TO HAVE AND TO HOLD: FIRST STEPS IN A NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR THE PRESERVATION OF SERIALS

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Discussions on the need for a national strategy for the preservation of library materials have been taking place for a number of years. The present physical state of major and other collections, which represent so much of our national heritage, now make this need an imperative.

Librarians are seeing their collections, which have been carefully and expensively selected and catalogued, physically deteriorate at alarming rates. This is not due to any single factor but to a combination of factors, and surveys of the condition of collections suggest that the deterioration is now accelerating at unprecedented speed. On-line catalogues and networks are extending awareness of holdings, improving access and increasing usage. Storage conditions, a topic which is not often accorded the importance it should command, are now being recognised as playing a vital role in maintaining the material in a good physical state. Good housing involves paying due attention to temperature and relative humidity levels, lighting and patterns of use. Shortage of space and inadequate shelving all too often force staff to crowd material into overfilled and unsuitable areas, causing damage to material even whilst not in use and adding to the danger of damage as it is transported back and forth to reading areas. Pressure to achieve higher targets of user satisfaction causes staff to pay less attention to the correct handling of individual items. A readership brought up with the 'throw-away' society has decreasing respect for the physical item and needs to be constantly reminded of their own responsibilities as users. Ever increasing photocopying adds to the list of risks of potential damage. These factors are compounded by the reliance of the publishing industry for the past 150 years on wood-pulp based paper. The lignin and alum rozin size present in this material are causing it to become extremely fragile - a phenomenon now commonly known as 'the brittle paper problem'. All of these factors together present librarians with an ever-growing legacy of material which is literally self-destructing on the shelves or in user hands.

The extent of the problem, both for individual institutions and for the country, is now so great that it would be impossible for all but a few libraries to be able to preserve all of their 'at risk' stock. The British Library, for example, has estimated that it holds in excess of 2 million books which can be classed as fragile solely because of the brittleness of the paper. The report of the survey of Oxford University libraries has identified 250,000 items in the brittle
category with 18,500 showing major structural damage and a further 3 quarters of a million showing some signs of damage. The picture is similar around the country, and indeed the world.

At the same time, the resources to cope with the problem are, if not actually diminishing, certainly not growing. It is doubtful that, even if we put all our efforts and funds together and worked in a concentrated way, we still could save even one copy of every title. Co-operation is the only possible way forward if we are to ensure the optimum saving of the existing material. It makes no sense in this day and age to have, for instance, four libraries preserve their copies of the same title when by collaborating they could have saved four different titles.

There are some notable projects in co-operation that are already underway. In this country we have the NEWSPLAN project and the Mellon Microfilming Project. In the United States there is a well-coordinated newspaper programme and the numerous projects led by the Research Libraries Group (RLG) for the preservation of both library and archival material. Worldwide there is the Unesco 'Memory of the World Programme' and the International Projects funded by the Commission on Preservation and Access (CPA) in Washington, DC. These are only a few examples but they share in common a willingness to exchange information and to work together.

In everything that I say I should like to make it clear that I am concerned above all with preservation for access. For the librarian there should be little point in spending money on conservation if it is only to create a museum of artefacts. We are concerned with assessing the various types of material in our collections and coming to a decision on the most appropriate way of preserving them in order to provide the best access. In some instances this will, of course, be the original item itself. In other cases, a surrogate will be the chosen course.

The problem is not one for which a single global plan can be made and adhered to. I would like to describe briefly three different projects which have involved co-operative preservation of serial publications. These are NEWSPLAN (with which many of you will be more familiar than I am), the RLG Art Serials Preservation Programme, and the Mellon Microfilming Project.

I do not intend to give much detail of the mechanics of each, but rather to highlight a few of their achievements and problems.

**NEWSPLAN**

NEWSPLAN, as many of you will know, began as an initiative by librarians in the South West Regional Library System (SWERLS) of the UK who became alarmed at the physical deterioration of local newspapers from the area. The British Library Newspaper Library (BLNL) was approached for support to conduct a survey to identify as many as possible of the published titles, their location, holdings and condition. Priority for preservation action was assigned to each title. The resulting report was so successfully received that a further 9 regional committees were established to cover the whole of the UK. Today 9 of those committees have published reports with work progressing in the final region.

**Achievements**

* The plan has been driven by librarians who have defined the preservation needs, quantified them and suggested ways forward.
* It has been successful in encouraging local authorities in many of the regions to devote 1% of library book funds towards the project.
* It has generated co-operation within and between the various regions, with the BLNL, and with the newspaper industry itself.
* It has brought the poor physical condition of many of the nation's newspapers to the attention of a wide audience.

**Problems**

* NEWSPLAN suffers perhaps most of all from lack of recurrent and adequate funds. As I mentioned, 1% of book funds has been pledged by many authorities but this is only a small amount in relation to the problem. The NEWSPLAN Panel needs to assess how long this limited commitment will need to continue in order to complete the work.
* The plan is subject to changes in local authority policies and to authority boundaries which can impede progress, and which are so topical today.
Although there has been much encouragement to produce film to high standards, this has not always been achieved, mainly through a lack of detailed technical knowledge on the part of library staff managing the programmes, and the various filming agents.

The lack of a central database means that information on what has been filmed is not yet readily available to users. Putting records on the Register of Preservation Microforms (RPM) would be a valuable start.

Research Libraries Group Art Serials Preservation Project

In 1990 RLG set up a project to microfilm 100 art serials which had been identified as being in need of preservation. These titles had been selected following a survey of members of the RLG Art and Architecture Program which had been conducted from 1987 to 1990. Funding was obtained from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). Preparation and filming was carried out by one agency and RLG provided a central manager for the project who was responsible for cataloguing, locating missing volumes, pages, etc. and general administration. The project ran for three and a half years at the end of which all 100 titles had been filmed equating to some 1619 volumes of print.

Achievements

- The use of a single filming agent had benefits in two ways. First, the consistency of the filming. In addition the agent worked to develop a special process for dealing with black and white art materials. Whilst further development work is needed, the benefits are apparent in the final product. If several filmers had been used, this development work would probably not have been possible, or would have been greatly delayed.
- Collaboration by a large body of participants, all of whom are enthusiastic to further the goals of the project, is essential to the success of the effort, and has been shown to be possible.
- The centralised model is a viable one for projects in which not all the participants are expert in preservation microfilming techniques.

Problems

- The amount of time and effort required to locate and obtain copies to fill gaps of missing volumes and/or pages was much longer than estimated when it was handled centrally by a non-specialist.
- Centralisation of preparation and cataloguing proved to be difficult as there still needed to be a heavy reliance on staff and subject experts for detailed knowledge.
- Staff in the participating libraries did not have sufficient knowledge of microfilming to be able to evaluate the quality of the film on receipt. Two independent inspectors had to be hired to make up this shortfall.
- Centralisation necessitated a more intimate involvement with the day-to-day running of the project on the part of the project director than had been envisaged.

Mellon Microfilming Project

This Project, which is co-ordinated in the National Preservation Office (NPO), is the first co-operative preservation microfilming project in the UK. It has, for this reason, moved at times very slowly as ways of collaborative working were developed. Time was needed to test and establish high but totally achievable standards of preparation and filming. To date nine institutions have been involved, with another three shortly to become participants. In excess of 10,000 reels of film have been produced so far. Central to the Project has been the insistence that all titles filmed must be listed in the Register of Preservation Microforms (RPM), the national database of microforms which meet archival standards. The RPM now lists over 100,000 titles and is available through BLAISE (the BL's automated information service), through the European Register of Microform Masters (EROMM) based at the Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek in Göttingen, Germany and through RLIN in the United States.

Of the material filmed, a large proportion has been of serial publications. The National Library of Wales (NLW) has filmed all of its holdings of Welsh periodicals from 1735-1920 (about 530
titles). The Bodleian Library has filmed about 160 English trade journals of the 19th and 20th century. The National Library of Scotland (NLS) has filmed Blackwoods Edinburgh Magazine and the Scots Magazine and Trinity College Dublin (TCD) has filmed several Dublin city directories. The Scottish Newspapers Microfilming Unit in Edinburgh (which has received the largest grant from the Project) has filmed more than 25 titles of Scottish newspapers in its first year of operation. The National Jazz Foundation Archive is currently preparing a project to film their jazz serials. The titles filmed at TCD in particular have demonstrated some of the problems that arise when filming serials. It is a basic principle of the co-operative schemes that the library will film as complete a copy as possible, filling in gaps in their own copy from copies of the material held elsewhere. TCD had to contact 12 different libraries, mainly in Dublin, in their attempts to complete volumes and runs of the titles they were filming. The patchier the holdings the greater this effort becomes. The estimated time needed to prepare and film a volume of a fairly straightforward title averaged just over six hours, but for material in poor condition this rose to over 19. Obviously this is time-consuming and therefore costly, but the benefit to the users is that the microfilm versions of these titles are more complete than the original printed versions.

One serial title provides a further example of the need to act sooner rather than later as well as in a collaborative way. NLS applied to film their copy of The Gentleman’s Magazine. Although not a Scottish publication, their copy was being increasingly used and was showing signs of wear. A check revealed that although commercial film had been made, there did not appear to be a complete run of the publication available. NLS were given approval to proceed but then the problems began. They found that a significant number of volumes were too tightly bound to film. The five other legal deposit libraries checked their copies of the title. Only one out of the six sets, that at Cambridge University Library, was found to be in a suitable condition for filming. Approval was given by CUL to carry out the work within their programme and filming is now in progress.

**Achievements**

- Final figures will not be available until 1997 but over 700 serial titles have already been filmed.
- The wide variety of material filmed has given us valuable information on some of the problems and solutions each type can pose.
- The grant given to support the Scottish Newspapers Microfilming Unit is an important example of one project (Mellon) helping another project (NEWSPLAN).
- A Working Group has produced a manual covering the preparation of the material, filming, quality checking, cataloguing and post-filming procedures.
- Significant development of the RPM as the national database for preservation microforms, with over 7% of input already submitted from outside the BL, and this is still increasing.
- Master negative films are stored centrally to BSI standards.

**Problems**

- At the beginning of the Project we assumed that filming standards were straightforward. We discovered that they are subject to wide variations in their interpretation. It took a lot of time and effort to reach a common set of high but achievable standards.
- The slow start-up affected the structure of the scheme. Originally grants were offered on a 50/50 basis. However, by the time the Project was ready to accept new participants many libraries were suffering financial cutbacks. Once this was discovered, the terms were changed to allow for grants of up to 100% of filming costs, but valuable time had already been lost.
- The Project has highlighted the need for librarians to understand the value of high quality microfilm together with how it can be achieved, and their role within the process.

Central to all three of these projects has been the necessity to secure the preservation of the content of printed material on archival quality microfilm. For RLG and Mellon this aim is supplemented by the recording of the microfilm
in widely available databases and by making the film as accessible as possible through loans and copies. All have shown that co-operation, whilst it imposes some extra costs, not only achieves its primary aim of preservation but also goes well beyond benefiting just one organisation. For serials in particular all three projects have highlighted the difficulties we are already having in collating complete runs of many titles. Therefore if we do not take the opportunity to do something now, then we may lose some of the information forever as time continues to take its toll. The projects have also highlighted the need for librarians to be better informed in the best practices for preservation. We need to recognise our responsibilities in planning and in knowing the difference between a good and a bad end-product. By working together on such projects, we can identify current and future problems and seek solutions, many of which can often be best addressed when shared.

The projects also show that no one method will be the answer to every situation. But before we start developing a host of different projects it is important to establish a national framework within which we can place these various initiatives and provide co-ordination of effort. Work has already begun to try to identify some of the various factors which need to be addressed. Meetings of the heads of preservation at the national libraries, the Consortium of University Research Libraries (CURL) and public record offices have been held in recent months to debate these issues. At the same time, senior representatives of CURL and the British Library are considering specific areas for collaboration between the two organisations.

As a result a number of issues are now being investigated, such as an assessment of the national problem, the elements of a national policy, the problems presented by 19th and 20th century material and the use of IT. We need to have a concrete picture of the scale of the problem - its size, complexity and costs. We need to consider what is needed in a national policy - where responsibilities will lie and how this can be supported, both in practical and financial terms. We need to encourage further development of mass conservation techniques, such as deacidification and paper strengthening. We need to encourage publishers to use paper which meets the new ISO standard for permanent paper, so that we can stop the brittle paper problem continuing. We need to develop a database which will provide access not just to holdings in collections but copy-specific information on the retention and preservation of actual copies.

Crucial to the success of a national strategy is the issue of retention policies. Until we are able to look at a set of practical retention policies for individual libraries, we will be forever working in a sort of black hole, never knowing the level of success we achieve. A small working party has been seeking in the past few months to establish a very short set of categories by which libraries could define their retention policies, relating them to parts of the collection and/or to individual copies. At present the categories being considered are:

a) retention of both the artefact and its intellectual content
b) retention of the artefact
c) retention of the intellectual content
d) no intention to retain beyond immediate usage

Within a co-operative framework, it is with categories three and four we are most concerned, which are important for several reasons. We know that much of the material of the 19th and 20th century will fall within these categories. The cost of making preservation surrogates is not cheap and we therefore need to cooperate in order to make the resources stretch as far as possible in the time available. We also need to know as a matter of urgency if certain titles or material are not being retained in any libraries, so that we can take action for their preservation before it is too late even to make substitutes. The Conference of Directors of National Libraries in 1991 considered a draft paper on the preservation of serial literature. The British Library Newspaper Library now has a policy on the retention of newspapers after microfilming which has been approved by the BL Board. It has also issued statements on the disposal of foreign language newspapers and on the collection and preservation of free newspapers, the latter being important for its proposal for devolved responsibilities. A Working Group of the Legal Deposit Libraries has
been looking at, amongst other initiatives, co-ordination of their retention policies, primarily in terms of legal deposit material. The Round Table on Newspapers of the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) is currently revising its statement on retention. These are positive steps forward but we need to encourage more institutions to prepare and make their policies publicly available.

A number of librarians have expressed concern that those resources which are available for preservation may not be being spent in the most effective way. The lack of time available to academic libraries to co-ordinate applications for post-Follett funding is a recent example of this. Although there is little doubt that co-operation puts an added cost onto preservation activities, without it there is no way in which we can ensure that the funds are spread to the best effect. Help needs to be given to both librarians and conservators in managing preservation programmes. This activity will become more complex as we begin to see viable projects for mass conservation becoming commercially available. The choices for which type of preservation method to choose will become increasingly linked to the use of the material and the retention policies of the institution, together with their role within the national framework. Increasingly, decisions will need to be made in the light of the national effort and not just in terms of individual institutions and collections.

Central to co-operation is the need for a single body to provide the necessary co-ordination. This is a role which the National Preservation Office is in a unique position to perform. It already provides a national focal point for preservation issues in libraries in the UK. It has experience in administering the Mellon Microfilming Project. It has been involved in instigating research, such as the survey carried out in 1991-92 by the Home Office Crime Prevention Unit into theft and loss in UK libraries. The NPO could become both a co-ordinator and facilitator for co-operative preservation. It could develop a database of collection strengths together with retention policies which could be used to assist individual libraries in planning their programmes and which could also be used to develop new co-operative projects. It could offer central support, especially for smaller institutions which do not have the resources to hire staff with the relevant knowledge and experience. The benefits of such a role have already been seen as a definite 'plus' for all participants in projects co-ordinated by both the NPO and RLG. It could provide a UK focus for co-operation in international preservation programmes.

Through collaboration, the resources available for necessary research can be most effectively utilised. This will be especially useful as we all struggle with the new problems presented to us by digital and electronic material. We need more information to help us to understand what material is best suited to digitisation, what are the relative merits of the different methods of scanning and how we can then preserve the digitised data. The Commission on Preservation and Access has already funded a number of studies in this area, the results of which have pointed to the need for a central approach to the problem for the foreseeable future.

I began this talk with the assumption that if a serial is held by a library, that library will normally want to continue to hold it. In the future, for some material 'to have' may imply a responsibility to preserve and make available on a national level, whereas 'to hold' may mean a substitute copy or possibly only access to information about a surrogate. However, if we do our best today to ensure that the limited funds and conservation resources at our disposal are spent in the most cost-effective way in either maintaining originals or producing substitutes of the highest quality, then we can be proud of having done the very best possible to help future generations of users.