
Gorman, G.E. and Shep, Sydney J. (eds). *Preservation Management for Libraries, Archives and Museums*. London: Facet Publishing. 2006. 224 pages. ISBN 978 1 85604 574 2. £44.95.

When the National Library of Iraq went up in flames in April 2003, it lost an estimated 60% of its archive material, along with 95% of the collection's rare books, some dating back centuries. As much as this tragedy – described by UNESCO as 'disastrous' – can sadden and shock, it is certainly sadder still that the invading forces could allow it to happen at all.

If our heritage is to be preserved for future generations, it is imperative that we construct stronger strategies to safeguard our history, against not just war but natural disaster, slow fire, and simple degradation. The eleven essays within this book hope to analyze what elements these strategies should incorporate, how they should be implemented, and why this issue should be regarded as paramount for collection managers and archivists across the world.

The remit of just what constitutes our heritage is examined closely by John Feather, and he argues effectively that until consensus is reached on this most basic point there can be no satisfactory method of determining what to preserve, and why. Particularly relevant to preservation managers are his views on selection process and viability and his overview of the opportunities and pitfalls facing archivists of digital material.

Mirjam Foot's essay suggests a set of ground rules for preservation policy and planning with reference to the aims and functions of the library or archive within its social context. As a 'nuts and bolts' checklist for archivists and librarians this is indispensable stuff, especially when read alongside Helen Forde's closing chapter, which deals with the social contract between libraries and archives and the public with particular focus on their dual responsibilities of preservation and access.

Some relatively recent phenomena are closely examined in two chapters – David Gratton and John Moses make a strong argument for the museum's role in preserving 'intangible heritage' – oral history, traditions, and language – in the face of growing globalization. Meanwhile Yola de Lusenet provides a cogent investigation into the problems archivists are facing when presented with digital media.

One of the key problems with digital archiving is the intrinsic glut of formats which need to be considered, and whether documents stored on obsolete media should be preserved as is or migrated onto new formats. This theme is further developed by Marilyn Deegan in her essay "Surrogacy and the artefact", which questions the perceived need to keep originals whenever possible, and by Barbara Reed who takes an in-depth look at the management of digitally born artefacts, noting the irony that while the original Domesday book, written over 900 years ago, is "perfectly accessible", the 'updated' version produced on videodisc by the BBC in 1986 became virtually obsolete 15 years after its creation.

Further articles dealing with the nitty gritty of preservation and conservation of both paper and audiovisual media along with case studies of preservation issues in conflict zones round out this collection, which achieves its aims impeccably and deserves to be a staple text for all archivists and librarians with an interest in the conservation of our heritage.

Penny Robertson
CPD / Senior Information Officer
CILIPS / Scottish Library and Information Council