
MATTHEWS, Graham, SMITH, Yvonne, KNOWLES, Gemma. *Disaster management in archives, libraries and museums*. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2009.

229 pages. ISBN 978-0-7546-7273-9. £55.00

It is a sad fact of life that our planet is prone to periodic natural events, and that the longer the return period, the greater the event, and the less the chance that anything in its path will survive unscathed. If the probability of a risk is low, we should manage that risk not by protection but by planning for recovery, and that is the theme of this book.

The reviewers were expecting a map to guide users, but, in the main, this is a description of the landscape. The authors acknowledge this, but express the hope that it will provide support for advocacy by those who read the recommendations. The blurb on the back cover claims that it will be key reading for scholars and students, and managers, but extremely useful for practitioners: this reinforces our perception.

The chapters are well laid out, with a clear structure; the first half of the book is taken up by explaining the methodology of the research process with the second half of the book containing the advice. Stress is placed on an appropriate disaster control plan, with some tips from those who have experienced a disaster, an excellent checklist of the plan framework, and a table illustrating the features of ten 'best' plans. The case for disaster management is built up, point by point, by use of anonymised quotations from the many respondents to the project, many of who give food for thought. Although the book is by no means a how-to guide to the subject there are still many useful ideas and suggestions that will aid anyone who needs to create or develop a plan for their organisation.

It is disappointing that the book sticks firmly to the remit of the original research as this means there is very limited exploration of the issues relating to digital resources. This issue is acknowledged by the authors, but in a world where an increasing amount of the information dealt with by archives will be born digital, and where there is an increase in electronic library resources, this omission means that from the outset the book only gives a partial picture.

If the audience was academic, this book will succeed. It should also help middle managers make the case for disaster management and, through reading the sources mentioned, be aware of all that may be thrown at them. There are links to a wealth of potentially useful resources which will be invaluable to anyone given the responsibility for disaster management activity, as long as they are given the time to follow up a directory of useful resources. We are presented with several reasons why Disaster Control Plans are not implemented and lack of resources and support are included as major reasons for this. There is enough information here to make a case that could be used to generate higher level support.

The quotes from staff at archives, libraries and museums are very interesting and useful but they have a feel of interesting conversations you might hear between two people passing you on the street – you hear something that grabs your attention but

you would like to have heard more of it! However, for those at the flood barriers, the experience of others may be cold comfort.

Phil Oakman
Records Manager
University of Northampton

Philip Thornborow
Collections and Learning Resources
Manager
University of Northampton
philip.thornborow@northampton.ac.uk