as aplicações informáticas para processamento da informação já tinham coberto todas as alternativas, o artigo sobre informática desfaz essa expectativa ou esperança. Todos nós, profissionais da informação, estamos envolvidos numa actividade que não dá trégua e que exige uma actualização profissional permanente. A mudança veio para ficar e a capacidade de adaptação de cada um está à prova. As PÁGINAS estão atentas e procurarão continuar a corresponder. Em *Ler Muito Prazer*, um texto delicioso que, sem complexos de deslocado, faz jus ao título da secção. O modelo que hoje seguimos poderá sofrer alterações no futuro – e certamente isso virá a acontecer – mas a intenção será sempre a de servir da melhor forma as necessidades da comunidade profissional a que as PÁGINAS se destinam.

Este número 4 das PÁGINAS assinala o fim dum ciclo o qual se identifica com o lançamento da revista e com as assinaturas que, então, se angariaram. A revista resulta do conjunto de múltiplos esforços entre os quais não é desprecendo o vosso, leitores, através das assinaturas. Estas dão a segurança financeira mínima que permite a produção das PÁGINAS e para a prosseguir, teremos de continuar a contar com a vossa colaboração. Neste Editorial não cabe aprofundar esta questão mas em breve, muito breve, reataremos o contacto convosco e, então, o médio prazo será desvendado.

Até lá, boa leitura.

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**Preservation policy, practice and co-operation**

*MIRIAM FOOT*

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**Introduction: some causes of deterioration**

During the nineteenth century increasing demands for paper and advances in science and technology transformed paper making from a craft to an industrial manufacturing process. Different raw materials and new processes produced paper that is chemically unstable and that will deteriorate over time, a deterioration that is accelerated by light, heat and humidity. The increase in atmospheric pollution has further increased chemical deterioration of paper and binding materials, leaving us with the problems of acid paper and brittle books.

Other factors have contributed to more rapid deterioration of library and archive materials during the last century. Increases in temperature and modifications to buildings, introduced for the convenience of library staff and users, have had a deleterious effect on library and archive stock. The enormous increase since 1945 in library use, and especially in the use of rare books and archives, the natural consequence of an increased population and of better education, has meant that materials relatively little disturbed for centuries are now handled (fetched, carried, consulted, copied, lent, read, exhibited, re-read, and eventually replaced) many times per year. The introduction of the photocopier caused more damage in a relatively short span of time than handling and reading have done over many decades.

The increase in accessibility, with the production of more and better library and archive catalogues, with the advent of on-line catalogues linked to networks (all excellent developments, greatly
improving library and archive services), has in turn meant even more use of material with its consequent wear and tear.

The preservation problem and new technology

The size of the preservation problem world-wide is now such, and the nature of the problem so acute, that the library and archive communities are beginning to realise that it can only be tackled if they are prepared to act together. This view has developed largely as a result of a changing environment. Economic pressures have increased. In many countries the nineteen-eighties were not too uncomfortable, but the nineteen-nineties saw resources diminishing and there is no sign that the twenty-first century will bring a great improvement in those economic factors that determine library and archive funding, while there is every reason to believe that demand will continue to grow. Competition caused by the growing emphasis on access and the need to fund new technology has meant that funding for preservation has slipped behind.

As well as lack of funding and competition for available funds, two new technological developments have strengthened the need for a co-operative approach: the development of mass-deacidification and paper-strengthening processes and the emergence of electronic media, including new techniques for surrogating or substitution.

Mass treatments have been in use for over two decades, but none of these bulk processes is the panacea for all our problems. Some are better than others, but none is universally suitable for all library and archive material. Moreover, none is so cheap that duplication of effort can be justified.

Electronic media present a number of different preservation problems due to the inherent instability of the information carrier and the inherent obsolescence of the computer hardware and software needed to access it.

Both reasons of cost and ease of access make co-operation essential when new surrogating techniques are used on any scale. The conversion of paper – or film-based material and archive material to electronic format has not only vastly improved access to the content of such material, but also serves to prevent over-use, and therefore wear and tear of originals. However, the longer-term accessibility of these media, whether originating in electronic format or produced as a surrogate, is both complex and (as yet) costly and the development of methods and standards for their preservation can best be achieved, and is only affordable, if it is shared.

Preservation: Policy, Practice and Co-operation

Other changes

Over the past two decades the preservation philosophy has also changed. The recognition that preservation is not something separate, not a purely technical matter, the responsibility of a few men and women in white coats, is gradually dawning. Nor is it something that comes at the end, a long time after the currency of the material has ceased. The need to look after a collection, to make sure it is there, and in a fit state to be used, to ensure that it can continue to be used, is – or should be – the continual responsibility and daily preoccupation of all those who handle library and archive material. The comparatively short life span of electronic formats and the need to understand their structure in order to preserve them (by whatever means) places the preservation decision right at the beginning of their life-cycle. Moreover, the fact that preservation and access, preservation and services to users are not at daggers drawn, but that preservation is there to enable access and to support the services, cannot be emphasised too strongly.

At the same time there has been a movement away from the reliance on complex conservation technology (so beloved in the 1960s and seventies). The dangers of too much intervention and of mass processes have become more and more apparent and better understood. The destruction due to well-meant but ill-conceived treatments, the over-emphasis on cure, have led to a greater focus on prevention and to the development of a wider range of possible approaches. Conservation science and historical bibliography have moved closer together. The book or document as a physical object is far more than a carrier of information and in many cases its physical attributes are necessary to understand its history and the society in which it was created. Prevention is also cheaper in the long run. Pressure on publishers to use archival-sound paper, the creation and maintenance of a suitable storage environment, adequate and supportive shelving, cleaning of both storage areas and collections, boxing and protective wrapping, educating library staff and users in careful handling, as well as research into materials and treatment methods, are all excellent investments. They carry a cost, but this is only a fraction of the cost of restoring a badly-damaged collection – let alone one that is lost beyond redemption. There needs to be a balance between prevention and cure, a balance between a healthy respect for the physical object and the need to use it. These shifts of culture have gone hand-in-hand with a change in emphasis from hands-on conservation to preservation and preservation management.
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The need for policy

If changes in economy, technology and philosophy have awakened the need for co-operation, the same factors have stressed the need for an over-arching policy, both institutionally and nationally. In theory it seems logical that a preservation policy, a policy that addresses the questions of what should be preserved, why and for how long, precedes a preservation programme that sets out the order in which the collections will be preserved and how this should be done. The policy determines the programme and the method. In practice this is not always the case. In many libraries the immediate needs of the users, the level of funding, and even the available methods have determined the programme, and in many instances the programme has taken the place of the policy. The importance of developing retention and preservation policies in the context of an over-all library policy, the need to approach a collection as a whole, the need for collection surveys, for planning and budgeting for programmes within an over-all strategy, the need to raise funds and to present a coherent argument, the need to train librarians, archivists and conservators to become preservation managers, have also become more apparent. Let us look at these issues in a little more detail.

The need for a preservation policy is nothing new, but it has become more acute in recent years. With dwindling resources and with many more claims on the resources that are available, the need for accountability and the need to justify expenditure have become more pressing. Organisations and especially the governors and funders of institutions and organisations, be they governments, local authorities or any other disbursers of public funds, but also the users of institutions, expect a policy as a sign of accountability and as a tangible expression of intent as well as something that can be monitored. A policy is often necessary for bidding for funds and for demonstrating that such funds can and will be used responsibly. It is needed to set and validate priorities and to review existing programmes. It can also be used to raise funds outside the institution. It is needed in order to spend money wisely and to demonstrate that funds are spent to long-term good effect. It is useful to raise awareness of the issues in question among funders and top management, but also among all staff and users. A policy can explain to users why certain actions are and are not taken. A policy sets out the responsibilities of all concerned, staff and users alike.

Then, a policy is needed to plan coherent preservation programmes, programmes that do not just nibble at the edges, or deal with individual problems piecemeal as they arise, but that hang together and add up to a useful over-all result, taking into account the over-all needs and benefit of the collections.

Formulating a policy

How is a preservation policy formulated? What do we need to take into account and how do we proceed?

In order to address the questions of what needs to be preserved and why, we must look at the function and purpose of the collections themselves, and of those of the institutions in which they are kept. These can vary a great deal. Different kinds of library or archive have different aims and purposes as well as different duties to their users. Their preservation decisions must be guided by those aims and purposes and by the needs of the users.

Although the answers to the questions of what do we preserve, why and for how long differ with the aims and purposes of the institution, they are also influenced by the nature of the material itself. A broadly-based international collection will comprise original sources and secondary material, basic research material and ephemera, in a variety of formats, ranging from print on paper, or manuscript on vellum in a conventional sewn and bound structure or in loose sheets, from maps, atlases, sheet music, to globes, seals, scrolls, acetate film, slides and photographs, videos, CD-ROMs and on-line databases (and many others). All these formats impose their own conditions, but they also serve a multitude of purposes, and it is the purpose of the collection, even more than its nature, its physical format and the different media in which the information is contained and presented, that determines its preservation needs. Different formats and different media demand different technical solutions as well as different storage conditions, but the aim and the purpose of a library itself and its function determines its preservation policy which should cover all formats and all media.

The preservation policy then steers the preservation programme, which sets out the order in which collections or items will be preserved and the method by which this should be done.
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The preservation policy then steers the preservation programme, which sets out the order in which collections or items will be preserved and the method by which this should be done.
Links with other functions

If we talk about the purpose of a collection as a determining element in its preservation needs, we need to look at other library and archive functions that are closely linked to preservation, such as acquisition, retention and access. How strong these links are and what their relevant importance is, again depends on the purpose of the library or archive in question as well as on the nature of the material. Although the aims and purposes of the various kinds of libraries and archives vary enormously, they all have some basic objectives in common. All libraries and archives acquire material (or have at one stage in their existence done so), mostly with the aim of making it available at some time or other, and all want to retain some of it for a longer or shorter period of time, some in perpetuity. If we assume that all research libraries want to make their collections available now, and in a number of cases also in the future, they will have to ensure that those collections can be used and are in a fit state to be used. This ‘fit state’ applies both to the information contained in these collections and in many cases – and certainly for convencional material – to their actual physical format.

When we are talking about digital material, there is an extra dimension that needs to be preserved, and that is the dimension of access. For convencional material the human body provides its own access mechanism, moreover this is one that is renewed with each generation. For digital material this is not the case. Eyes are not much use when faced with any of the formats or media in which digital data are presented. Unless we have a separate, usable and maintainable access mechanism, we simply cannot get at (cannot use) the data so recorded.

Most of what follows applies both to libraries and archives, although some functions and decisions are different, especially those that apply to acquisition and retention.

Acquisition

Acquisition decisions not only influence or steer preservation decisions, they can in themselves be preservation decisions (e.g. when it is decided to acquire a certain text in hard copy, in paperback, on microfilm, or in digital format; when it is decided to acquire a rare edition relatively cheaply, but in bad condition, rather than wait for a better copy). The purpose of an acquisition also determines its preservation needs: whether it is acquired merely for short-term use, to be replaced by a newer and more up-to-date version as soon as, or even before, it has worn out; whether it is acquired for the primary purpose of lending or for use on the library premises; whether it is acquired for medium-term heavy use only or purely for long-term retention, to become the national archival copy. In all these cases, and there are many other possibilities, the preservation decision will have to follow the purpose of the acquisition. The format of the acquisition also determines its preservation needs. Different decisions have to be made following the acquisition of a well-bound book printed on permanent paper, of a much damaged brittle late 19th-century publication, of a set of newspapers, of a collection of photographs or drawings, or of a reel of microfilm or a CD-ROM.

Retention

The question of retention is inextricably linked with preservation. In most libraries acquisitions are not always made with a retention (or non-retention) decision clearly in mind. Frequently, the decision to retain an item for medium-term or long-term (or even indefinite) use, can only be made once its short-term usefulness has been proven. Archives are in a better position in this respect as, as a rule, the material is vetted and weeded before it is accepted. However in libraries, before any preservation decision is made (other than a shortterm provisional fix), a retention decision is vital. Without a clear retention policy, preservation rapidly becomes a haphazard and even potentially wasteful exercise. Not only is the decision on use and retention absolutely vital for any decision relating to preservation, but the decision on the format in which an item is to be retained is almost equally important. There are basically three levels of retention: transient material (by which I mean material that will be superseded or replaced), material of which the intellectual content only is to be retained, and material for which it is important to retain both the content and the physical format. Once the level of retention has been decided, the preservation policy can follow.

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While, for conventional material, we can still make the distinction between retention and preservation, however closely linked these two concepts are, for electronic material such a distinction no longer applies. The main reason for this is the lack of longevity of
the storage media for electronic information, coupled with the imminent obsolescence of their retrieval hardware and software. Simply leaving things as they are is not an option for digital collections. The choice whether to retain the document as an artefact or to retain the information it contains, or both, is less of a real choice with electronic material. If we try and keep electronic publications as artefacts (i.e. exactly as received from the publisher or producer), they will eventually become inaccessible and their contents will be lost. On the other hand, if we attempt to retain the content many aspects of the visual presentation and perhaps even of the functionality of the electronic document may be lost. Experience so far seems to indicate that in the long run the intellectual content of an electronic publication is all we can expect to retain and we shall have to accept (at least for the time being) that certain interactive, dynamic and presentational aspects of the original may not be retained, at least not exactly.

**Surrogates and originals**

Collections of which the intellectual content only is to be retained are obvious candidates for surrogating. The option of surrogating or re-formatting as a means of preserving the information content has been much used by libraries and archives and although the preferred method (from a preservation viewpoint) is still microfilming, digitising has become an alternative from the point of view of easy access, albeit one with its own subsequent preservation concerns. Surrogating, although useful for the retention and preservation of the intellectual content of library or archive material is not a solution in every case. In many cases the format is as important as, or sometimes even more important than, the information it contains. Format alone can provide information over and beyond its content and there are a number of library and archive users who have a real need to consult material in its original format, whether for study of marginal annotations, of paper, of the writing materials used, of the composition of the item, or of the structure of the book and its binding. But these are a minority of all users and unlikely to wear out the originals. For some purposes of access surrogates can be preferable to originals, while at the same time surrogates, provided they have been made carefully and with suitable equipment, can prolong the life of an original by protecting it from over-handling and repeated copying.

Preservation: Policy, Practice and Co-operation

The decision whether or not the original format should be retained once a surrogate has been made is by no means cut and dried. Hard and difficult decisions are necessary, based on the nature of the material in question or the likely use it will get and the likely purpose of such use. Judging the needs of future generations of scholars is not an easy task.

**Storage**

Long-term retention demands suitable storage conditions and good quality storage equipment, in order to protect the collections, or at least slow down their physical and chemical deterioration. Again, the nature of the collections themselves, their age, rarity and value, the materials from which they are made and their structure, their size and shape, all determine the conditions under which they should be stored. Some types of material will need greater security, others a different and/or better-controlled environment or extra protection – some need to be stored flat in drawers, others upright on shelves. If we look at the enormous variety of library and archive materials, it will be immediately clear that there is no such concept as ideal storage conditions. Ideally, storage conditions should be adapted to the materials of which the collections are made, but for most institutions this is simply not practical. Moreover, most library and archive items themselves consist of a mixture of materials, each of which may have different optimum conditions. Compromises have to be made and a balance found. The housing or storage of digital material opens up a whole new range of considerations. Not only because video disks, tapes, CD-ROMs, etc. need different storage conditions from those suitable for cellulose-based material, not only because we have to house and maintain their retrieval hardware and software – but because what we house and retain is frequently the information rather than the format. Moreover, when we talk about digital material and databases, the question of housing or storage takes on a different meaning.

Standards for the storage of electronic material are still in a state of development. Standards for the storage of conventional material have been well developed in a number of countries. Such standards and guidelines are useful, but they should not become divorced from the purpose and the use of the material for which the storage and environmental conditions are prescribed.
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The decision whether or not the original format should be retained once a surrogate has been made is by no means cut and dried. Hard and difficult decisions are necessary, based on the nature of the material in question or the likely use it will get and the likely purpose of such use. Judging the needs of future generations of scholars is not an easy task.

**Storage**

Long-term retention demands suitable storage conditions and good quality storage equipment, in order to protect the collections, or at least slow down their physical and chemical deterioration. Again, the nature of the collections themselves, their age, rarity and value, the materials from which they are made and their structure, their size and shape, all determine the conditions under which they should be stored. Some types of material will need greater security, others a different and/or better-controlled environment or extra protection – some need to be stored flat in drawers, others upright on shelves. If we look at the enormous variety of library and archive materials, it will be immediately clear that there is no such concept as ideal storage conditions. Ideally, storage conditions should be adapted to the materials of which the collections are made, but for most institutions this is simply not practical. Moreover, most library and archive items themselves consist of a mixture of materials, each of which may have different optimum conditions. Compromises have to be made and a balance found. The housing or storage of digital material opens up a whole new range of considerations. Not only because video disks, tapes, CD-ROMS, etc. need different storage conditions from those suitable for cellulose-based material, not only because we have to house and maintain their retrieval hardware and software – but because what we house and retain is frequently the information rather than the format. Moreover, when we talk about digital material and databases, the question of housing or storage takes on a different meaning.

Standards for the storage of electronic material are still in a state of development. Standards for the storage of conventional material have been well developed in a number of countries. Such standards and guidelines are useful, but they should not become divorced from the purpose and the use of the material for which the storage and environmental conditions are prescribed.
Access and use

Storage conditions and preservation planning are closely linked to access and use of the collections. Access takes many forms. Better, more accessible catalogues and wider networks will increase use and thereby increase the need for conservation treatment, for better protection and for better storage facilities. But catalogues also help by defining what is in a collection, thereby preventing readers from asking for the wrong material and thus preventing over-handling. Catalogues can also refer readers to surrogates, thereby safeguarding the originals, while registers of surrogates can direct users to existing surrogates available for use or further copying.

Access to the material by users can take the form of direct or remote consultation or of semi-direct enjoyment (e.g. exhibitions). The needs of the users will determine whether the original document (provided it is in a fit state to be handled) or a surrogate is issued, while the kind of use will determine the security measures needed. In any case the purpose of the user strongly influences the preservation needs of the material. The concept of use is an important one for most libraries and archives, so important that many libraries take the amount of use that is made of their collections as an indication of their preservation needs. This poses no problems with heavily-used material, which will need protection or treatment or both, to keep it in a state fit to be used. The converse of such an argument is a dangerous one. We must be very careful when considering low use as a reason for neglect. Texts may not be in immediate demand nor in frequent demand, but they may be used by someone at some stage to increase knowledge and understanding.

Nevertheless, the question of why an item or a collection should be preserved is closely linked to considerations of use and to considerations of access. Only if we want to create a time capsule is there any point in preserving material to which access is withheld.

Providing access to collections while preserving them for future use can, at least for convencional material, be seen as two conflicting aims. There are indeed kinds of access that defeat or prevent future use, in the same way as there are preservation methods that inhibit instant access. Nevertheless, such conflicts can be resolved and if the need for and the purpose of access are considered carefully, the dilemma between access and preservation is not quite so acute.

*Per contra*, for digital material we can argue that access can assist preservation. Electronic material does not deteriorate through use (as there is no direct contact and therefore no deterioration of the medium), but if it is not used for a long period, it may prove not to work any longer. A high level of systematic access helps to check the usability of electronic publications. Moreover, for electronic formats we have the choice whether we preserve them in digital format or whether we convert them (for the purpose of long-term retention) to non-electronic media. If we do preserve them in digital format, we have the choice whether to store them on-line or off-line, and whether or not in a standard format. These options will provide a different kind of access. The kind of use and the kind of access that is needed, influence preservation decisions and need therefore to be considered when formulating a preservation policy.

Security

Both storage and access are closely linked to security and, again, this applies to all formats.

A preservation policy either needs to include a security policy or needs to be linked to one. Such a security policy should address physical security, such as building and perimeter security, but also security of access, conditions for access by staff, contractors and users to storage areas, decisions on closed *versus* open-access to the collections – security during lending and transport of collection material; as well as security of computer systems, including authorized access to and authorized manipulation of data.

The need to safeguard the collections will influence the way in which they are housed. High security areas are often desirable and can be essential, but security that is too strict and that limits access to one or two people only can defeat itself in case of a sudden emergency.

Sensitive controlled access must be a requirement whenever any secure storage is planned.

A security policy must include the users, and state, for example, possible limitations of access to original material in favour of surrogates. It should also state clearly the responsibilities for security of the collections, again both those of the staff and of the users. Procedures to be followed in case of a breach of security should be clearly set out, so should procedures for preventing and coping with disasters.
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The need to safeguard the collections will influence the way in which they are housed. High security areas are often desirable and can be essential, but security that is too strict and that limits access to one or two people only can defeat itself in case of a sudden emergency.

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Loans and exhibitions

There are a number of other library and archive functions that must be taken into account when formulating a preservation policy, such as lending (be it loans to other institutions, to individuals, or to exhibitions), reprographic services and exhibitions. What are the reasons for lending material? Are there restrictions on lending certain types of material? Are loans restricted to duplicatas and/or surrogates, or can original and possibly rare material be lent? What are the conditions for loan? Do they include specifications for environmental control for security and for handling? What are the security provisions during transport? Who covers the insurance? All questions that need to be asked as they have a direct impact on the preservation of the material. In question a similar considerations apply to exhibitions, whether these are held in the institution itself or elsewhere. Are there restrictions on the type of material that can be exhibited and on the duration of the exhibition? Are there conditions for security provision, for control of the environment and of illumination, for the design of exhibition cases and furniture or stands – are there guidelines for support materials and for the handling of objects? Is material that is lent for exhibition always first photographed or microfilmed? Are there procedures for conservation reports and for monitoring the condition of the material before, during and after the exhibition? All these issues are closely related to the preservation of the material itself.

Reprography

Likewise, a copying or reprographic policy needs to take account of preservation considerations. It needs to encompass issues such as copyright and the status of the material (whether or not it may be copied), but it must also relate to frequency of use and frequency of demand for copying; it needs to state the limitations inherent in particular formats (e.g. very large documents, fold-out maps or illustrations), and particular media (e.g. restrictions on copying of illuminated manuscripts or vellum documents, it must state clearly the restrictions imposed by the condition of the material (e.g. fragile or brittle documents, tight, weak, or important original bindings) and give guidelines for handling and support. There will also have to be rules as to what material may and may not be copied by the users themselves. The use to which copies or surrogates are put by the institution needs to be laid down, e.g. whether the users are always offered a surrogate in preference to issuing them with the original; whether there is a catalogue or catalogue entry for surrogates.

Finance and management

Two more considerations will influence a preservation policy, whether for conventional or for digital material: finance and management. Although human intellect, human understanding, historical and technical knowledge, common sense, energy and a will to succeed are all vital, no preservation policy, no preservation programme, however well conceived, stands a chance of being implemented without sufficient funding. But preservation is only one of many library and archive functions that cry out for funding, and in order to find a proper balance between the funding of preservation activities and those other library and archive functions and programmes, we must again consider how they are related.

Historically, libraries and archives have looked at the balance of funding between acquisition and preservation, between access (catalogues, reader services) and preservation and, sometimes, between public services (exhibitions and publication programmes) and preservation. In recent decades the balance of funding between computing and telecommunication services and preservation has also been considered. However, when we talk about the preservation of digital material the latter distinction may well disappear.

Lack of resources has always stood in the way of the successful implementation of a preservation policy or strategy and will certainly do so no less for electronic material. Perhaps the situation is even worse. At least once a book or a manuscript has been conserved, one can be reasonably satisfied of its continued existence (provided it is properly stored and not over-handled). Once a microfilm has been made, the contents of the document filmed will be preserved for about 300 years (provided the film is of archival quality, has been produced according to archival standards and has been stored in proper conditions). This is not the case with electronic material. Long-term access to such material requires an ongoing commitment to reformat or to migrate data, and planning is made more difficult because of the rapid changes in technology and the unpredictability of its nature and of future alternatives.
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Whether we talk about the preservation of conventional or of digital material, resources are limited and we must be selective in deciding what to preserve.

In the past the need to be actively selective in what not to preserve was not so acute. Many types of material could not be saved in any case, either because they had been over-used and were therefore beyond rescue, or because they carried the seeds of their own destruction due to their manufacturing processes. Now, with much increased understanding and greatly improved techniques, we are in a position to save most material, at least in theory. Benign neglect is no longer an option and we have to make a choice between saving or discarding. This is a hard choice and I have never yet met a librarian who relishes it. Archivists are better trained in this respect.

Moreover, for digital material we cannot put off the decision whether or not to preserve, as this decision will have to be made right at the beginning of its life cycle. Limited resources mean that we must make the best use of those we have – and that includes human resources – perhaps the most important of all. Training and education are vital, so is a constant emphasis on awareness-raising throughout an institution and throughout the community.

We must press for a better understanding of the preservation problem and of the vital importance of tackling it in a co-ordinated way. Much more investment is necessary, financial, but equally important, intellectual, in the training of conservators, of preservation managers and of all those who handle and use books and documents. Knowledge of historical book structures, of the history of book production and book and manuscript materials, of past and present conservation techniques and of new technology are all vital if selection for preservation is to be informed and if decisions on treatment are to be intelligent.

Co-operation

Having dealt at some length with the connections between preservation and other library and archive functions, the need for those institutions, and within institutions, those departments where these functions are carried out, to work together and to discuss mutual dependencies and mutual problems will be apparent. The same arguments apply and the same needs exist on a national scale.

The ever-growing threat to library and archive collections, the nature of electronic formats, the different economic and technical environment, and the changes in preservation culture, are all forcing a wider, more collaborative approach. No library, no archive, however well intentioned, can carry alone the responsibility for the long term maintenance of all its collections, let alone for that of the national collection. In many countries the need for co-operation has been generally accepted and is much discussed, so is the need for a national preservation strategy. Now is the time for practical steps to be taken and a number of building blocks need to be put in place before the edifice of a national preservation policy can emerge.

Building the future

The assessment of the national preservation need is the first of these building blocks. Methodologies for surveying library and archive collections are being developed and tested. Following this, representative collections will have to be surveyed so that, with some scaling up, the total national preservation problem can be assessed.

The second building block is agreement on a national retention policy (as applied to libraries). Once individual libraries have prepared their own retention policy according to a standard method, these policies can be compared and used to reach agreement on retention responsibilities at the national level. To help document and implement such policies, a register of collection strengths and retention intentions will be essential. A clear picture of the scale of the national preservation problem, quantitatively and qualitatively, combined with a better understanding of the distribution of the national collection, are needed in order to agree the division of responsibility for its retention and maintenance.

A third and most important building block is a change of attitude: a genuine belief that the national need overrides local interests, in the same way as in every institution the needs of the collections as a whole must override purely departmental or local needs and preferences; a genuine willingness to set aside short-term expediency in favour of long-term aims; a recognition of the importance of shared knowledge and shared experience – and a spirit of goodwill and mutual trust, so that the goal of formulating local preservation priorities and programmes into a coherent plan under the umbrella of a national preservation policy can be achieved.
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Preservation: Policy, Practice and Co-operation

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As a fourth building block we need political acceptance and funding on a national scale: the recognition that preserving the national written heritage is not just the task of individual librarians and archivists, but a task that involves users, scholars, businesses, and all those who benefit from the results of study and research. However, this will not be achieved unless librarians and archivists combine to make politicians and funding agencies aware of the importance of maintaining the national recorded heritage for the use and enjoyment, not only of those who use it now, but of future generations.