

# **Preservation management for libraries, archives and museums**



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Edited by

**G. E. Gorman and Sydney J. Shep**



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**Dr Bob Pymm** is a lecturer in the School of Information Studies, Charles Sturt University. Previously he was Manager, Collection Development

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**Barbara Reed** has a distinguished reputation in archives, records and electronic document management in Australia and overseas. She is a Fellow of the Australian Society of Archivists, Director of The Recordkeeping Institute, Chair of the International Standard on Records Management, member of the Records Continuum Research Group, and member of the Archiving Metadata Forum. She has held academic positions at Monash University and the University of New South Wales, and is currently in demand as an appraiser and consultant to industries, including federal and state government, local government, small businesses, large corporations, statutory authorities and professional associations.

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**René Teijgeler** started his academic career studying sociology and social psychology at Utrecht University. In 1988 he was appointed teacher in bookbinding and graphic techniques at the Amsterdam School of Printing. He completed his education as a book and paper conservator at the State School for Conservators in 1993, and was appointed conservator at the Koninklijke Bibliotheek in The Hague. He continued his academic training in anthropology at Leiden and Utrecht University, and obtained an honorary degree in 1996. His research projects in preservation concentrated on the tropics in general and non-Western manuscripts in particular. He has studied writing materials from South and Southeast Asia, and was involved in a research project on Indonesian writing materials at Leiden University. In 1997 he started the consultancy firm Paper in Development and has since advised many projects in developing countries on preservation, papermaking, and book production. With Henk J. Porck, he co-authored *Preservation Science Survey: an overview of recent developments in research on the conservation of selected analog library and archival materials* (2000) and wrote an annotated bibliography, *Preservation of Archives in Tropical Climates* (2001) with the co-operation of Gerrit de Bruin, Bihanne Wassink and Bert van Zanen. He is currently working on the war's frontline with other museum, archive and library professionals advising on the reconstruction of Iraq's cultural heritage.

# Introduction

Forty years ago, on 4 November 1966, the River Arno in Florence burst its banks. In the days, weeks, months and years that followed, the fundamentals of book and paper conservation science were rewritten and new disciplines were forged: disaster management, preservation conservation and preservation management. This watershed moment, so to speak, has since been joined by spectacular episodes of cultural genocide. The 1992 burning of the National Library in Sarajevo, as well as the 1991 bombing campaign against the medieval city of Dubrovnik by Slobodan Milosevic's Serb nationalists, bore witness to the attempted erasure of Bosnian and Croatian ethnic identity. The Taleban's demolition of the Bamiyan Buddhas in 2001 destroyed 17 centuries of Afghan pre-Islamic sacred cultural heritage. The opportunistic looting of Baghdad's National Museum and the torching of the National Library and Archives in 2003 provoked international outrage, particularly as the invading forces did nothing to prevent the removal, destruction, sale, or relocation of cultural property.

However, there have been quieter revolutions to counterpoint the drama of flood, fire and war. Identification of the brittle books and slow fires syndrome drew attention to the dangers of self-consuming heritage artefacts and led to the formation of the Commission on Preservation and Access. From 2000, the highly publicized showdown between Nicolson Baker and the library and archive communities galvanized public thinking about the immanence of the original. Most recently, the global turn to

digitization has forced scholars, collectors, curators and institutions to rethink and restructure their primary modes of operation.

Preservation management now sits at the top of the agenda for memory institutions around the world. It is a topic of ongoing debate as collection development strategies, policies and practices are negotiated between libraries, museums, archives, funding agencies and governments. Historically separate cultural institutions are now converging to share limited resources, develop compatible ideologies and co-ordinate distributed collections. In this climate, preservation and access are twin sides of the same coin: curatorial responsibilities are enhanced; the public is empowered.

The eleven essays in this volume chart the diversity of preservation management in the contemporary information landscape. Themes range from policy and planning to the challenges of new media and digitally born material, and from issues surrounding intangible cultural heritage materials in an indigenous setting to the status of the artefact in the electronic environment. Dynamic new approaches to conservation research are discussed as well as reconfigured understandings of the social contract in publicly funded institutions. Insights from the battlefields of Iraq are coupled with speculations about new directions in the definition and nature of the collection itself. The authors are academics, practitioners and consultants in Britain, Canada, the Netherlands, Australia and New Zealand, and are connected to a much wider international network of professional associations and NGOs. They have been selected as much for their specific expertise as for the contribution they will make to the field of preservation management in the next 40 years and beyond.

John Feather opens with a sweeping, yet nuanced, overview of the key issues in managing documentary heritage today and in the future. In a densely populated world of artefacts, selection is a fundamental preservation strategy, determined by cultural policy and, in turn, influenced by a bewildering array of social, economic and political contexts and pressures. As a result, objects transmit their historical fingerprint, and collections are living ecologies, testifying to the past, illuminating the present, and interpreting the future.

Mirjam Foot focuses the discussion on libraries and archives, demonstrating the necessary and logical integration of preservation-led decision making into the standard repertoire of institutional policy and planning. She frames basic library and archive functions such as collection management, retention policies, access frameworks, security guidelines, risk assessment and disaster preparedness with an awareness and understanding of the preservation context. Preservation policy informs preservation strategy, which in turn generates institution-specific preservation programmes.

Indigenous property rights and the guardianship of intangible cultural heritage in institutional collections offer significant challenges to conservators and preservation managers alike. David Grattan from the Canadian Conservation Institute joins John Moses from the Canadian Museum of Civilization to probe the paradox of ephemera and the obligations of culturally sensitive collecting and curatorship. Using the example of the Dogrib Traditional Knowledge Project, they advocate the concurrent need to preserve and manage documentation about artefacts as much as the artefacts themselves. In particular, they argue that objects in an aboriginal context do not exist in isolation but are part of a complex network of other media manifestations and culturally specific rituals.

Marilyn Deegan contributes to the ongoing debate about the relationship between surrogates and originals. She examines the nature of analogue or digital surrogates from the perspective of the reader/researcher and responds to institutional concerns about rationalizing the retention of specific items in light of alternative formats. Particular issues such as the authenticity (as opposed to authentication) of digital data, and the type of information the object or carrier itself contains and transmits are addressed. By covering the spectrum of memory institutions, she demonstrates that libraries, archives, museums and galleries are all faced with difficult decisions as well as liberating solutions.

Closely related to the surrogacy debate is the policy and practice of reformatting and migration as foundational preservation strategies. Yola de Lusenet picks up the thread of object value versus informational value, and embeds it in a discussion of the frequently conflicting demands of preservation and access and the expectation of some form of perpetuity

for heritage collections. Using a wide range of international examples, she argues for a two-tiered microfilm/digitization approach which overcomes resource constraints and unprecedented collection volumes. She also reviews reformatting strategies for photographic and audiovisual heritage materials.

Conservation is often considered the mere technical servant of a broader preservation philosophy or agenda. The Netherlands-based team of Henk J. Porck, Frank Ligterink, Gerrit de Bruin and Steph Scholten argue, conversely, that conservation research is an essential and equal partner in the development of a preservation programme. As part of a recent Dutch national initiative for the preservation of library and archival materials entitled *Metamorfoze*, they have developed a new analytical model for cost-benefit decision making. This valuation instrument quantitatively assesses three key variables or success factors – preservation, access and economy – and enables the objective setting of conservation research priorities.

Whereas much of the literature on preservation and access has been based on paper objects, documentary heritage covers an enormous range of audio and visual materials, both physical and virtual. Bob Pymm surveys traditional and emergent new media and shares the challenges inherent in preserving evanescent and multi-modal formats. He affirms that preservation management in these domains is resource intensive, requiring an ongoing engagement with and commitment to artefacts rather than a single solution executed just once.

Barbara Reed joins the discussion with an examination of the special preservation needs of the digitally born object. Technically new and particularly unstable, these artefacts have particular challenges that are only now being identified. Pioneering ventures such as the digital capture of the 1960 US Census data or the 1986 British Domesday Project demonstrate the fragility and obsolescence of medium and format. How we develop management strategies for digital cultural heritage resources is becoming increasingly urgent as technology continues to drive the shape of information sources, as the public demands unlimited and long-term access, and as issues of content re-purposing, ownership, metadata and authenticity take centre stage.

A case study from the war zone of Iraq forms the basis of René Teijgeler's observations about the urgent need for heritage management planning in advance of man-made disasters, as well as inventive solutions during armed conflict and in its aftermath. He surveys various international initiatives for the preservation of movable and immovable cultural property and documents a number of specific historical instances of illicit activities and breaches of international law. From his experience in the field working alongside other museum, library and archive professionals, Teijgeler shares insights about safeguarding our cultural heritage.

Helen Forde muses on the social contract between publicly funded institutions and the end-user, noting that the inalienable right to information embedded in Rousseau-esque ideologies of Western democracies must be balanced with robust preservation management strategies. She suggests that the delayed response by institutions to honour such a contract in the name of curatorial care or collection management, and by users to exert their lawful rights, is slowly being recognized and rectified. Recent Freedom of Information legislation, various Truth and Reconciliation Commissions and large-scale digitization projects have redefined the nature and ownership of official archives, artefactual evidence and memory records; retrospective cataloguing, updated retrieval systems and multiple access points including exhibitions and community participation programmes are the resultant stewardship priorities across memory institutions.

Finally, the volume's editors fast-forward to consider the changing nature of collection management, including preservation management, in the 21st century, and the potential impact on the information community. As museums, libraries and archives pool resources and harness opportunities for collaboration through digitization activities and networked access, new models of collecting and new paradigms for imagining cultural heritage institutions are evoked.

Any collection of this nature is only as worthy as its contributors make it. In our estimation the authors who have shared their research in this volume represent the most current and forward-looking viewpoints in their respective fields, and we are well aware of the time constraints under which they work. All the more reason to be grateful for their contributions, which

will stand the test of time for decades to come; thanks to these individuals, this work has achieved our original intention. Behind the scenes there are the usual suspects without whom such a work would never materialize – the staff at Facet Publishing for their continuing confidence in our endeavours, especially Helen Carley, Lin Franklin and many others; here in Wellington, Jackie Bell, our unflappable copy editor. Our thanks to all who have contributed to the quality of this collection; we retain for ourselves responsibility for errors or omissions.

G. E. Gorman and Sydney J. Shep

## CHAPTER 1

# **Managing the documentary heritage: issues for the present and future**

John Feather

### **Introduction**

The preservation of the documentary heritage has to be seen in the broader context of managing what we have inherited from the past in a way which will allow us to hand it on to the future. Documentary preservation makes sense only when we also take account of the preservation of objects, the built environment and created landscapes. But we cannot preserve everything, and indeed should not seek to do so. As a society needs and desires change, the political and social expression of its understanding of, and need for, its inheritance also changes. In responding to change, each generation makes its own contribution to the heritage of the future. How we decide what must be preserved, and how we then preserve it in a meaningful way, is the question which lies at the heart of preservation management. This chapter explores these complex themes as an introduction to the more detailed studies which follow, and in this sense serves as an overview to the entire volume.

### **Heritage and culture**

Heritage has become a growth industry (Ashworth and Larkham, 1994; Lowenthal, 1998). A combination of cultural tourism at a time of cheap and easy travel, and nostalgia at a time of profound social change, has made heritage a part of the leisure industries. In itself this is not new. The 18th century grand tourists, who were the distant ancestors of the customers of easyJet, were a cultural and economic elite. If the democratization of

wealth and education has not quite made Venice, Agra and Bangkok into destinations accessible to everyone, it has certainly opened up horizons – both geographical and intellectual – which were inconceivable in earlier times. Yet as international travel has become more available to more people than ever before, there has also been a growing sense of the national dimension of heritage.

A large part of the contents of the museums, galleries and libraries of Europe and North America has been removed from its place of origin. Some of that removal was a result of the spoils of war; some was simple theft; some was by agreement between equal parties; and some, of course, was by entirely legitimate commercial transactions entered into freely by consenting buyers and vendors. It is impossible to imagine the Louvre or the British Museum or the Metropolitan without objects which were acquired through all of these channels and others. Yet, the demand for ‘cultural repatriation’ has been insistent, but has largely been rejected by the heritage institutions and their political masters (Adi, 2005; Lowenthal, 1998, 244–7). Indeed, there are fundamental questions about the nationality of ‘national heritage’. The *Mona Lisa* was painted by an Italian (who normally described himself as a Florentine) working in France for a French king. Is it French or Italian? The Portland Vase is the aesthetic root of an archetypically English design of ceramic which goes by the name of a culture – Etruscan – which produced neither the vase nor its derivatives, and of which little or nothing was known to those who made use of that name. Is the vase Roman? Or Greek? Or Italian? Or English? Or all or none of these? (Walker, 2004). And are the cloisters of the cathedral of Elne French or Catalan? Or, since they have stood overlooking the Hudson River for most of the last 100 years, are they now American? Will the cloisters return to Roussillon before or after the Benin bronzes are returned to Nigeria? To pose such questions is to show the impossibility of answering them, and exposes the complexity of the demand for repatriation.

The documentary heritage is not exempt from these controversies. Even within England, there are those who have argued that the Lindisfarne Gospels should be sent from the British Library to a repository in the northeast where the book was made in the seventh century. There have

been calls for the return of colonial records to the national archives of the countries which were constituted out of former colonies during the 1950s and 1960s. It has been argued that Islamic, Buddhist and Hindu manuscripts should be returned to more appropriate places than western libraries. And not all of these demands have fallen on deaf ears. In 2001, the Lindisfarne Gospels left the British Library to be exhibited at a gallery in Newcastle upon Tyne in response to insistent public demand (BBC, 2001). The issue has now been addressed differently, using an elaborate website developed jointly by the British Library and the North East Museums Libraries and Archives Council (2005).

Technology has also come to the aid of archivists and historians in Britain's former dominions and colonies. Thousands of microfilms have been made of colonial and Indian records from the British Library and the National Archives for sale or donation to the countries to which they refer (National Archives of India, 2005). Arguments about acquisitions which resulted from wartime depredations also continue. An independent adjudicator, whose decision was accepted by both the government and the British Library, ruled in 2005 that the Beneventan Missal should be returned to the Italian monastic library from which it was looted (probably by the Nazis) during World War 2 (Department for Culture, Media and Sport (UK), 2005). But this is not one-way traffic. Books and manuscripts, like paintings and other *objets d'art*, are subject to rules which can restrict their export. The acquisition by the Fitzwilliam Museum of the Macclesfield Psalter is only the latest high-profile success in retaining cultural property in Britain (Cambridge University, 2005; Kennedy, 2005).

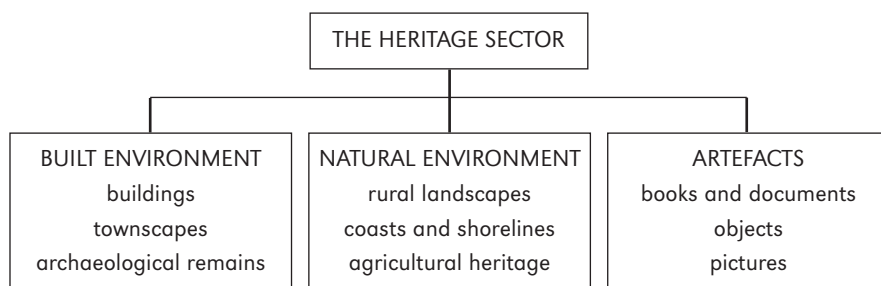
What is it that constitutes this documentary heritage? How is it defined? And how do we define its nationality? What is our social and cultural duty towards it? And how do we fulfil the obligations which that duty creates? These are some of the questions which this chapter addresses, with the intention of giving a broader contextual framework to the more practical issues with which much of the rest of the book is concerned.

## **Documentary heritage: defining the domain**

In common parlance, a 'document' is normally understood to mean a piece of paper with text or graphics on it. Among information professionals it

is now commonly used to mean any information carrier, including electronic and audiovisual media (Feather and Sturges, 2003, 144). Historically, a *document* was the written evidence required in a court of law or for administrative purposes. Indeed, it was precisely because of the requirements of law and government that the authority of the written word came to displace that of oral evidence; it then became essential to authenticate documents and to preserve them in accessible repositories (Clanchy, 1979). The formal dictionary definition is somewhat broader; the *Oxford English Dictionary* (s.v. 4) offers this: 'Something written, inscribed, etc., which furnishes evidence or information upon any subject, as a manuscript, title-deed, tomb-stone, coin, picture, etc.' Taking the two uses of 'etc.' to include printing and books, we have here a definition which takes in not only the contents of libraries and archives, and also those of museums and galleries, but also objects which are part of the built environment. The distinguishing element in the definition is neither medium nor format, but the fact of writing, inscription or symbolic or pictorial representation. The driving force of the definition is that this was a human creation intended to inform.

Figure 1.1 suggests a typology which will help us to define and locate those parts of the heritage which are in the domain of the heritage institutions: libraries, archives, museums and galleries. All three domains – built and natural environments, and artefacts – include information carriers, but different levels of interpretation are needed before the information can be retrieved and used. An 18th century building can be used to help us to understand social and economic history, just as a man-made landscape can give us insights into agrarian history or the history



**Figure 1.1** The heritage sector

of aesthetics. But these 'readings' are essentially interpretative, in a way that 'reading' an 18th century book is not, even though there is always an element of interpretation in the reading of text.

It can be cogently argued that a properly interpreted building or landscape is indeed a document. English Heritage, the British government agency responsible for the historic environment in England, defines the objective of its research programme as '[contributing] towards providing public access to, and appreciation and enjoyment of, the historic environment for this and future generations' (English Heritage, 2005a). The British Library, similarly but differently, acknowledges its public role: 'The value we bring is essentially three-fold: we are a critical resource for UK research; we underpin business and enterprise through our contribution to knowledge transfer, creativity and innovation; and we are a world-class cultural institution with a vital role as a holder of the national memory' (British Library, 2005a). At least implicitly, there is a suggestion here that the contents of the British Library are more immediately intellectually accessible to its audience, and perhaps less in need of the kind of research-based mediation which is implicit in the approach of English Heritage. The capacity of libraries, archives and museums to provide direct access to the documentary heritage is reiterated in the fundamental statement of the aims of the UK government body charged with direct oversight of them, the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA): 'Museums, libraries and archives connect people to knowledge and information, creativity and inspiration. The MLA is leading the drive to unlock this wealth, for everyone' (Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, 2005).

In that spirit, the first Annual Report of the newly constituted National Archives (formerly the Public Record Office and the Historical Manuscripts Commission) emphasizes its role in relation to the general public as well as to other archive institutions and the archives profession (National Archives, 2004). A similar sense of public service is found in the missions of archive services throughout the world. The US National Archives and Records Administration (2003) is explicit: 'The mission of the National Archives and Records Administration is to ensure, for the Citizen and the Public Servant, for the President and the Congress and the Courts, ready