication of the Ratcliffe Report in 1984[2], led to a number of important developments such as the establishment of the National Preservation Office (NPO), a revival of interest in preservation issues by professional bodies such as the Library Association and SCONUL, and several high-profile conferences and seminars including the Library Association’s 1986 annual conference in Harrogate[3]. Our research, based on a questionnaire survey, and funded by The Leverhulme Trust, is a systematic and comprehensive attempt to investigate the situation as it stands today in the wake of these developments. This article discusses some of the main managerial issues highlighted by our results. In particular we consider responsibility for preservation; preservation policies; disaster control planning; staff training and user education; co-operative initiatives; factors inhibiting preservation activity; and spending on preservation.

Methodology

Between May and July 1993, following a successful pilot study, questionnaires were sent out to 682 British libraries (173 public, 228 academic and 281 special) with a covering letter outlining the aims of the research and asking respondents to reply in terms of their “library

system as a whole and not only with reference to special collections”. A second questionnaire was sent to those libraries which did not respond to the initial mailing. Any difficulties in interpreting responses were clarified by follow-up telephone calls and the results analysed using Minitab statistical software. Libraries were coded according to type within their broad categories so that global figures could be broken down and comparisons made between them.

Responses

There was an excellent response to the survey with 488 libraries (71.55 per cent) returning completed questionnaires: 132 public libraries (76.30 per cent), 177 academic libraries (77.63 per cent), 177 special libraries (62.99 per cent) and 2 anonymous returns. We are well aware of the considerable time and effort involved in completing questionnaires of this type, and so would like to thank those who took the trouble to respond for their much-valued co-operation.

Findings

Preservation Policies

The preservation policy and activity in any particular library depend on a number of criteria, not the least of which is how preservation is perceived and consequent attitudes towards it. Several comments from respondents were significant in this respect. While one academic librarian, for example, highlighted the need for preservation to “be recognised and treated as an essential and integral aspect of library management”, and another believed that it “should be a matter for the library as a whole”,

the majority of comments suggest that preservation is still regarded as a specialized activity, normally applicable only to special collections and rare or valuable individual items. The academic librarian who spoke of “our attitude [which] really does differ fundamentally as between policy towards special collections and policy towards the rest of the stock”, and the public librarian who emphasized “our priority in relation to preservation is given to local history material”, are more typical of our respondents on the whole.

Because of the need to prioritize both human and material resources, preservation policies usually have to be focused on particular parts of a collection for economic reasons. Indeed, the librarian has to make a wide range of financial decisions in managing a preservation policy, deciding, for example, whether or not to defer periodical binding in favour of laminating paperbacks, or to carry out urgently needed conservation work on rare items in special collections at the expense of maintaining heavily-used items in general stock. Inevitably this will lead to situations where, in the words of one special librarian with a large historical collection, the “conservation of some essential materials inhibits work on other material”. In view of the importance of such decisions, affecting both everyday and rare items, we were surprised to find that only 51 libraries (10.45 per cent) reported a written preservation policy (14 public, 13 academic and 24 special).

□

*There is usually
a mechanism for
decision making*

□

There was, however, evidence that elements of a preservation policy may be found in other policy documents such as those dealing with retention or acquisitions; one public librarian, for example, said that his library had “most of the parts of a policy, but not a document that pulls them all together”. Respondents may even have been uncertain about terminology, such as a distinction between written “guidelines” and written “policy”. The need for such policy documents is now greater than ever. Managers’ need to optimize the use of expensive library stock means that “The same kind of attention given to the initial selection of items for acquisition ought to be given to their subsequent retention or

withdrawal, and to their potential preservation requirements should they be retained”[4, p. 6]. A written policy statement on preservation, made known to, and understood by, all library staff would constitute a considerable step towards achieving this level of attention.

Responsibility for Preservation Activity

Two-hundred-and-eighty-three of the libraries (57.99 per cent) returning questionnaires had a member, or members, of staff responsible for the management and implementation of preservation activity (82 public, 96 academic, 104 special and one anonymous). Furthermore, the job titles and/or grades of these staff indicate that at least 80 per cent of them are professional librarians or senior managers. If bare statistics such as these can give no indication of the amount of time and effort actually spent on preservation activities, they do suggest that, even in libraries where preservation is not regarded as a major issue, there is usually a mechanism for decision-making at an appropriate level.

Although librarians were asked to complete the questionnaire from the viewpoint of their “library system as a whole”, 21 returns from public library authorities were passed on to those responsible for local history collections or archives and completed on the basis of those collections only. In addition, a further six public librarians who did answer the questionnaire from a system-wide perspective stressed that most of the positive aspects of their replies related only to local studies and archives. Academic and special librarians appear to adopt similar attitudes, often referring specifically to the needs of their special collections librarians and archivists. Again, this emphasizes the perception of preservation as an issue relating essentially to these special, and usually historical, materials.

Disaster Control Planning

A total of 201 libraries (41.19 per cent) reported having someone responsible for disaster control planning (41 public, 88 academic and 72 special), and 143 (29.30 per cent) reported having a disaster control plan, written or otherwise (24 public, 66 academic and 53 special). The remarkable rise in the number of libraries with disaster control plans – a survey of SCONUL members by Moon and Loveday, for example, found that only two of their respondents had such a plan in 1982[5, p. 14] – may be attributed to a number of factors. Most significantly, the publicity which followed a number of recent

major library disasters, including fires at the Los Angeles Public Library and the Library of the Academy of Sciences of the Soviet Union in Leningrad (as it then was) in the mid- and late-1980s, informative and authoritative publications from The National Library of Scotland[6] and The British Library[7] which included model disaster control plans, and the efforts of the National Preservation Office[8], have all served to focus attention on an issue which was formerly neglected. Moreover, considerations such as the importance of protecting computer systems, the need to meet the stricter criteria now being laid down by insurance companies and to comply with British and European health and safety legislation, have all stimulated the development of disaster control plans. These affect all types of library, and indeed all public buildings.

Staff Training and User Education

A total of 102 libraries (20.90 per cent) in our study had in-house training programmes in preservation awareness for existing staff (34 public, 40 academic and 28 special). This is considerably higher than Ratcliffe's earlier finding of 36 (10.84 per cent) (including 15 public, 11 university, three national and three miscellaneous)[2, p. 19], and is probably a reflection of the greater awareness of preservation issues which now exists amongst librarians generally. The situation of newly-appointed staff, on the other hand, appears to have remained remarkably static. One-hundred-and-thirty libraries in our study included preservation/conservation awareness in training programmes for newly-appointed staff (41 public, 48 academic and 41 special), compared with Ratcliffe's figure of 91[2, p. 19]. In percentage terms these figures represent 26.64 per cent and 27.41 per cent of respondents respectively.

Although a figure of just over a quarter for the number of newly-appointed staff receiving training in preservation may seem low, it is explicable if, as we have already suggested, preservation is generally seen as a specialized activity. In addition, managers may well assume that new professionals gain a sufficient awareness of preservation issues while at library school. Whereas this was certainly not the case in the early 1980s when Ratcliffe found "little evidence of conservation training among newly recruited professionally qualified library staff at any level" and "little provision for conservation in the curricula of library schools"[2, p. 53], Feather and Lusher, in their 1988 study of this aspect of library school curricula, reported "a significant

advance with regard to the teaching of conservation in the [Library and Information Studies] curriculum on the situation in 1984"[9].

There were no obvious trends regarding training content or methods, which varied considerably between libraries, as did the grade of staff receiving such training. Most libraries offered basic training in specific areas such as handling materials, binding policies and the need to check the condition of items on issue or return. Several also presented preservation issues in a broader context, or dealt with the subject in greater depth. One library, for example, placed training for newly-appointed staff within the "broad context of stock management and presentation standards", while another held "conservation familiarization days [covering] preservation and disaster planning". Methods of tuition included informal instruction by supervisors or line managers "as and when required", seminars organized by conservators or other specialists, visits to internal or commercial binders and videos. The level of staff trained appeared to be less significant than the sections in which they worked, selective training being aimed particularly at staff working with special collections, archives or delicate items, again supporting the view of preservation as a specialism.

□

Most libraries offered basic training

□

Whether or not any expectations of prior knowledge are justifiable in the case of staff, librarians cannot, of course, assume a similar level of awareness on the part of their users. Consequently, it was somewhat disappointing that fewer than half of our respondents – 204 (41.80 per cent) – said that they provided guidance to users in the handling of library materials (67 public, 70 academic and 67 special). Of the various methods employed, verbal advice and instruction at the time of issue to those handling delicate materials such as rare books, maps, drawings and archive material was the most frequently cited. As well as being shown how to handle the materials themselves, users were also instructed in the importance of using equipment such as book supports and cotton gloves, and asked to use pencils when taking notes. Guidance was not, however, confined to special collections.

Many libraries, particularly those in the public sector, recognized the need to handle all media with care, and instructed users in the handling of equipment such CD-ROM and video players, microform readers and photocopiers. Methods of instruction included leaflets, notices, posters, bookmarks, stickers and, to a lesser extent, open days and exhibitions. When considering the role of user education in preservation, we would naturally expect librarians to concentrate on special collections and archives, including as they do their most valuable, and often irreplaceable, items. It was, therefore, encouraging to find libraries also employing such a wide range of awareness-raising techniques in an effort to maximize the useful lives of their general collections.

Co-operative Initiatives

Ratcliffe found that although there was “a general awareness of the potential of microform as a conservation measure ... costs usually restrict use to specific items as need arises”[2, p. 53]. The response by libraries in our survey to the preservation/conservation problems of newspapers not only confirmed the potential of microform as a “surrogate” medium, but also provided an excellent example of the benefits of co-operation between libraries, and the important contribution made by external funding bodies. This was especially true in the case of public libraries.



***Microfilm is a
potential
“surrogate” medium***



Seventy-eight public libraries (59.09 per cent) experienced preservation/conservation problems with newspapers; this was the format most often identified as presenting difficulties. The most common response to these difficulties is the use of microform copies; 62 of the 83 public libraries (62.88 per cent) which used *archival quality* microform for preservation purposes used it for preserving their newspaper collections. Indeed, for one librarian “matching speed of decay with replacement by microfilm” was a major concern regarding his newspaper holdings. Microfilming is, however, expensive, and, in most cases, has to be paid for out of existing budgets. At least 53 public libraries (40.15 per cent), are sharing costs

and resources in co-operative newspaper microfilming initiatives; 36 of them specifically mentioned participation in Newsplan[10]. Such co-operative, and nationally co-ordinated, initiatives underline the important contribution made to preservation and conservation by independent funding bodies such as the Mellon[11] and Wolfson[12] foundations, and, above all, the importance of Newsplan itself.

The benefits of local and regional programmes would, of course, be significantly enhanced by a well-co-ordinated national information policy which included preservation. One academic librarian, for example, stated that “There is a need for national and regional co-operative schemes for conservation of early, or rare modern, items to ensure the survival of best copies”, while another highlighted the problem in more practical terms; “although we no doubt collect items that ‘ought’ to be preserved for posterity, there is no way of knowing which these are”, a state of affairs which was attributed to “the lack of a national information policy”.

Factors Inhibiting Preservation Activity

Respondents were asked to rank the following seven considerations according to their importance as factors inhibiting the preservation/conservation of their stock:

- (1) security;
- (2) suitably trained staff;
- (3) finance;
- (4) storage conditions;
- (5) heavy use of the collection;
- (6) organizational priority given to preservation;
- (7) general staffing levels.

After weighting the rankings[13], we found, not unexpectedly, that “finance” was regarded as the most important factor by respondents in all three library sectors. Indeed, one respondent pointed out that, while the relative importance of the other six factors “will vary from time to time”, the overriding importance of finance remains the “only constant factor”. The ability to implement policies on the other issues is clearly seen as being dependent on the availability of funds. Inadequate funding, in addition to militating against an individual library’s ability to meet its own needs, also has serious implications for the concept of the “national archive”. As one special librarian put it, “I am well aware that some of our stock (particularly ephemera) is unique, but the current level of the book fund is such that it is

only just possible to meet demands for new stock and maintain periodical subscriptions". Comments such as these, allied to the points made by others about the need for a national information policy, give cause for concern.

"Storage conditions" was ranked second overall; indeed, in response to other questions, 230 respondents specifically reported a whole range of storage-related problems including dampness, inadequate shelving, humidity levels, overheated rooms, atmospheric pollution and mould or insect infestation. "General staffing levels" was generally ranked third overall, although academic librarians ranked it second. In academic libraries substantial increases in student numbers over the last few years have served to highlight the problem of general staffing levels in librarians' minds. There will, however, be many in other sectors able to empathize with the academic librarian who was "more afraid of the staff wearing out than the stock"!

□

***Security ranked
as the
least important***

□

In addition, general staffing levels – or, more accurately, constraints on them – were often a crucial factor in determining the "organisational priority given to preservation"; this factor ranked fourth overall, and the following comment from one special librarian made the problem very clear: "Sorry I cannot be more positive... but in terms of staff constraints [preservation] is a very low priority issue to us". Organizational priority was least important for academic and public librarians who ranked it fifth and sixth respectively. One academic librarian, for example, clearly identified his major problems as "the twin pressures of increased student numbers and a purchasing budget that has not kept up with the demands on it in real terms" which meant that "preservation has not had a high priority". The relatively low priority given to "suitably trained staff", ranked fifth overall, has to be seen in this context. Preservation is seen as a specialized activity. Managers may assume that new professionals gain a general awareness of it at library school, and it is, in general, not a high priority, or an area of skill or knowledge emphasized in recruitment.

"Heavy use of the collection" was ranked only sixth overall – perhaps surprisingly, in view of the

greater demands being made on existing stock because of tighter acquisitions budgets. It was, however, seen as more important by academic librarians, who ranked it fourth, underlining once more the "twin pressures" of increased student numbers and budgetary problems described above by an academic librarian in relation to prioritization.

Security was ranked as the least important factor by respondents in all library sectors. This is alarming. Recent research carried out by the Home Office, in co-operation with the National Preservation Office, estimated that annual book losses in UK public and academic libraries alone may amount to £159 million and £38 million respectively (direct book replacement costs only at 1989/90 prices)[14, p. 52] These estimates of loss, which are considerably higher than many previous estimates[15], strongly support the need to allocate resources to measures such as the introduction of electronic security systems, in order to try to address what is obviously a costly, and therefore significant, problem. They also highlight the need for libraries to carry out inventories or sample counts, at least in valuable or vulnerable areas of the collection, in order to assess loss. Only 39 per cent of libraries in the Home Office survey, for example, had carried out procedures "to quantify their [book stock] losses and were able to furnish the figures generated by those procedures"[14, p. 9]. Security, like disaster control planning, is an integral part of any preservation management policy.

Spending on Preservation

The most practical expression of the importance assigned to preservation policy is in the allocation of resources to its implementation. After much consideration, and lengthy discussions with our advisory committee, we decided to ask respondents for an estimate of their preservation expenditure and to compare this with their acquisitions budget. We hoped that this might give us some insight into the perceived relative importance of these two aspects of collection management policy. The information thus obtained, although interesting, has to be treated with caution. Because of respondents' differing attitudes towards preservation, different criteria were applied to the calculation of "total expenditure on all preservation/conservation activities". For example, four academic librarians specifically included staff costs, while three specifically excluded them; six public librarians gave figures for "binding" or "general binding"

only, while another's figures were for "conservation binding but not normal binding".

For these reasons we have made no attempt to estimate national spending on preservation, or assume an average spend per library. Instead, we simply present a breakdown of the results in terms of the amount spent by individual libraries as a percentage of their acquisitions budgets: of the 342 respondents who supplied the relevant information, 300 (87.72 per cent) said that they spent the equivalent of 0-29 per cent, 15 (4.39 per cent) the equivalent of 30-59 per cent, 10 (2.92 per cent) the equivalent of 60-99 per cent and 17 (4.97 per cent) the equivalent of 100 per cent or above. A further 31 respondents reported spending nothing at all on preservation, and 11 that they had no acquisitions budget. All but one of those libraries spending the equivalent of 60 per cent or above of their acquisitions budgets on preservation were either local studies collections, university college or special libraries, with relatively small acquisitions budgets. Nine of these libraries also indicated that they had received external funding for preservation purposes. Otherwise, notwithstanding the interpretative difficulties, our results suggest that little has changed since Ratcliffe found that "there are in general low levels of expenditure (as a proportion of overall spending)" on preservation[2, p. 52].

Conclusions

We have come a long way since Ratcliffe found a widespread ignorance of preservation in the early 1980s. Although most of our respondents still appear to regard preservation as being most applicable to special collections and to rare or valuable items, they at least seem to be aware of the basic issues. Even in those libraries where preservation is not regarded as being particularly important, such a view appears to be the result of a policy decision, rather than ignorance.

We must, however, continue to build on the general awareness of preservation issues, and there is still much that needs to be done. Funding, for example, is a major problem and, even in organizations with a strong commitment to preservation, those responsible for preservation have to compete for the limited resources available. A written preservation policy, which, unfortunately, very few libraries in our study had, would provide a coherent framework around which to build sound arguments in favour of developing further organizational support for preservation, thereby securing necessary funding.

The success of national initiatives such as Newsplan and other ventures funded by organizations such as Mellon and Wolfson underline the substantial benefits to be gained through co-operation between libraries at local, regional and national levels. A national preservation policy would take this a stage further and enable libraries to take a more rational approach to problems such as what they ought to be preserving in terms of special collections, funding allocation and, particularly in the case of public libraries, help to clarify their national heritage responsibilities. Within this context the role of the NPO and how it can work in co-operation with other bodies such as the Department of National Heritage should also be considered. When the proposed Library and Information Commission begins to develop a national information policy, preservation will need to be taken into account. The issue is not merely one of preserving heritage material, but of ensuring access to information in a useable form.

□

Co-operation between libraries reaps substantial benefits

□

No doubt preservation needs will change as librarians place an even greater reliance on electronic information systems and image creation, both as a means of increasing access to their collections and as a means of surrogate preservation. Nevertheless, aside from the fact that these media will present their own preservation problems, whatever the changes in store for librarians – whether professional, financial or technological – their fundamental role, that of ensuring the availability of information to clients as and when they require it, will remain. This role, along with the manager's need to make the most of available resources, means that a carefully considered and well managed preservation policy should be an essential aspect of effective resource management.

□

Note and References

1. Jackson, M., "Preservation" in Bromley, D.W. and Allott, A.M. (Eds), *British Librarianship and Information Work 1986-1990. Volume 2, Special Libraries, Materials and Processes*,

- The Library Association, London, 1993, pp. 275-83.
2. Ratcliffe, F.W. with Patterson, D., *Preservation Policies and Conservation in British Libraries: Report of the Cambridge University Library Conservation Project*, The British Library, London, 1984 (Library and Information Research Report 25).
 3. Palmer, R.E. (Ed.), *Preserving The Word: The Library Association Conference Proceedings, Harrogate 1986*, The Library Association, London, 1987.
 4. Matthews, G., "Preservation and Library Management", *Library Management*, Vol. 11 No. 4, 1990, pp. 4-9.
 5. Moon, B.E. and Loveday, A.J., "Progress Report on Preservation in British Universities Since the Ratcliffe Report" in *Preservation and Technology. Proceedings of a Seminar at York University 20-21 July 1988*, The British Library, London, 1989, pp. 11-17, (National Preservation Office Seminar Paper 3).
 6. Anderson, H. and McIntyre, J.E., *Planning Manual for Disaster Control in Scottish Libraries and Record Offices*, The National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh, 1985.
 7. Tregarthen-Jenkins, I., *Disaster Planning and Preparedness: An Outline Disaster Control Plan*, The British Library, London, 1987.
 8. National Preservation Office, *If Disaster Strikes!*, National Preservation Office, London, 1988 (video-cassette).
 9. Feather, J. and Lusher, A., *The Teaching of Conservation in LIS Schools in Great Britain*, The British Library, London, 1988, p. 31 (British Library Research Paper 49).
 10. Wells, R., *Newsplan. Report of the Pilot Project in the South-west*, The British Library, London, 1986 (Library and Information Report, 38).
 11. "US Gift of \$1.5m for Microfilming at BL", *Library and Information News*, February 1989, p. 18.
 12. "Awards for Cataloguing, Preservation and Purchase", *The British Library Research and Development Department Research Bulletin*, No. 3, Spring 1989, pp. 5-7.
 13. Each factor was weighted by multiplying its rankings (i.e. 1-7) by the number of respondents giving it a particular ranking, adding these sums together and dividing this total by the total number of respondents.
 14. Burrows, J. and Cooper, D., *Theft and Loss from UK Libraries: A National Survey*, Home Office Police Department, London, 1992. (Police Research Group Crime Prevention Unit series paper no. 37).
 15. Jackson, M., "Library Security: Facts and Figures", *Library Association Record*, Vol. 93 No. 6, 1991, pp. 380, 382, 384.

Paul Eden is a Research Assistant, John Feather is Head of Department and Graham Matthews is a Lecturer, all at the Department of Information and Library Studies, Loughborough University, Loughborough, UK.

This article has been cited by:

1. Maja KrtalićDepartment of Information Sciences, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Osijek, Osijek, Croatia Damir HasenayDepartment of Information Sciences, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Osijek, Osijek, Croatia. 2012. Exploring a framework for comprehensive and successful preservation management in libraries. *Journal of Documentation* **68**:3, 353-377. [[Abstract](#)] [[Full Text](#)] [[PDF](#)]
2. Paul Eden Paul Eden is Research Fellow, Department of Information Science, Loughborough University, Loughborough, UK.and Elizabeth GaddElizabeth Gadd is Academic Librarian, Pilkington Library, Loughborough University, Loughborough, UK.. 1999. Co-operative preservation activities in the UK: findings of a research project. *Library Management* **20**:4, 220-227. [[Abstract](#)] [[Full Text](#)] [[PDF](#)]
3. 1997. Erratum. *Facilities* **15**:1/2, 42-49. [[Abstract](#)] [[PDF](#)]
4. Paul EdenSouth Wiltshire Fire Liaison Group's National Fire Safety Week Symposium on "Document Protection and Recovery", on 26 September 1995 Graham MatthewsLecturer in the Department of Information and Library Studies, Loughborough University, and is Project Head of Disaster Management in British Libraries. 1996. Disaster management in libraries. *Library Management* **17**:3, 5-12. [[Abstract](#)] [[Full Text](#)] [[PDF](#)]