

**THEFT AND LOSS FROM UK LIBRARIES:
A NATIONAL SURVEY**

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Crime Prevention Unit Papers

The Home Office Police Research Group (PRG) was formed in 1992 to carry out and manage research relevant to the work of the police service and Home Office Policy Divisions. One of the major police department divisions which acts as customer for the PRG is the Home Office Crime Prevention Unit which was formed in 1983 to promote preventative action against crime. It has a particular responsibility to disseminate information on crime prevention topics.

The object of the present series of occasional papers is to present research material in a way which should help and inform practitioners, including the police, whose work can help reduce crime.

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Foreword

While the problems of theft and of the mutilation of books and other materials in our libraries seldom attract national headlines, they represent a growing concern to those responsible for the provision of library services.

This report details the findings of the first comprehensive survey of the financial loss borne by the main sectors of the library service, and the actions they are taking to combat these problems (previous, smaller, surveys have been more broadly focused on crimes committed in libraries). It concludes that libraries are indeed suffering substantially and estimates that losses of books alone exceed £150 million each year. Book mutilation, too, is widespread.

These losses to the public purse are occurring despite a sizeable, and burgeoning, investment by libraries in measures to prevent theft and retrieve material not returned from loan. The report documents librarians' views of these various counter measures. But, above all, it makes the point that count and inventory practices in libraries are often sadly deficient, and that this severely hinders many institutions from directing their efforts at targetting the type of material, particular borrowers, or circumstances that give rise to the greatest loss.

I M BURNS
Deputy Under Secretary of State
Home Office
October 1992

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1 INTRODUCTION

The problem of theft – and of the mutilation – of books and other materials held in libraries is not new. Chained collections provide one mark of the longevity of the problem in the UK and indeed, Munn (1935) traces origins back to ancient Egypt. The management of theft and mutilation has thus long been part and parcel of the librarian's responsibilities, although it has not been a straightforward task in a service where one of the main tenets is to encourage readership through borrowing.

Despite this, the issue has only received prominence as a management priority in recent years. Much of the impetus has come from the academic institutions, where the increasing use of 'electronic tagging' to secure materials – the 20th century equivalent of the chain – has proved one of the more visible signs of the unease felt. In the late 1980s, these concerns were taken up forcefully by the National Preservation Office (NPO) of the British Library, an organisation that hitherto focused almost exclusively on promoting techniques for preserving the physical condition of the nation's books. Its concern extended beyond the fact that theft and mutilation disadvantages other library users, to the direct financial consequences: the head of the NPO recently estimated that the aggregate cost of theft and damage in UK libraries might conservatively total £50 million per annum, and could very likely be of the order of £100 million (Jackson, 1990).

While few will dispute that a significant problem exists – and that individual institutions and authorities are devoting considerable resources on counter measures – the true dimensions of book loss are unknown. Counts and inventories, always difficult to conduct in the larger collect are believed to be declining in frequency in many libraries. Moreover, unlike many other uniform locally-operated services, the library service does not work under any central direction or common standard. Auditing conventions differ. Although very useful statistics are coordinated by libraries, rates of loss are not included.

This enquiry was commissioned, on the initiative and with the direct assistance of the NPO, to begin to remedy this situation. Its remit was straightforward: to throw light on the scale and characteristics of loss experienced in key, and contrasting, sectors of the library service: the "public" (that is, local authority), academic and the governmental/specialist collections. In addition, evidence was sought on what libraries in each sector have been doing to ameliorate their problems, and of their experiences in prevention.

The library service in the UK

A rudimentary outline of the principal components of the service provides background to this enquiry. Library facilities in the UK are provided by a wide variety of authorities, and range from freely accessible "public" collections to libraries, run by private institutions or organisations, where access is severely restricted. In structural

terms the notion of a unified “service” is inaccurate: but of course close affiliations – and loan arrangements – exist between nearly all collections, and professional association is strong.

The bulk of collections form part of the “public library service”, which local authorities are required to provide under the Public Libraries and Museums Act of 1964. The most recent figures on the public library sector, derived from the 1989/90 annual survey carried out by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) indicate that there are 24,514 “service points” in the UK¹. This total however includes a great number of smaller collections in old people’s homes and hospitals (18,927) and in mobile form (735). The number of designated library buildings is a little under 5,000: a number that has not changed significantly over the last decade.

The estimated book stock of public libraries in 1990 was 157 million books²: the equivalent of 0.31 reference books and 2.08 other volumes per head of population (PSI, 1991). In 1989/90, the net overall expenditure on library facilities by all local authorities in the UK was £593.9 million, after allowing for income from fines and other sources which amounted to £40.3 million.

Although the public library occupies a central position in the range of library services in the UK, it by no means constitutes the whole picture. There are other essential strands which were considered within the remit of this enquiry.

The national libraries – the British Library, the National Library of Wales and the National Library of Scotland – are three of the five “legal deposit” libraries within the UK; and serve as national centres for reference, study, bibliographical and other information services. These three libraries are funded directly by their “parent government departments” – the Department of National Heritage (formerly the Office of Arts and Libraries, which in 1989/90 allocated £99 million to library services – a little over half of which went to the British Library), the Scottish Office and the Welsh Office (PSI, op cit). The collections in these three institutions are huge – of the order of 23 million volumes.

Substantial numbers of books are also, of course, held by educational establishments: from the universities and polytechnics (at the time of the research, now universities) through to private schools and colleges. As these generally receive funding directly from the institutions they serve, aggregate figures are more difficult to come by. There are some 135 main university and polytechnic libraries, and probably several times this number of libraries in the colleges and individual departments of these same institutions. Two of these collections – Cambridge University Library and the

¹This data is based on returns from 156 of the 167 library authorities, and CIPFA figures are grossed up to account for those unable to provide information.

²The term “book” is defined by CIPFA as a volume, including volumes of bound periodicals, held either for loan or reference or out on loan. A similar convention is used in this report.

Bodleian at Oxford – serve alongside the three national libraries as “legal deposit” libraries and together hold in excess of 10 million volumes. The Standing Conference of National and University Libraries (SCONUL), which represents the universities, estimates that current holdings are between 55 and 70 million volumes (gauged by collecting data on the amount of shelving occupied in university libraries). Polytechnics are another source: the Council of Polytechnic Librarians (COPOL) estimates that the libraries of the twenty-nine polytechnics in England and Wales hold over 10 million books.

“Specialist” libraries – comprising the collections which serve government departments (from the departmental headquarters through to innumerable smaller offshoots, like the substantial collections held by institutions such as the Milk Marketing Board, or Health and Safety Executive libraries), those serving professional associations, commercial companies or even private institutions — are another sizeable sector. There are hundreds, if not thousands, of such collections and there is no means of reliably estimating their book stock.

This sketch outlines some of the main sectors within the UK library service that have been included within this review (details of methodology and sampling follow at pages 6/7 and in Appendix 1). While it is clearly not comprehensive, it indicates that *the total number of books held in libraries in the UK certainly exceeds 200 million volumes* (see Appendix 2).

Use made of library facilities

The data available on who uses library services, and how they do so, is piecemeal. That which is available comes from two principal sources: from the public libraries completing their annual CIPFA returns, and from the General Household Survey.

The CIPFA returns indicate that issues, or loans, of books from public libraries in the year to 31 March 1990 amounted to 564 million volumes, or nearly 10 volumes per head of population overall. Nearly 6 out of 10 loans are of adult fiction. Issues made by public libraries per head of population have declined marginally since 1980: they are highest in Scotland (10.25) and lowest in Northern Ireland (7.07). Over the same period lending stock (per head of population) has increased in Scotland, but fallen in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The General Household Survey (GHS) of 1987 (OPCS, 1988) provides the most up to date information on the proportion of the population using libraries and the characteristics of users. The survey showed that 26% of all adults interviewed had visited a public library at some time in the four weeks prior to interview.

A higher proportion of females than males visit libraries (29% as opposed to 22%) although the males who do visit tend to do so more frequently. People aged between 30 and 44, and those aged over 60, are most likely to visit their public library, while

those aged between 45 and 59 are least likely to visit. Similarly, people in the non-manual socio-economic groups (SEGs) are more likely to visit libraries than people in manual SEGs. Those members of the manual SEGs who do visit libraries, however, are more likely than members of other groups to borrow or return books, but are less likely to look at reference books or newspapers while they are in libraries. The more highly qualified a person is, the more likely he or she is to make use of public libraries. Not surprisingly, however, unemployed and economically inactive people are more likely than the employed to visit a library.

The GHS also asked respondents about the services they use when they visit a library. Eighty-one per cent of people visit libraries to borrow or return books, while 26% of people do so to look at reference books. Fewer than one in ten people (8%) visit libraries to borrow or return records or tapes and only 9% use them as places to study.

Previous work on library theft

In 1935 Munn, an American librarian, stated that “theft is a subject which has not been widely discussed by librarians in public” (Munn, op cit). Since that time research into both the theft and mutilation of books in US libraries has been profuse. Numerous studies have been published (e.g. Griffith 1978; Lincoln 1984; Burnett 1990) detailing the quantities and types of books that are stolen and mutilated and discussing the specific problems faced by individual libraries. A whole range of journals directed at the library service are published in the US, including at least one devoted society to the security of libraries and their collections (“Library and Archival Security”). Serious incidents of theft and mutilation frequently catch the attention of the American media.

There is, by comparison, a dearth of research endeavour – and public interest – directed at these sorts of problems in British libraries. Much of the research that has been carried out has been conducted by students in fulfillment of academic degrees and has not been made widely available to librarians. While much of the general research on UK libraries has been conducted by the former Centre for Library and Information Management (CLAIM) at Loughborough University even this organisation tended to concentrate on the traditional mainstream issues, such as the uses made of libraries, rather than the deliberate theft and mutilation of library materials.

A 1984 study by two US academics (Lincoln and Lincoln, 1986), conducted with the support of CLAIM, which assessed the level of crime and disruption in Great Britain’s libraries, has provided the most comprehensive data so far in this area. Three hundred public libraries were surveyed, including the central library and every third regional library in each district in England, Wales and Scotland: thus producing a sample heavily biased in favour of larger libraries. Two hundred and nine libraries (70%) responded and provided information on 24 categories of crime and disruption including damage to books, and the theft of books, reference and audiovisual (AV) material.

The survey showed that:

- 85% of libraries had suffered at least one known incident of intentional book mutilation, while the average frequency of deliberate mutilation was 9.8 incidents per library per year.
- Over 90% of libraries had suffered at least one incident of book theft, while 55% had suffered more than 20 incidents. When respondents were asked how many volumes had been stolen from their library during the previous year – one of the principal issues investigated by the current enquiry 40% of respondents proved unable to provide even an estimate. Of those that were able to do so, one third stated that they had had between 200 and 1,000 volumes stolen. The average book loss due to theft was estimated to be 250 books per library per year.
- The average frequency of the theft of reference material was 7.3 incidents per library per year; and
- 15% of libraries suffered more than six cases of the theft of audiovisual (AV) material, with the majority (8%) suffering more than 20 incidents per year. The average loss of AV items was 3.4 items per library per year.

Lincoln and Lincoln concluded that an average of 69 offences are experienced by each library in Great Britain per year. They also suggested that the crime patterns found in British libraries are similar to those found in American and Canadian libraries: a comparison with an earlier study conducted by Lincoln (Lincoln, 1984) showed that while British libraries suffered a greater number of crimes (probably because the libraries in the British survey were larger and busier), the general pattern of crime was similar to that occurring in North American libraries. This finding suggests that some of the American literature on the theft and mutilation of library material, and on lessons learned, may be applicable to British libraries.

A study conducted by Burnett (1990) at Long Beach Public Library in the US represents one of the most sophisticated attempts by an individual library to identify the cause of its book losses. Burnett was able to establish that, as well as theft, the transfer to a more modern computer system and errors in the processing of books (particularly the failure to account for many books in storage) had a substantial part to play. Despite this, the study indicated that approximately 8% of Long Beach library's book stock was stolen every year. Last copies of science fiction, western, detective and fiction books (selected because they would not have been discarded) were stolen at a rate of between two and three per cent per year, while books by popular authors were lost at a rate of 63% per year! These figures do *not* include books that were legitimately borrowed and never returned and it was estimated that it would cost the library more than \$150,000 just to replace the last copies and popular titles that had gone missing.

Souter (1976), in a study of the problems caused by delinquent readers, conducted interviews with staff at six university libraries in the UK. A range of issues was

discussed, including the theft, non-return and mutilation of books and it was discovered that half of the libraries perceived the mutilation of their books to be more serious than theft. Souther suggested that mutilation may be perceived to be more serious than theft because of its visibility to librarians in their day-to-day handling of material. Mutilation was also believed to be more widespread in some subject areas than in others. Although this study provides a useful insight into the attitude of academic librarians towards theft and mutilation, it did not provide any data on the actual incidence of these problems.

One of the most informative studies on the mutilation of library material is that conducted by Gouke and Murfin (1980) at Ohio State University. One hundred and thirty two issues of bound periodical titles were checked, page by page, for mutilation (defined as pages torn out) once in 1973 and again in 1977. At the 1973 check, it was discovered that the rate of mutilation was approximately 15% of all issues on open access *per year*. The cost of replacing and rebinding these issues was estimated to be between \$7,700 and \$12,950. In response to this problem, the library initiated a small public relations campaign which, by the time of the 1977 check, had led to a reduction in the yearly rate of mutilation from 15% to 9% of issues.

Gouke and Murfin also discovered that 87% of those volumes which were damaged at the first check had suffered further damage by the time of the second check, (four years later) while only 67% of the volumes which were initially "clean" had been damaged at the time of the second check. The authors concluded that "(leaving ripped out and unrepaired volumes on the shelves did lead to an increased rate of mutilation" (Gouke and Murfin, *op cit*). The implication drawn was that public relations campaigns can be an effective way of reducing mutilation, particularly if they draw attention to the cost and difficulty of replacing items and to alternatives such as copying facilities.

There are indications that the apparent difference in attitude towards theft and mutilation between US and UK libraries is diminishing. Recent conferences convened by both SCONUL (Quinsee and McDonald, 1991) and the NPO (Jackson, 1991) provide evidence of the growing need felt by many of the country's librarians for the wider dissemination of information about crime affecting libraries. One of the purposes of this enquiry was to provide the empirical evidence needed to direct and channel the next stages of this debate.

Research methods

Several different methods were adopted to address the problems of theft and mutilation, and to ascertain how libraries are responding to these problems. They fell under three main headings:

National survey. A postal questionnaire was issued to just over 1,000 public, academic and specialist libraries to elicit data on their stock checking practices and the losses

these reveal; their experience of theft and mutilation and the preventive techniques they employ, and their general perceptions of these problems. The questionnaire sought the response of the senior librarian at each of the libraries covered. It was quite substantial, spanning twelve pages: and, despite the wide differences in the operation and role of the various libraries in the different sectors, a common format had to be adopted. It was administered by the market research organisation, Public Attitude Surveys (PAS) Ltd. and was issued in mid-November 1991.

Overall, the sample drawn incorporated 15% of the public libraries – at central, regional and branch levels (but excluding libraries in old people’s homes/hospitals and other institutions, and mobile libraries) – across the UK. In order to obtain adequate numbers for analysis, the sample quota for the non-public sectors was higher: the survey incorporated all of the university and polytechnic libraries and two-thirds of the “specialist” libraries listed in the Library Association’s “Libraries in the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland” (Library Association, 1990). The sample size was calculated to ensure a target response of at least 520 libraries, a figure which represented 10% of the principal public, academic and specialist libraries listed by the Association. Full details of the sampling conventions used are provided in Appendix 1.

In comparison with similar surveys, the achieved response rate – 727 libraries, 72% of these sampled – was high. It was highest in the public library sector (78%), where it was probably boosted by the support of the Home Office in obtaining the agreement of Chief Librarians in advance of mailing to individual libraries themselves; stood at 70% of the academic institutions and fell away a little for specialist collections (49%). This response rate ensured the survey considerably exceeded the initial target rate and accounted for 14% of the main public, academic and specialist libraries in the UK.

The survey was therefore significantly different from the only other substantial survey of library theft in this country, carried out by Lincoln and Lincoln (op cit). In particular:

- it covered not only public libraries, but academic libraries and specialist collections;
- it achieved a broader response from all public libraries, ranging from those in inner city areas to those in villages; and,
- rather than providing a broad assessment of ‘crime’ in libraries, it focused specifically on the problems of the loss and mutilation of library materials.

“Good practice” enquiries. Several initiatives were taken to supplement the views and assessments made by respondents to the national survey (which has been called the “main survey” in subsequent sections of this report) with more searching diagnosis of the steps that can be taken to tackle theft. Two telephone surveys of librarians were carried out, with the assistance of the staff of the NPO, to probe librarians’ responses

(and, where possible, elicit hard facts) on book “amnesties” and on the increasingly common practice of visiting borrowers’ homes in order to recover library material. Another, smaller, postal survey was focused at the users of tagging – or “library security” – systems to gauge views on the benefits and drawbacks of this form of technology. These formal elements were accompanied by a great many informal, and unstructured, visits and contacts with librarians and others who felt they had a contribution to make to the enquiry objectives.

Participation in Hertfordshire’s “library security ” initiative. As a means of increasing familiarity with the practical realities of reducing library losses, it was arranged that the research team would work in association with an initiative on library security being launched by the Hertfordshire Library Service. The belief was that this experience of “hands on” involvement was essential to ensure that recommendations and advice from the enquiry would be drawn from some, albeit limited, first-hand experience.

The Hertfordshire initiative was targeted at two libraries in the county: at St Albans central library – a collection of some 110,000 books housed in modern purpose-built accommodation in a large, town centre, shopping mall – and at Harpenden library, a smaller facility (housing about 80,000 books) in a commuter-belt town, which also services two village libraries and a mobile unit. This element of contrast between the two libraries – for example St Albans has operated a library security system from its opening in its current premises in 1988, whereas Harpenden has no such system – was fortuitous, but neither the selection of Hertfordshire as a library authority, or of the two libraries as focii, was specifically designed to provide demonstration data for the project.

The role of the researchers, together with the NPO, was to serve alongside local librarians on the Steering Committee guiding this project (chaired by the St Albans Regional Librarian) and assist the local coordinator in providing the committee with advice and direction. In assuming this role – in which Hertfordshire provided “open door” access throughout – the team was able to perform additional tasks (such as conducting personal interviews with most of the staff at the two libraries concerned) which are referred to in the report, and also benefit considerably from learning about the stock control routines, inventory practices and the day-to-day demands posed by the many other aspects of the librarians’ duties.

Structure of the report

The findings from these various strands of the overall enquiry are presented in the following two sections of the report. Section II details the extent and characteristics of book theft and mutilation obtained from all of these sources. Section III turns from “the problem” to “solutions”, and presents evidence gathered from libraries about the various strategies for preventing loss and mutilation. A summary of main findings, and recommendations for future action, are at Section IV.

2 LOSS AND MUTILATION IN UK LIBRARIES

This section of the report examines the extent of loss and mutilation suffered in UK libraries and investigates causes of loss. It draws primarily on the main survey of libraries, which elicited responses from 727 institutions throughout the UK (see page 6).

Definitions of loss

One of the principal difficulties faced by libraries in quantifying the loss of their books lies in the definitum of loss. Apart from cases when readers report the loss of items they have on loan, loss will only routinely come to light when a search is made in direct response to readers' requests for items that they are unable to locate. Such shelf searches are an everyday library activity. But in order comprehensively and accurately to quantify losses, librarians need to carry out some form of count or check.

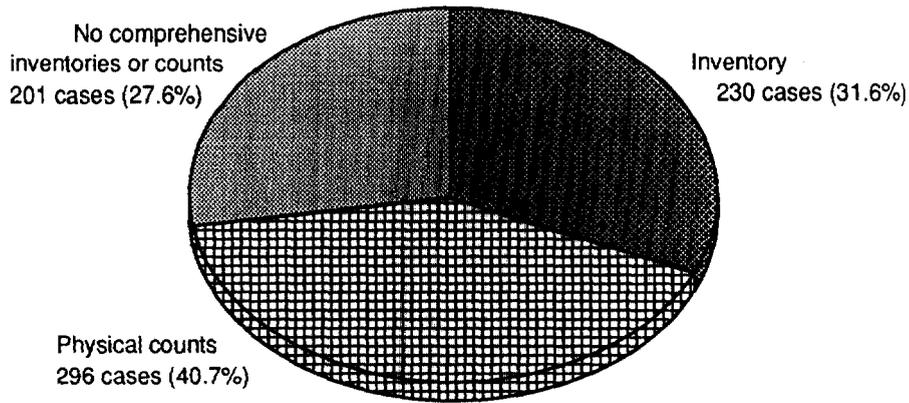
Even when this is done it would be erroneous to assume that all of the 'missing' books are permanently lost from the library. Librarians are thus faced with the critical problem of deciding at what point to "write off" missing books. Some major institutions, such as the British Library, only 'write off' books known to be lost or destroyed rather than books 'not found' on the shelves. In contrast, many other libraries write off their missing books if they do not circulate for a specific length of time after first being identified as missing.

The type of count or check used (if any) also varies from library to library. The main survey established that full physical inventories, aimed at specifically identifying missing titles, are carried out by only 32% of libraries (230), fewer than half of which complete them once, or more than once, every five years. Physical counts of the complete book stock are more widespread and are carried out by a further 41% of libraries (2%) – and in 7 out of 10 cases at least annually. This procedure can only gauge the amount of stock missing and not the identity of lost items. Figure 1 indicates the number of libraries employing these different methods of assessment.

While many libraries (45%) carry out additional checks (such as registering and analysing non-returns or books that cannot be found) either to supplement annual counts, or as their sole means of checking, these checks cannot provide a full picture of overall loss.

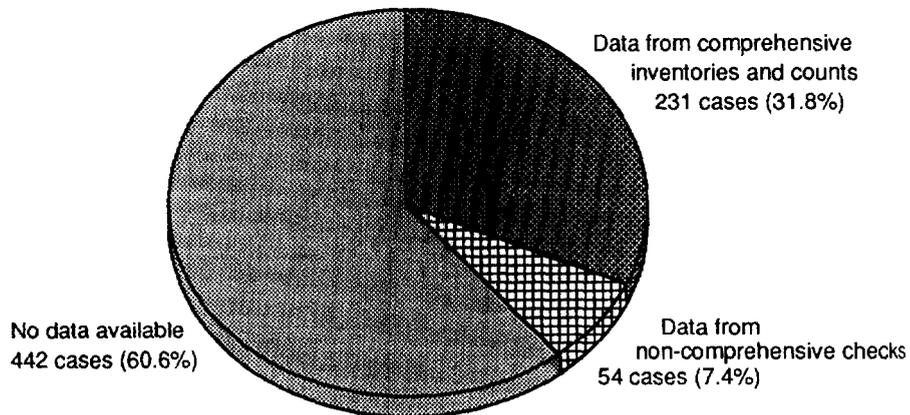
Overall, therefore, the main survey revealed that more than a quarter of all libraries (28%) never carry out full physical inventories or full physical counts of their book stock. Moreover, although nearly three-quarters (526) do carry out inventories or counts, less than 50% (231) of these were able to provide any information concerning their losses. Similarly, only 17% (54) of the 326 libraries which carry out some other type of check were able to provide loss figures. Thus, from a full sample of 727 libraries, only 39% (285) carry out procedures to quantify their losses and were able to furnish the figures generated by those procedures. Figure 2 distinguishes these different groups.

Figure 1. Comprehensive counts carried out



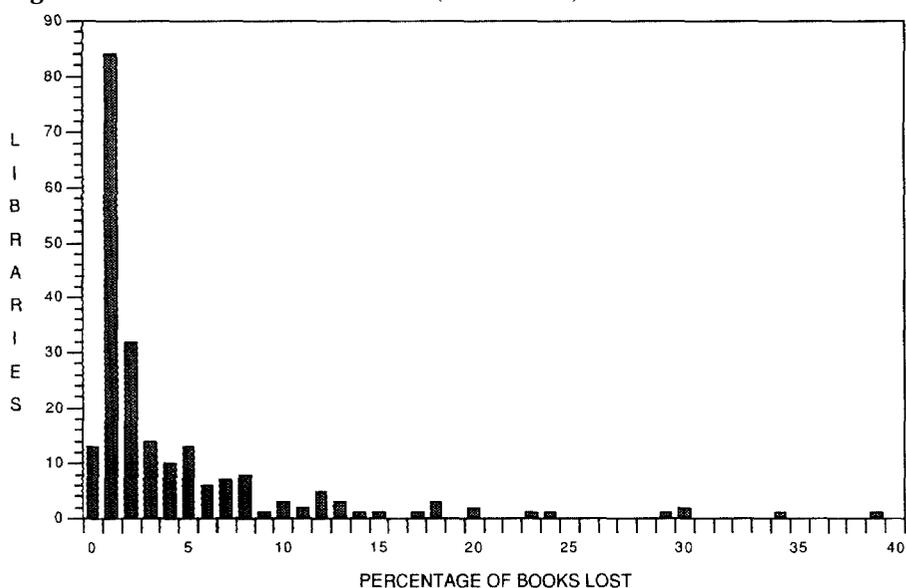
Total carrying out inventories/full counts : 526 libraries
Total carrying out no comprehensive checks : 201
All survey respondents : 727

Figure 2. Libraries ability to provide count data



Total of all survey respondents able to provide count data of any sort: 285 of 727 cases (39.2%)

Figure 3. Levels of loss at “last count” (285 libraries)



The extent of library loss

Across the board, the loss rate revealed at the “last count” by those libraries able to provide data was 4.4% of their total stock. Figure 3 indicates loss levels at these institutions.

The survey revealed significant variations between library sectors. Both academic and specialist libraries reported average losses that were about a half of the sample average: at 1.9%, and 2.1%, of total stock respectively. Standing alone, the overall reported loss rate from public libraries was 5.3% of stock. Respondent libraries in three of the four participating countries – England, Scotland and Northern Ireland – reported loss rates close to this average; losses in Wales were higher (7.1%).

Loss levels do not increase exponentially in line with the size of collections, but are substantially lower – 1.9% of total stock – for smaller collections, holding up to 10,000 volumes.

The rate of loss reported at “last counts” provides a perspective, or “snapshot”, on the sort of losses being discovered by stock audits within libraries, but it is not synonymous with an annual loss. It incorporates some libraries which reported the results of a full inventory or check conducted more than one year (and often several years) since a previous reconciliation, but also some which reported the results of assessments spanning a shorter period. Putting these cases aside, the loss rate for those libraries able to provide data only in respect of an annual count (172 libraries in total) was slightly lower, at 4.0% of total stock. Annual loss rates for public institutions were 4.2% and for academic and specialist libraries 1.8% and 2.2% respectively.

Representing library losses as a percentage of total stock holding has come to be an accepted convention within library circles, but it fails to convey the actual frequency with which losses occur. By the same token, the use of "total stock" as the denominator in deriving a rate of loss can produce a one-sided view of vulnerability, especially when holdings of reference stock are high, or when libraries operate purely as reference institutions. Other criteria, such as the number of loans made, can provide alternative perspectives. These various dimensions warrant consideration.

Needless to say, collection size is a primary determinant of straight numerical loss. Two-thirds of the libraries reporting losses of less than 200 books were smaller institutions, with collections of less than 40,000 volumes. At the other extreme, more than half (56%) of the 19 libraries which reported losses of over 5,000 books had collections of more than 100,000 volumes. This renders analysis of gross loss largely redundant, although the fact that only three percent of libraries had lost no books at their last count or check provided a forceful validation, if one was needed, of Lincoln and Lincoln's (op cit) assessment that it is rare for libraries to escape theft entirely.

Monthly loss rates were derived from the count data provided by respondents. Across the sample, libraries indicated an average loss of 116 books per month, although the median return was much lower, at 32 books per month. As Table II.3 might suggest, these figures were distorted by returns from a minority of libraries which had carried out counts that had revealed extraordinarily high levels of books loss: in the case of two larger libraries in excess of 2,000 books lost each month. When the data was re-tabulated to provide a more "representative" profile – by excluding respondents who had reported losses in excess of 500 books per month (which excluded seven cases) – *the mean loss rate fell to 67 books per month, and the median to 28 books*. Even this figure – the equivalent of 804 books lost by the average library each year – constitutes a very sharp increase on the average rate of loss, of 250 books per annum, discovered by the 1984 survey (Lincoln and Lincoln, op cit)

As a means of providing an alternative index, a loss rate was calculated on the basis of the number of loans made by each respondent library. Although it has drawbacks – particularity in respect of institutions that operate primarily (or solely) as reference collections – this was thought to provide a reasonable indication of vulnerability to loss. Loan numbers moreover provide a far more reliable indication of library usage than numbers of registered borrowers, as variable numbers of users at any library are "dormant": and it is rare for libraries to keep the necessary data on actual library traffic. Using this index, the data from those libraries able to provide accurate details from both counts and loans (167 respondents) showed that libraries on average lose 3.3 books per thousand loans. There were no substantial differences between different countries in the UK.

Books are not the only items at risk in libraries. Records and cassettes have been commonplace in many library collections for a number of years, and in more recent times many libraries have begun to build up large collections of videos and compact

discs. These items frequently constitute the only part of the library's collection that is self-financing – or indeed revenue-earning – and their popularity inevitably make them attractive targets for theft.

The main survey revealed that more than three-quarters of both public and academic libraries (82% and 79% respectively) currently stock audiovisual (AV) items. Less than half (42%) of specialist libraries stock them. Audio cassettes, which are held by 71% of libraries, are the most frequently stocked items.

The survey showed that almost half (46%) of those libraries which stock AV items never carry out inventories or counts of their collection: even more than the number who do not carry out book counts (23%). The majority (38%) of those libraries which do counts however, carry them out on an annual basis.

Fewer than one in six of those libraries stocking AV items were able to provide any information relating to the number of items they had lost at their last assessment. The mean loss rate for all of these libraries was eight AV items per month: considerably higher than the mean AV loss per library – of 3.4 items per year – found in the 1984 survey by Lincoln and Lincoln (op cit). The majority of libraries (44%) reported losing between one and five AV items per month, while only 4% lost more than 51 items per month. Twenty-five libraries (26%) reported having lost no AV items at their last assessment.

The type of area in which a library is located appears to affect the rate of loss of AV items. The survey showed that the majority (28%) of those libraries which had lost no AV items at their last assessment were located in small towns, while more than half (57%) of those which had lost items at the high rate of between 11 and 50 per month were located in inner metropolitan areas.

The nature of library losses

New acquisitions made by libraries have been reported as particularly vulnerable to theft. Indeed Keele suggested that “a loss rate of 1% over total collection is more likely to be a 50% loss from new acquisitions” (Keele, 1987).

A high level of vulnerability may arise because many of the new acquisitions in public libraries are books by well established, popular authors or books on popular subjects: demand for such material is high and so, presumably, is the incentive for readers to steal them. Similarly, many new acquisitions tend to be first issue hardback books, and their quality and condition may prove to be too great a temptation for readers wishing to add to their own private collections.

Amongst the 285 libraries able to provide data, new acquisitions – which were labelled as “books purchased in the last year” – the loss rate was 5.1%.

All libraries, whether or not they were able to provide specific count data, were requested to estimate their losses of new acquisitions, and the wider sample of 493 who

responded to this question indicated that they had lost an average of 4.8% at their last check. Although both these figures are higher than the average rate of loss reported by those who could provide count data (4.4%), the difference is not significant. It was nonetheless notable that a sizeable proportion of libraries – one in ten – estimated losses of more than 11% of new acquisitions at their last check.

The type of material that any library is most likely to lose will, of course, depend upon the material that it makes available. By the same token, the vulnerability of certain material may be increased by the type of library in which it is held and by the type of borrower likely to want it. The main survey asked librarians to distinguish those materials they believed to be most vulnerable to theft. Almost two-thirds (63%) of the 727 respondents ranked non-fiction items as the stock first or second most frequently lost from their library. Thirty-eight per cent believed that text books constituted the most frequently lost items, while 261 libraries (36%) believed that fiction items held this somewhat dubious honour.

These were librarians' perceptions. It is interesting that actual stock-count data generated by the Hertfordshire libraries at St Albans and Harpenden revealed that the biggest losses suffered by both in 1990/1 were of fiction books. The belief amongst librarians that non-fiction is most frequently lost may simply reflect a high number of requests made by the public for non-fiction books. In contrast, if a specific fiction item is not available on the shelves, users may simply choose another.

During discussions with professionals working within the library service, it became apparent that many librarians believe that books on specific subjects are particularly vulnerable to theft. The survey showed that almost half (47%) of the libraries felt that certain subjects – ranging from sex to art and from telepathy to languages – are particularly vulnerable. The subject fields perceived by the most libraries to be particularly at risk were by no means uniform, and ranged from the occult, black magic and witchcraft (mentioned by 10% of the overall sample), to music, literature and the arts (mentioned by 7%). The survey revealed some amusing variations between the subjects believed to be most vulnerable in libraries in different locations. Two-thirds of those who felt that books on sex were particularly likely to be stolen were located in metropolitan areas; and just under a third (29%) of those who highlighted the vulnerability of books on the occult and black magic were located in small towns.

Explanations most frequently cited to account for the vulnerability of books on specific subjects were that they are expensive to purchase or in excessive demand. Many of those who noted that books on the occult and black magic were vulnerable felt that the main reason was their expense. Most of those who specified books on the martial arts felt that they owed their vulnerability to excessive demand, while those who drew attention to the theft of books on sex believed most readers were too embarrassed to borrow such stock legitimately.

Non-returns and other factors contributing to loss

The non-return of legitimately borrowed library books has, like their direct theft, been a long-standing problem for the library service: indeed book amnesties do result in the return of items borrowed many years previously. The failure to return material has the same consequences for the library as deliberate theft: other readers are deprived of access to books; the library is deprived of its assets; and substantial costs can be incurred in recovery. The two problems however appear to have different causes and certainly demand very different responses from the library service.

Views on the non-return of library books are ambivalent. Undoubtedly, many borrowers who do not return their library books, whether or not they do so deliberately, do not regard their actions as theft. After all, they will contend that their library knows of their loan and can always come and retrieve items if they want them back. The procedures in many libraries reflect this logic: books for which the maximum number of overdue notices have been sent, for example, often remain on library catalogues for many years and are processed as being out on loan rather than as being lost. Although hardly a sign of thorough stock control disciplines, this viewpoint is not entirely irrational. It can be argued that as long as no other reader requests the book it does not matter whether it has been in the possession of the current borrower for five weeks or five years: it is being read by someone.

One of the most imponderable difficulties faced by libraries in dealing with non-returns lies in defining the point at which "over-due" books should be regarded as irretrievable. When libraries were asked to detail what percentage of the books classified as lost at their last count were non-returns, some 16% overall noted that "none" were. While this at answer may have been expected for a very small minority of libraries – say, "reference only" institutions – it suggests that many lending institutions do not classify non-returns as losses in principle.

Leaving aside these difficulties of interpretation, which could serve to understate the extent of non-returns – and indeed are likely to have depressed the low figures reported to the entire enquiry – *the main survey indicated that non-returns accounted for an average of 29% of losses* suffered by those respondents able to provide data. Not surprisingly, the part played by non-returns in the two sectors which can exercise greater 'control' over their borrowers – academic institutions and specialist libraries – were substantially lower, at 18% and 17% respectively. Standing alone, the mean non-return figure for public libraries was 33%.

There were also quite significant differences between countries and types of area. The mean non-return figure for Northern Ireland was nearly twice the overall figure (47%), but that for Wales (18%) was much lower. Metropolitan areas also indicated that their non-returns were higher than those of the English counties, which supports the general belief in the library service that the 'chasing' of library books is more difficult amongst the more transient populations in urban areas.

Books may appear to be missing from a library for a number of reasons other than theft and non-return. The survey showed that 45% of librarians regard misshelving to be the next most important factor likely to account for material being regarded as 'missing'. This encompasses accidental misshelving – by library users and staff alike – as well as cases of deliberate misshelving by those wishing to have unique access to material at a later point. Other main reasons selected by respondents were disposals without deletion from library catalogues, selected by 167 (23% of the sample), while 142 (20%) believed that the temporary removal of stock without recording (e.g. for repairs) makes the greatest contribution. While the disposal of items without deleting them from inventories will certainly impact the results of counts, it is important to note that misshelved stock or that temporarily removed without record should not affect the overall rates of loss revealed by inventories and counts (even though such items may not be available to readers).

One of the exercises conducted under the auspices of the Hertfordshire initiative at Harpenden Library targeted these administrative problems. There, the forms used by the library to record book reservations and initiate searches for reserved stock – which would normally have been disposed of after three unsuccessful searches for the requested item – were retained to facilitate further searches. In a 10 week period 102 slips were accumulated representing apparently lost items. Later checks resulted in the re-discovery of over two-thirds (71) of these items, which had been subsequently reinstated in the library computer system after having been found at incorrect locations during routine shelf tidying, or having been returned from repair, re-cataloging, binding and so forth. This exercise suggests that librarians' beliefs about the contribution made by misshelving and various inadequacies of their stock control disciplines to their 'missing' stock may be well justified.

A general conclusion from the various findings is that the losses reported from any library represent not only the willingness of their patrons to steal items, or fail to return items out on loan, but also depend critically on the conventions and policies – such as count methods and definitions of loss applied – of the individual institution itself. In this sense the 'loss data' derived from the survey is less tangible and straightforward than, say, the specific crime incidents investigated thoroughly by Lincoln and Lincoln's 1984 survey (op cit). It was not surprising, therefore, that many of the associations they found between different crimes and different library characteristics were not directly apparent in the current enquiry.

One exception was that libraries which classify books as lost at an earlier stage also happen to be those suffering some of the highest losses. As with so many other points of policy in the library service, conventions on classifying books as 'lost' vary widely, but the mean loss rate of libraries who could provide count data and who applied the most rigorous standards of classifying material as lost (i.e. within one to six months after the loss identified or final recall notice issued) was 5.6%: rather more than the overall sample mean of 4.4%. This aside, there were few other clear indications of the factors that influence loss. Losses, for example, were not found to be substantially

different between different types of library authority. Nor was there strong evidence that the registration requirements laid down by different libraries exerted an influence on reported losses. Indeed, even when such associations were evident, it was not always clear which way any causal relationship operated (the “chicken and egg” problem).

Theft by staff

It is realistic to recognise that library staff themselves may contribute to the losses sustained by libraries – either by failing to return loan items, or by deliberate theft. Several cases have occurred to drive this point home. Probably the most well-publicised recent case was that of Norma Haig, a librarian from Liverpool who was found guilty in 1984 of what was described in court as “a £46,000 trail of havoc around the country”.

Haig’s thefts were committed not only at her place of work but during visits to the British Library, the National Art Library at the Victoria and Albert Museum, and Birmingham City Library. She was a collector of plates illustrating ladies’ fashions of the 18th and 19th centuries, and her crimes consisted primarily of easing out plates with razor blades or cheese wire. Although she re-sold some stolen items, most were kept for her own pleasure.

Some US commentators have expressed very strong views on the extent to which librarians themselves are directly responsible for book theft and mutilation¹ and while there seems little empirical evidence to support such views, there have certainly been numerous cases of library staff being prosecuted for the theft of thousands of dollars worth of books. The seriousness with which staff theft is treated in the US was made abundantly clear recently in a case when a rare books’ curator from the University of Georgia was sentenced to 15 years imprisonment, a further 15 years probation and a \$45,000 fine for the theft of more than a million dollars worth of rare books.

The main survey included two questions on thefts by library staff to examine this sensitive issue. In response to a question probing “how extensive” this problem was in the respondent’s library, 77% responded that it was “no problem” at all, and a further 21% that it was “minimal”. It was not entirely surprising that no library believed that the problem was “substantial”.

In response to a question concerning recent cases (i.e. over the last five years) of staff “discovered stealing books”, 96% of respondents knew of none. The remaining libraries each knew of between one and five cases. This was a direct question, designed to rule out cases of non-returned loans, which some informal contacts suggested are sometimes subject to abuse by librarians. This caution was perhaps needless, for when the issue was discussed in greater depth as part of the interviews with professional and

¹In 1944 Thompson, for example, expressed the opinion that “the librarian rivals the despoiling conqueror and the confiscating revolutionary in the proportion of his thefts” (cited in Bahr, 1989).

clerical library staff in Hertfordshire, it was clear that few could equate the non-return of books by serving librarians as “theft”. Both sources indicate that few attach real significance to librarians as a source of loss.

Book mutilation

Although the term “book mutilation” has long been in currency within the library service – if not outside it – the boundaries of the sort of damage encompassed under this label are ill-defined. Some degree of *accidental* damage is of course inevitable when readers are allowed to lose books in the library and take them to their own homes. The starting point of the main survey was therefore to deal only with the deliberate damage, or mutilation, of library material.

Deliberate mutilation itself has many forms, and can range from the irritating to the extremely damaging. The removal of journal articles, annotation and highlighting of text, and damage caused by the removal of colour plates and illustrations all have cost implications for the library and all detract from the quality of the service that the library is able to offer to its readers: but the extent of that cost varies considerably according to the value – and rarity – of the material defaced.

At one extreme incidents commonly classed as mutilation involve unambiguous theft. The case of Timothy Graves, found guilty in March 1991 of the theft of over 15,000 First and Second World War Air Ministry and War Office records from the Public Record Office, is an obvious example. Tellingly, Graves was not caught for these thefts – continued over a six year period – “in the act”, but when the losses came to light through routine microfilming of RAF documents. The repair and replacement of these documents has proved to be a major undertaking (a “cost” not commonly considered) as so much of the material was uncatalogued: and their place in the catalogue has proved difficult to assess (Jackson, 1991).

Book mutilation is not always immediately visible to the librarian. Unless specific checks are carried out after any usage of material – an impossibility except when dealing with the most prized items – libraries are unlikely to know, with any degree of accuracy, how frequently their material has been mutilated. Most libraries inevitably have to assess the extent of the problem in terms of the frequency with which incidents of mutilation come to the notice of staff. Even then, they have no way of knowing *when* the damage was caused.

The survey asked about the frequency with which cases came to the libraries’ notice. *It showed that while it is extremely rare for book mutilation not to come to librarians’ notice at all, only 3 out of 10 libraries discovered cases weekly or more often. The majority – 6 out of 10 – have cases come to their notice at least monthly.*

Despite the very different methodological approaches, these results appear broadly consistent with the findings from the 1984 survey by Lincoln and Lincoln (op cit):

indeed, they seem again to indicate that either the problem itself – or awareness of it – has escalated. This is particularly the case for libraries that might be classed as the most frequent victims. The 1984 survey indicated that a quarter of respondents had discovered 20 or more cases during the previous year. If the current survey's designation of "two or three times a month" can be viewed as an equivalent frequency, the main survey found that fully 45% of respondents acknowledged this number of cases.

Any reasonable interpretation of these findings will, of course, be dependant upon the steps taken by libraries to look for mutilation, as well as the measures employed to prevent its occurrence. More than two thirds of all libraries (69%) do not employ any strategies aimed specifically at preventing mutilation. When steps are taken, the most frequently employed strategy (used by 9% of all respondents) is that of restricting access to vulnerable material. The second most common specific defensive measure (leaving aside general "staff vigilance") is the checking of books before and after use, a strategy pursued by another 47 libraries (6% of all respondents). In short, few libraries employ direct actions to detect mutilation. Much will go undetected.

A second essential criterion necessary to assess the overall seriousness of book mutilation is the type of damage being inflicted. Nine out of ten (92%) of all the libraries surveyed stated that the books in their collection were vulnerable to having their pages written or drawn on, while 83% of libraries suffered the loss of pages from books and 77% suffered incidents of plates being cut out. Over half (55%) of public libraries, together with 41% of specialist collections felt that writing or drawing on pages was the most common form of mutilation inflicted on their books. Less than a third (30%) of academic libraries however, shared this view: in these institutions, more (47%) felt that the removal of journal articles was the most frequent form of mutilation.

The material affected differs between institutions. Text books were believed by about one in three public libraries (31%) and specialist collections (28%) to be the most common targets of mutilation, while for 60% of academic libraries periodicals were the most common targets.

Specific subjects are particularly vulnerable to mutilation. The subjects mentioned were again extensive, ranging from cookery to wildlife and from sex to knitting! These were rarely the same subjects that librarians believed to be the targets of theft. This suggests that the library user who mutilates books has a different motive from the thief. Close to a third (32%) of libraries felt that books on art or those containing art plates were most vulnerable to mutilation, while other subjects specifically highlighted were those with details on pop artists and "stars" (25%) and those dealing with film and cinema (20%).

A quarter of libraries reported experiencing one or two "persistent episodes" of mutilation – which the survey classified as those carried out by "one person or a group of people" – while a further 8% reported more than two persistent episodes. The

likelihood of a library suffering such episodes appears to vary according to sector. Just under half (44%) of academic libraries suffered one or two persistent episodes of mutilation, while less than a quarter (23%) of public libraries and only 10% of specialist collections suffered incidents of this type.

Summary

The failure of so many libraries to implement regular checks of their library materials significantly undermines any reliable assessment of the extent of theft and mutilation on a national scale. The enquiry was only able to draw on detailed count figures from 34% of the respondents to the main survey – a total of 285 libraries. Whatever the reasons that inhibit libraries from making stock checks – and there are many – this is bound to remain the principal impediment to any global assessment, or to placing the problem in proper perspective.

Despite this, the response to the main survey still constitutes the most comprehensive return received from UK libraries on this issue (14% of all main public, academic and specialist libraries in the UK¹), and the results give cause for concern. On average, the libraries able to provide information reported that their “last count or check” had shown 4.4% of their stock to be missing: a higher figure than that used by the NPO in estimating “typical” losses. There was moreover no reason to believe that those libraries who were able to supply loss data derived from their counts or checks were in any way atypical².

Applying the costing conventions used by the NPO and others to derive an estimate of UK total losses, this suggests that “last counts” across at least 200 million books held in UK libraries (see page 3) would indicate a shortfall of 8.8 million books. As the average cost of all books sold currently stands at £21 per volume (for July – Dec 1991, see Fishwick, 1992), this indicates a theoretical replacement cost of £185m.

This broad estimate of the loss sustained by the service as a whole requires qualification (Appendix 2 gives more detail on the estimation methods used and alternative perspectives). It is, first, not an annual cost: for the “last counts” considered within the survey embraced count data derived after periods both shorter and longer than one year. The *‘best estimate’ of annual loss derived from the survey was 4.0% of total stock, which gives an estimate of total UK losses of £168m per annum* (using the same criterion).

The application of “current replacement values” may of course unduly inflate the overall cost – many lost books are not replaced and may indeed have been nearing the end of their useful service. Libraries, like all consumers, also give keen consideration to the costs of repurchasing and are likely to replace only cheaper volumes such as

¹Lincoln and Lincoln (op cit.) by comparison, derived estimates of book loss from 60% of their 209 respondents: some 125 libraries.

²The breakdown of libraries which were able to provide loss data was broadly representative of the national and sector breakdown of the overall sample.

fiction or children's books without careful thought; indeed the 1990/91 expenditure by public libraries on books and pamphlets was some £105 million. Although similar expenditure for academic and specialist libraries is not centrally collated, the combined total will at best match the theoretical replacement cost. Conversely, many of the books which were reported to be particularly vulnerable to theft (such as local history and archive material) are frequently out of print and – if replaced – may require to be purchased from antiquarian sources. However, the simple cost of replacement does not account for the processing time required to repurchase and prepare (e.g. catalogue, laminate and label) new volumes. There is encouragement to incorporate these important “life cycle conventions” (LCC) more widely within the budgetary planning of the library service (see, for example, Stephens, 1989). It would be inappropriate to apply sophisticated costing techniques of this nature to such a broad estimate of loss, but the fact remains that the supplementary costs arising from the replacement of lost books are significant.

It would be totally misleading to view the cost of library loss falling uniformly across the library service. The survey established quite unequivocally that there are libraries that do carry out annual counts who can reliably report that their losses have been minimal (albeit these are often libraries in rural communities where librarians know nearly all their users).

Nonetheless, estimates of a cost of loss in excess of £150m are significantly larger than the NPO's previous estimates: these have been in the range of £60m (“the best estimate we could hope for”: Jackson, 1990) and £100m. It should also be noted that the current estimates derive from a broad-based survey, fully representative of smaller “branch” libraries, whereas previous estimates have referred to the 1984 survey (Lincoln and Lincoln, *op cit*), which focused entirely on main libraries believed to experience the worst problems.

3 LESSONS FOR PREVENTION

This section of the report turns from the scale and characteristics of theft and mutilation experienced in libraries to the means of controlling and preventing such incidents. It draws principally on the current experiences of libraries responding to the main survey, but also on a number of other “spin off” enquiries focused at specific strategies, and on the lessons that have been drawn in the course of the Hertfordshire initiative (see page 8).

The actions taken by libraries against the problems of theft and mutilation will naturally reflect the seriousness with which these problems are viewed within the library service. Widely differing perspectives were reported. In response to questions about “how seriously” they viewed, respectively, theft and mutilation respondents were fairly evenly split on both counts: *about half saw these problems as “very” or “fairly” serious*. Public libraries were fairly consistent in this view across the different authorities, except that Inner London authorities took a more serious perspective (93% and 63% respectively), as did their Outer London counterparts (63% and 65%). Specialist libraries had fairly relaxed views that probably reflect their greater control over access, and their overall loss levels, but academic institutions mirrored the view of London libraries (73% viewing theft as serious, and 76% similarly concerned about mutilation): suggesting that their generally lower levels of loss may be a consequence of higher awareness and prevention.

Monitoring loss

The management of loss and damage within libraries is, needless to say, difficult to separate from the general management of the complete library facility. Individual libraries do not operate under the same disciplines as the commercial public limited company (plc) where, to protect shareholders’ interests, external auditors are required to verify that each annual report represents a “true and fair” account of the company’s physical and financial assets¹. Even so, a primary endeavour of the service is to provide readers with access to all of their stock: theft, and to an extent mutilation, confound that purpose.

In this sense, the complete absence of full physical inventories and counts in so many of the libraries surveyed is a genuine concern. Arguably the single most important lesson that has been drawn from crime prevention activity in the last ten years is that, to be effective, preventive actions require a thorough appreciation of the nature and characteristics of the problem faced. By the same token, if they are to shape suitable responses, libraries need to be able to assess whether the majority of their losses arise from the non-return of loans or from direct theft; which parts of their collections are most vulnerable, and a variety of other characteristics of missing material.

¹For public libraries, the responsibility falls to the general remit of the local authority auditor.

It is notable, in this context, that even amongst those libraries that do conduct full checks of some description, the most common approach is to conduct an annual count, rather than a "title by title" inventory (annual counts were performed by 41% of all those surveyed). Such procedures of course provide valuable and necessary 'early warning' of loss, but they cannot furnish any more than general information (say, by classification) about the type of stock that is missing. Our informal discussions with librarians suggested that most were fully aware of these limitations, and that – to many – the checks were mere formalities, often completed to meet requirements set by the central library authority rather than for action by the individual library itself.

It was clear, too, that the annual checks carried out within Hertfordshire were treated in much the same manner. Although the 1991 stock counts carried out in both St Albans and Harpenden libraries produced results within "acceptable" standards for Hertfordshire Library Service, little consideration had been given to the fact that the overall results concealed quite substantial shortfalls in some parts of the collections, which were offset by equally large surpluses in others. Indeed "surpluses" in particular parts of each collection were substantial enough to offset fully 39% of the "losses" discovered in Harpenden, and 17% of "losses" in St Albans. These were believed to have arisen both as the result of "crossovers" of misshelved stock between sections, and also because counting conventions were not formalised, and had differed between the 1991 count and previous counts. Staff interviews in Hertfordshire consistently indicated that, while respondents valued the "good housekeeping" which is inherent in the discipline of conducting annual checks, few attached great reliability to the results. Indeed, most staff had no idea of the resulting loss rate (these were however made available: some in other authorities advised that the results of counts are treated as confidential by the Chief Librarian's office). This line of thinking may in part explain why over half of those who indicated to the main survey that they do carry out checks were nonetheless unable to furnish information on their findings.

The logistical difficulties of carrying out full inventory checks are large – and may, in the larger collections, be insuperable. Even with the advantage of an inventory file from a computerised loan system which enables librarians simply to 'swipe' titles across automatic reading heads, there is considerable physical difficulty in having to check off many thousands of individual titles. The comparison with commercial operations – where there will generally be many items in a single stock line or batch – is not an altogether fair one. But, despite this, it is now commonplace for routine stock check exercises in the commercial world to employ portable data capture (PDT) equipment to capture bar codes and minimise the need for the physical movement of stock. Informal enquiries suggested that such approaches have not been employed in the library context. Given that the main survey indicated that over a half of all libraries (57%) now operate computerised loan systems, technologically advanced approaches such as these – say, the development of hand-held readers that would "read" titles on the shelves (i.e. without having to even open the cover of books) – could transform checking practices.

A common assumption, shared alike by the National Preservation Office and many professional librarians consulted, is that the discipline of conducting book inventories and counts has been one of the early victims of financial stringency in the library service. It was therefore a little surprising to discover that, amongst those respondents to the main survey who said that they do carry out some form of inventory or count (72%: including three who counted, but could not provide information on count results), there was no consistent view that the frequency of checks had changed over the last five years. Exactly one half reported no change, and while 11% said counts had “decreased” or “decreased substantially”, nearly the same proportion (8%) actually reported that counts had increased. This question sought only respondents’ views (and many may not have been familiar with past practices in the library in which they currently worked), so it is possible that the actual frequency of counts may indeed have declined. Commentators, certainly, have consistently felt that counts have been reduced. Bostwick, writing in 1917 (Bostwick, 1917) was one of these: he offered strong criticism that the reduced frequency, or even elimination, of counts was “indefensible in the case of the custodianship of public property”. This comment seems equally relevant in the modern context.

MANAGING LOANS

Monitoring and follow-up

Most libraries are primarily lending institutions: a point amply attested by several of the summary statistics given in the Introduction to this report. In 1989/90, for example, public libraries alone made 564 million loans, the equivalent of nearly 10 volumes per head of population. The point was also well demonstrated by participation at the local level. The comparatively small Harpenden library, for example, only had shelf capacity sufficient to accommodate about 75% of its stock at any time. If for any reason loan levels dipped, books simply had to be stacked in corridors. As lending is so central, it follows that the ability to monitor, and when necessary ‘chase’ unreturned items, is critical to the overall stock control function.

One of the striking findings of the main survey, at least from an outsider’s perspective, was the very considerable number of loans which readers are allowed at any one time *Forty per cent of all libraries allowed adult readers to borrow 9 or more books (a term used in this case to cover AV material as well), and a further 45% set limits only slightly lower, at between 5 and 8 “books” per adult.* While there are certainly strong “service” arguments in favour of allowing these numbers of items out on loan, the rationale in terms of control is less than convincing. Whether or not most readers have the capacity to read this number of books over the average loan period, it can do little to foster diligent care by the reader. Moreover, permitting numbers of loans to reach this seal, aggravates the problem of what one senior librarian in Hertfordshire labelled the “multiplier effect”: the not-unusual phenomenon of a family of four being able to take out up to 48 books at one time (the official Hertfordshire ceiling), and saddling themselves with the considerable administrative burden of ensuring all are returned. If loan periods overrun in these sorts of cases, families immediately engender such

heavy fine penalties that it may prejudice their willingness to return the items (see next section).

From the libraries' perspective, computerised loan systems – in operation at 57% of the libraries responding to the main survey – have done a great deal to enhance the efficient management of loans, but they are no panacea. Their operation requires careful management control.

Involvement with Hertfordshire's library service illustrated many problems faced in the day-to-day running of the library that had 'system' implications. System records would be corrupted by readers simply returning loan items directly to the shelves, rather than to check-in desks. Many books would be returned through library letter boxes at weekends or at night. Books on the 'free stock' list would be unavailable, and often untraceable, when they had been removed for repair.

These sorts of problems will be common in all libraries, but the ways of handling them in system terms, so as to maintain the integrity of the computerised record, can differ widely. The administrative exercise carried out at Harpenden library to track down books that had been reserved for readers, but which could not then be found (see page 16) provided a minor lesson on this front. Eleven of the 71 items re-discovered at Harpenden Library were found to have been removed from circulation for the purposes of repair. This prompted the library to take measures to reduce the amount of staff time spent on searching for books that had been temporarily withdrawn for a legitimate reason. A pseudo-borrower was created to whom all books being withdrawn for repair or binding were issued. This immediately proved to be of benefit in tracing apparently missing books.

More critically, in the direct context of Hertfordshire's initiative to tackle loss, it was apparent that their computerised system was unable to provide some of the most basic information that was required to direct librarians' efforts. There was no means of distinguishing the past history of books marked on the catalogue as "lost": they may have been given this designation after an unsuccessful shelf search (say, in response to a reader's request); because the item had been on loan and the borrower had failed to return it; or indeed because when readers acknowledged losing loan material, the accepted practice was to "return" this item to the library and then mark it as lost. This had the fundamental drawback that neither St Albans or Harpenden librarians were able to ascertain in retrospect whether the bulk of their losses arose from non-returned loans, or from undiscovered theft. While sophisticated analyses were routinely available on many other aspects of borrowing and stock control, this drawback could not be overcome.

Promoting borrower responsibilities

As the success of library borrowing arrangements rests on readers returning loan items within the time specified, one obvious focus of libraries' efforts should be actively to promote this responsibility amongst borrowers.

Staff at the Hertfordshire libraries felt that many borrowers were not fully aware of their responsibility for the library materials that they had out on loan, either because they did not read the information leaflets given to them when joining the library, or because they could not remember the quite substantial amount of information presented in those leaflets.

To combat these difficulties, an initiative was launched to promote borrower responsibility through the wider dissemination of this information. Bookmarks were designed explaining the procedures borrowers should follow if they believed they had lost library items, on renewing books by telephone and on the fine “ceiling” operated by Hertfordshire’s library service. Cards were developed on which borrowers could keep a record of the books that they had out on loan and when they were due for return. In addition, posters were displayed within the libraries encouraging borrowers to return books on time and underlining the problems caused by theft and non-return. The logic of these sorts of action – some of which have been tried before by other institutions – was to demonstrate that the libraries were serious about the efficient management of their stock and in rendering users the best possible service, but could only do this with the active cooperation of readers.

Fines policy

The imposition of fines on borrowers who retain library materials beyond their return date is probably the oldest and most firmly established means of enforcing the principles of the loan system. The main survey showed that 94% of libraries impose fines on overdue books and most have been doing so since they first began operating. A historical consequence is that the revenue generated by fines now constitutes an important source of income for many libraries: to the extent that most libraries in the public sector are actually expected, in their annual budget figures, to generate a specified amount of income from this source.

Each library authority established its own level of fines. Most are also responsible for meeting their own costs of enforcing loan disciplines, such as the mailing of early warning notices as books become overdue. There is also variation in the use to which fine incomes are put: the fines collected by many university libraries are often ploughed directly back into the library’s book fund, whereas those generated by public libraries are typically routed back into the coffers of County Hall.

Discussions with staff from the libraries at St Albans and Harpenden revealed that fines policies are frequently contentious. Here, at least, interviews with library staff indicated that many objected to the fact that they were expected to collect a certain amount of fines. They believed that this contradicted the philosophy of encouraging borrowers to return their books on time. There was in particular a significant level of disagreement over whether pensioners and children should be fined, and if so, whether they should be fined at the same rate as others. Moreover views differed widely over the level of fines and the rate at which they accumulated.

If incorrectly balanced, of course, fine policies can actually encourage the very practice that they are intended to prevent. In Hertfordshire the interviews with librarians revealed that most felt the level of fines, together with the number of items that readers are allowed to borrow, inevitably increased non-returns; particularly as many readers were thought to be unaware of the maximum ceiling on fines. Three or four weeks' worth of fines on each of 6 or 8 items amounts to a significant sum of money, and can be even greater if all the members of a family have similar loans (see the earlier discussion of this "multiplier effect" on page 26). Librarians felt a significant number of readers decided that they could not afford to shoulder the consequential costs from returning overdue loan items.

As well as being a functional necessity, fine-related issues have also proved to be a point of sensitive "public relations". These considerations were critical in the deliberations of a Working Party on Overdue procedures within Hertfordshire, which recently recommended two amendments to the county's fine policy. They first advised that the daily (rather than weekly) accumulation of fines be extended to cover the second week for which books are overdue, so as to avoid a sudden jump in fines payable on the first day of the second week. Secondly, they recommended that overdue notices should be dispatched earlier to give forgetful borrowers a greater opportunity to return their books before fines become too high.

**Libraries without fine penalties.* Although nearly all public libraries charge fines on overdue items, the main survey revealed that just over a third (36%) of specialist libraries, together with a small proportion of academic libraries (9%) do not. There may be various reasons for this, but almost certainly most of these institutions have other more effective means of ensuring that overdue books are returned. Specialist libraries are, by their very nature, one of the few available sources of the materials that they stock and a threat to ban, or to suspend, the borrowing rights of recalcitrant borrowers may be sufficient to ensure that overdue books are returned. Moreover such libraries also tend to have a fairly limited borrower population, many of whom may be known, at least by sight, to the library staff. Some academic libraries have found that a stern letter to a tutor or a threat to withhold a borrower's degree (which is a power contained in the Articles of some academic institutions, such as the University of London), is more effective than fines in securing the return of books. Several academic libraries also operate card controlled entry systems which again make it easier for them to enforce bans as specific borrowers can be physically prevented from entering the library.

**Summary.* Overall, while fines on overdue loans constitute the main method used by the majority of libraries to encourage the prompt return of books, and are a substantial source of income, a good deal of debate surrounds their operation. Finding the right balance between the level of fines and the rate at which they accumulate is a critical, but by no means straightforward, management issue. Philosophies abound, but the enquiry was unable to elicit any experimental or evaluative work by authorities who had put the interesting ideas behind these different approaches to empirical test. The

reasons for this absence of strategic analysis are not clear, but as most libraries are expected to generate a certain amount of revenue from fines on overdue books, it is not altogether cynical to suggest that it may well prove difficult for some authorities even to experiment with different approaches.

Book recovery

In order to combat the problem of non-returned loans, some library authorities have reported to the employment of 'Book Recovery Officers' (BROs). On initial investigation, this appeared to be a relatively new phenomenon being initiated by a handful of pioneering library authorities (see, for example, Manuel, 1990). Indeed the employment on a formal, authority-wide basis, of independent recovery officers and collection agencies is a relatively recent development, but it is not now restricted to a few regions. *The main survey showed that fully 194 libraries (27% of those sampled) employ BROs.* Over half (54%) have only been doing so since 1980. But the survey also established that the staff of many libraries have, over a much longer period, carried out informal recovery visits. Twenty one per cent of libraries still employ this method of recovering books.

Respondents' assessments of the impact of their chosen recovery methods were not dissimilar. Fifty-nine per cent of those employing BROs and 67% of those relying on recovery visits by their own staff felt that their methods had "some effect". The proportion believing that their methods had a "great deal of effect" was marginally higher amongst those using BROs (28%) than amongst those employing in-house staff (23%).

In order to gather more detailed information about the different recovery methods, a brief telephone survey was conducted with 11 of the libraries from the main survey sample, three of which benefitted from recovery visits by staff and eight of which employed BROs. Of these 11, five of the libraries had reported that their current method of recovering overdue books had had "a great deal of effect", while the remaining 6 stated that their methods had "some effect". This exercise, while by no means systematic or comprehensive, provides some commentary on developments in this field.

**Book recovery visits by library staff.* The three libraries whose staff carried out recovery visits had been relying upon this practice for at least 15 years and while two dispatched their porters or library attendants to recover books, the third relied on its "spare staff on quiet afternoons" to make such visits. The criteria used by these libraries in deciding which borrowers to visit varied: the staff of one library only visited borrowers who lived within walking distance of the library; the second library based its decision to visit on the number of overdue books in any household, while staff from the third library chased up all long overdue books. Staff from two of the three libraries visited borrowers' homes in order to recover overdue books, but the third (Shoe Lane library in the City of London) dispatched its staff to borrowers'

workplaces. While the location of this particular library does not make home visits feasible (borrowers have to be sponsored by their employers before being allowed to join), visiting borrowers at their place of work has proved to constitute a considerable embarrassment, and effected a high number of returns!

None of the libraries using internal staff expected them to collect outstanding fines as well as overdue books on home visits. They had experienced very little problem with aggression directed at staff recovering books: cases which had occurred involved verbal abuse rather than physical assault.

**Book recovery by external agents.* Seven of the eight libraries who reported employing BROs stated that responsibility for the recovery of non-returned books was held by the library HQ rather than by the individual library, and that they drew on the services of BROs working throughout the whole of the authority. Four of the authorities employed just one recovery officer on a part-time basis. The skills and characteristics believed to be advantageous to the job varied; only one authority had strong views and had recruited a woman who was a former police officer, believing that women were more successful at procuring the return of overdue books and less likely than men to be abused by defaulting borrowers. One of the authorities employed two (female) BROs, again on a part-time basis, while the remaining authority – in which three of the libraries contacted were located – employed a certified debt collection agency. This authority purposely referred to its BROs as 'debt collectors' as this was felt to be more effective in securing the return of overdue books.

The exercise of *selectivity* in choosing which borrowers to target is clearly critical. The criteria applied by the library authorities using external agents proved to be more standardised than those followed by library authorities using their own staff. Four of the libraries forwarded details of all borrowers holding books more than three months overdue to their BRO, while the remaining four libraries only pursued books over a specific value (ranging from £10 to £30). As with those libraries who send their staff on recovery visits, the main priority of the BROs was to secure the return of overdue books and the recovery of fines was a secondary consideration (this does not mean that any of these authorities disregard fines: most retain a record of fines owing and do not return readers to the status of "active borrower" until they have been paid).

Bank Recovery Officers in several of the authorities contacted appeared to have developed effective strategies for recovering both books and fines. The debt collection agency typically wrote to defaulting borrowers to inform them that a debt collector would visit: which in their experience prompted borrowers to return their loans and pay fines. Similarly, the officers from two of the other authorities left calling cards at houses from which they had not received an answer, informing the borrower that they will call again at a later date: a strategy which again generally prompted borrowers to return their books voluntarily and settle fines.

It appears to be a general axiom throughout the library service that BROs will only be employed if they can prove themselves to be self-financing. Some libraries – such as

St Albans – demand that the value of the fines recovered equals the cost of employing the officer, while other authorities demand that cost benefit is assessed on the value of the items recovered. But despite defining these sort of criteria, the enquiry was unable to elicit consistent evidence of their application.

Only one of the authorities contacted in the telephone survey was able to supply any cost-benefit analysis of its recovery services. The analysis provided by Wakefield library revealed that in the three years since starting a service in 1988/89, their recovery officer had cost the authority approximately £5,500 p.a to employ, but recovered stock and fines had averaged £7,500 p.a.: so effecting reasonable savings, Although no information on the cost of employing their BRO was available, Wolverhampton Public Libraries disclosed that in a 12 month period, their officer made 1872 visits in which materials to the value of approximately £9,350 were recovered (together with a princely £24 in fines!). But a third authority which was unable to supply any formal statistics suggested that their BRO – who receives a commission for each book recovered in addition to a basic wage – was not proving cost-effective.

Book amnesties

One fairly well-practised arrangement for encouraging the return of books that are out on loan is to conduct a “book amnesty”. The amnesty offer is made to serve two purposes: to elicit books from general users who may have genuinely forgotten to return loan items, and more specifically to appeal to borrowers who may be deterred from returning material because of the fines they have amassed.

The main survey found that nearly two-thirds (63%) of respondents had, at some time in the past, conducted a book amnesty. While the practice appeared quite common across the public library sector as a whole, amnesties are not so frequently resorted to by academic institutions (38%) – presumably because of the transient nature of their student users (and the greater powers open to them to penalise fine defaulters) – or by specialist libraries (22%).

Opinions about the success of amnesty arrangements were fairly evenly split: a little under a half of all respondents (45%) believed their amnesty had been successful, against a slightly larger number (54%) who rated their efforts as unsuccessful. A further indication of the “hung” nature of respondents’ views was that very few were willing to use strong terms (e.g. “highly successful/unsuccessful”) about their amnesty.

The assessments made in the main survey were again supplemented by a targeted telephone survey, this time directed at 25 libraries who had carried out amnesties. One of the main points to emerge from these telephone interviews was that there is no standard procedure for conducting successful book amnesties. The interviews did, however, provide a number of examples of both good and bad practice, and of key considerations that may serve as guidance for others planning to hold amnesties.

These were:

**Motivation* – Of the nine libraries who rated their amnesties as being “successful”, all but one held them specifically to reduce large numbers of non-returned books, while the remaining library in this group conducted their amnesty in an attempt to ‘sort out’ their records following a fire at the library.

In contrast, of the 14 libraries who rated their amnesties as being “unsuccessful”, only eight held them to reduce outstanding loans – the remaining six were conducted primarily for other reasons. Four were held in an attempt to “clean up” the libraries’ records prior to their transfer from manual to automated issue systems; one was held prior to the installation of a “tagging” system and one was held as part of the Council’s anniversary celebrations.

While it is not possible positively to determine whether these reasons affected outcome, the implication is that those who hold amnesties primarily because of the loss of large numbers of books are able to advertise their efforts more effectively. It may also be the case that their amnesties are conducted on a more formal basis.

**Advertising* – The interviews indicated that those who advertise on local radio, in addition to adverts in the local press, are likely to reach the largest number of defaulters and achieve the greatest success.

**Fines* – All but one of the librarians interviewed stated that they had suspended all fines for the duration of their amnesties, sometimes at a significant financial cost. The lack of success reported by the one library which only suspended current fines suggests that the total suspension of fines, despite the cost implications, proves more effective in encouraging the return of overdue books.

**Anonymity* – Five of the 23 librarians interviewed did not allow borrowers to return their books anonymously during their amnesties. Of these five, four rated their amnesties as having been “unsuccessful”. Allowing borrowers to return books anonymously seems to encourage take-up.

**Frequency* – The telephone survey suggested that most hold amnesties once every five to ten years. The librarian of a training college however stated that her library held an amnesty every term in an attempt to recover some of the large numbers of lost library books. Although this had initially proved quite successful, the novelty had quickly worn off and very few books were now returned. This experience, together with similar advice from several other librarians, suggests that holding amnesties too frequently can be counterproductive. Borrowers get used to them, and may even delay returns until fines are next suspended.

**Duration* – Contrary to the expectation that library users might need time to get around to returning library material, shorter schemes appear to have greater impact. Ten of the 14 amnesties rated as being “unsuccessful” lasted for three weeks or more,

with the majority (six) being of a month's duration. In contrast, only two of the nine amnesties rated as "successful" lasted for three weeks or more, while most (five) lasted for just one or two weeks. This implies that the duration of the amnesty may affect outcome in a way that may not be anticipated: those with books over-due seem to be more inclined to return these books during a brief opportunity, particularly if such an opportunity does not arise very frequently.

THEFTS FROM LIBRARY PREMISES

Reducing opportunities for theft

The presence and visibility of library staff is, of course, central to the protection of library collections. The main survey revealed that many libraries consider themselves to be inadequately staffed to meet this demand. More than a quarter (28%) felt that a lack of staff was the main factor preventing them from tackling theft. Many other practical precautions can be taken however to increase the physical protection of material on open shelves, and the take-up of many of these strategies was explored in the survey. The issues considered included:

**Bag and coat deposits.* Around a quarter of specialist libraries (27%) and academic libraries (24%) insist upon readers depositing their bags in cloakrooms before entering library premises, so rendering it more difficult for dishonest readers to secrete books. A more rigorous defence, practised by only 8% of specialist libraries and 4% of academic libraries, is to insist upon readers depositing their coats as well. Bag and coat deposits, however, incur costs – in terms of staffing (and ensuring the security of deposited items) and space – and they are a luxury that few public libraries can afford. Indeed the main survey showed that only 1% of public libraries operate obligatory bag deposits. No public library surveyed required readers to deposit their coats.

**Closed circuit television.* A mechanical means of increasing supervision, or of creating the perception of increased supervision, is through the use of Closed Circuit Television (CCTV). This preventive measure is not extensively used: it is most frequently employed by academic libraries (9%), although there are applications in 6% of public libraries. The deterrent effect of CCTV appears to be quite extensive as the majority (47%) of these libraries with systems reported having lost very small percentages of their total book stock at their last assessment. Informal discussions suggested that those libraries which had been able to fund the expense of installing CCTV had generally found that they had insufficient staff to enable full-time monitoring of the system, but few believed this detracted from the deterrent value (if the screens are situated out of sight of readers, there is no means of knowing that they are not actually being watched).

**Security staffing.* The sight of uniformed security personnel, both at the main exits and patrolling the study areas, is commonplace to the users of many academic libraries. Indeed, the main survey revealed that almost half (43%) of academic libraries and more than a quarter (27%) of specialist libraries employ security

personnel to safeguard their collections. This defensive action is rare in public libraries (4%) and many public librarians clearly believed that the use of security staff would prove to be intimidating in their libraries and would destroy the convivial and user-friendly atmosphere of their institution.

One of the dangers inherent in employing security personnel in libraries is that their presence may allow other staff members to believe that the prevention of theft is not their responsibility. If the security personnel at the exit gates are the only employees ever to deal with borrowers apprehended in the process of unofficially removing books, then the staff on the issue and return desks, for example, may have very little conception of the problem and may be unlikely actively to discourage it.

**Warning posters.* One low cost route towards increasing supervision is to promote vigilance by putting up warning and information posters. Borrowing from the “watch” concept now central to so much crime prevention and policing philosophy, if the majority of honest library users can be encouraged to report, or intervene when they observe theft and mutilation taking place, then the frequency with which incidents occur may be reduced. One of the initiatives undertaken in Hertfordshire aimed to reduce the incidence of theft and mutilation in precisely this way and a series of eye-catching posters were designed to “personalise” their campaign.

Security “tagging”

One of the more prominent – and recent – defences against the theft of books and other library materials has been to ‘tag’ them electronically so that any illegitimate removal from the confines of the library will activate sensors at exit points, and set off warning alarms. Similar systems involving this means of electronic article surveillance (EAS) are now commonplace in many retail environments.

The proliferation of “library security systems” (as they are called within the service) has not been dissimilar from the growth within high street retailing: libraries at least gain lifetime protection of tagged items, whereas in most retail applications the tag is “spent” at the point of sale. *The national survey found just over a third (36%) of all the libraries surveyed had systems*, and that four out of five had been installed in the 1980s (particularly from 1986 onwards). These global figures, however, conceal significant differences between sectors. Usage was very much higher amongst the academic libraries surveyed, where nearly 9 out of 10 (87%) operated a security system, and understandably much lower amongst specialist collections (16%) which are not openly accessible. Across public libraries, 29% operate systems – primarily larger collections (40,000 volumes and above). Tagging is comparatively rare in Wales, in Northern Ireland – and, to a lesser extent, in Scotland.

Data provided by the suppliers of library security systems suggest that the aggregate number of installations in the UK is now of the order of 2000. There are three main suppliers of systems: 3M, the market leaders (with around 1200 systems); Plescon, with about 500; and Knogo, who have long experience in retailing, but are relative

newcomers to the library field (with just over 200). Obviously prices of systems vary in line with their size and sophistication, but a radio-frequency by-pass system, for example, incorporating three infra-red sensors and six control gates would cost approximately £15,000 at current prices. Tags range in price from £45 to £125 per thousand.

There are several different technologies used to operate library security systems – involving detection by either electro-magnetic, microwave or radio-frequency means – but the most significant differences lie in the way tagged items are handled, and in the size and positioning of tags. On the handling front, librarians can either opt for systems that require the tag to be de-activated on loan (known as “full circulating” systems), or those where tags remain permanently ‘live’ and demand that books are passed around exit detectors on their removal from the premises (known as “by pass” systems). The operation of full circulating systems makes greater demands on librarians’ time. The survey found a fairly even split between these two alternatives in the public sector. The majority of academic institutions (68%) favour full circulating systems: presumably because, unlike so many other collections, they expect undergraduates and other users to be routinely visiting the library with previously issued books and these would cause operational difficulties if collections were permanently sensitised.

On the issue of tag size and location, there are again differences between systems. By-pass systems allow libraries to use variable numbers of tags which can be placed in different locations in each book. A number of different tag formats are available and their flexibility of use is believed to reduce “system orientation” (the suppliers’ label for user familiarity!). Full circulating systems, on the other hand, demand that tags are placed in a standard location (generally down the spine of the book: which has been a more labour-intensive operation) and that each item can be tagged only once. This has the disadvantage that if potential thieves can identify the tag, it can be removed without any threat being posed by secondary tags. At present the deactivation of tags and the reading of library barcodes are not integrated on full circulating systems and demand separate actions at the check-out desk: integration is however a very likely development with the next generation of systems.

As is the case with most security devices, all library security systems can be overcome by the committed and knowledgeable thief, who can learn how tags can be identified and removed, and how those that cannot be removed can be rendered ineffective. Their function is to deter the opportunist.

Two-thirds of the users of security systems felt that their installations had had a “great deal of effect” on theft from their libraries. The remaining one third, although unwilling to be quite so positive, were nonetheless ready to accept that their installation had achieved “some effect”. No user believed that their system was totally ineffective. These findings are consistent with the results of a small scale telephone survey carried

out for a recent issue of the journal "Library Equipment Report" (Library Equipment Report, 1990) which found satisfaction with all three makes of system to be high.

Many have perceived that an inherent drawback in tagging library materials is that while potential thieves may be deterred from the straight theft of whole volumes, they may instead turn to removing sections or parts that do not appear to be protected – such as the individual article in a journal, or chapter of a book. Mutilation like this will arise from a misconception that tags are universally placed in book covers, or beneath the library reference label. Research evidence on this point is inconsistent. Souter discovered that two of the libraries in his study of six university institutions believed that mutilation had increased as a direct result of the installation of a security system. This prompted him to state that "it is normal for mutilation to increase" when security systems are installed (Souter, 1976), whereas Gouke and Murfin (op cit, 1980) found no such association. Whether or not their own practical experience bears this out, a significant minority of those with systems – about one in four (24%) – reported that they believed that their tagging system had increased the mutilation of books in their library. Next respondents were undecided, although 6% believed tagging had helped to reduce mutilation as well as theft.

To supplement some of the the general questions about the uses of tagging in the main survey, a smaller exercise was conducted to explore how libraries make a case for such systems; how they choose between competing installations; and to examine their impact with greater precision. To achieve this, 31 libraries who had indicated in the main survey that they had security systems were selected for inclusion in a supplementary, but much shorter, mail survey.

Responses to this survey were received from 26 of the targeted libraries. In 23 of these cases, the libraries were employing the first systems that they had operated, while three libraries had found it necessary to make replacements as their original systems had become technically obsolete and triggers for them were no longer available. Ten of the respondents were using a 3M system; 9 using Plescon systems and the remaining 6 Knogo systems.

**Stating the case.* Although a survey of this scale cannot be treated as representative, it suggested that libraries were not uniformly having to fight 'tooth and nail' to have systems installed on the basis of concrete evidence of loss. Just under two-thirds of the respondents stated that they were aware of the level of losses being suffered by their library prior to the installation of their security system. Many of these libraries however emphasised that the figures they were able to provide were estimates, or were based on random checks rather than on any systematic and comprehensive stock check. Estimates of loss prior to installation ranged from 1% to 23% of all stock and from 4% to 50% of selected stock. Unexpectedly high losses discovered in particular parts of collections were often a precipitating factor. At the central library in Sandwell, for example, a small random sample of non-fiction books added to the stock in the previous twelve months was checked. Fifteen per cent of these books could not

be traced. Newport library discovered losses of over 50% of new acquisitions in some parts of its reference collection.

Fewer than half (12) of the libraries were obliged to formulate a “business case” in order to secure the funding necessary for the purchase and installation of their security system. Indeed decisions were not always made on a case-by-case basis. Several libraries reported having received a security system as part of an authority-wide policy decision to install systems in selected libraries.

Installations were also made on the basis of future risk rather than current loss. Teddington library advised that it had installed a desensitising security system, not to protect its book stock, of which it was losing approximately 2% per annum, but primarily to facilitate the establishment of an open access video lending service. The ‘business case’ formulated by this library emphasised the potential profits to be made by the video lending service rather than the savings that would be made through the reduction of book theft. Several of the other libraries in the survey also stated that their recent acquisition of AV materials was a factor precipitating their decision to install a security system.

**Selecting a system.* The choice of which system to operate was seldom a matter of critical analysis between competing technologies and suppliers. Only a quarter (6) of the libraries surveyed put the contract for the installation of their security system out to any formal tendering procedure. Ten of the libraries put their contract out to informal tender, while the remaining 10 did not examine competing systems at all. Libraries obviously take a whole range of factors into consideration when deciding which security system to install. Twenty-three of the libraries surveyed felt that the experiences of other libraries were one of the three most important considerations in their decision to install a system. Twelve libraries felt that the ease with which the system could be used was an important consideration, while the same number felt that the price of the system was one of the three most important considerations. Clearly the ‘reputation’ of systems, as determined by other libraries who have direct experience of usage, rates highly.

**Impact.* Only 4 of the 26 respondents had carried out any assessment of their losses since the installation of their security system. All 4 of these libraries stated that their losses had been reduced, although two of the “assessments” had consisted of nothing more than routine shelf-checks. A number of the remaining libraries commented that although they had not carried out any formal assessment, they knew that their losses had been reduced as less books were being reported missing by readers and thefts were being detected by the security system.

Overall, 17 of the 26 respondents to this supplementary survey stated that they were “moderately satisfied” with their current security system, while seven stated that they were “very satisfied” with their systems. The remaining three, who expressed

dissatisfaction, stated that their system had proved not to detect as many items as they were led to believe.

To probe which factors played a part in reaching these overall assessments, respondents were asked to list the advantages and disadvantages of their security system. Ten of the libraries surveyed felt that the principal advantage of their system was its effectiveness in deterring both casual and temporary theft. Ease of use of the system was also felt to be a major advantage by six libraries, while two felt that the 'declaratory' impact of the installation was critical, proving to readers that they were serious about the security of their books. Disadvantages included the incidence of false alarms (particularly those caused by items such as keys and pushchairs); failure rates of systems; and the additional procedures involved in issuing and returning books. Two libraries (one public and one academic) found that the principal disadvantage of their system was that its installation led to an increase in the incidence of mutilation of library materials.

**Attitudes to security systems.* Not infrequently, librarians in the public sector advised that the installation of a security system in their library would have a detrimental effect on library-borrower relations and would make their library less user friendly. But the majority of the actual users surveyed found that once both staff and borrowers had overcome their initial reservations, their security systems actually posed very few problems of this nature. Only three respondents reported that their borrowers were 'shocked' and 'outraged' to discover that the problems of theft from their libraries were severe enough to warrant the installation of a security system.

**Payback.* It is not infrequently claimed that security systems will achieve a payback on the capital investment involved within a reasonably short timespan. This belief is not only fostered in the promotional literature for systems themselves, but has been reiterated by impartial parties who have for example, echoed claims that payback will be "within a couple of years, and in some cases a couple of months" (Library Equipment Report, op cit). The length of time it takes for any library to make savings equal to the cost of installing and operating a security system will, of course, depend critically upon the rate at which it was losing books prior to installation of the system and a subsequent evaluation of impact: neither of which issues seem to be rigorously investigated.

Libraries were, however, questioned about their expectation of payback time. Five of the libraries surveyed felt that it would take between one and two years for their library to save an amount comparable to the cost of their system, while the largest number - nine libraries - felt that it would take between three and four years to 'break even' in this way. Two of the libraries felt that they would never achieve a 'payback' from their installation as the value of the books that would have been stolen in the absence of a system was only enough to match ongoing operating costs. In short, most of the respondent libraries indicated that they expected their systems to be operational *for quite lengthy periods of time before they achieved a discernible financial payback.*

Dealing with offenders

Although there are a number of measures which libraries can take to prevent the theft of their collections, many of those measures may be ineffective if libraries are not seen to take appropriate actions against borrowers caught attempting to steal books. Yet one of the main difficulties faced by libraries in taking any action is that even when readers are apparently caught red-handed, the burden of proof still lies with the library and it may be very difficult for them to prove intent to steal (as opposed to the fact that the reader had just “forgotten” to have items issued). The difficulties inherent in proving intent appear to prompt many libraries with electronic security systems (particularly those in the public sector) to adopt a policy of ‘giving the benefit of the doubt’ to the suspect.

The main survey revealed that almost a third (30%) of libraries impose no penalties on borrowers apprehended for attempted theft. This may be beneficial for the maintenance of good library-borrower relations but could be detrimental to libraries’ efforts to prevent theft. Borrowers can rapidly realise that even if they are unfortunate enough to be caught departing with unissued books, most libraries are unlikely to penalise them in any way.

The actions taken by libraries ranged widely, and included:

**Referral to police.* Nineteen per cent of all libraries responding to the main survey choose to refer apprehended readers directly to the police. Only 794 of academic libraries chose this option. Discussions with library authorities also indicated that some have occasionally prosecuted readers for items they had long failed to return from loan: while prosecution costs prohibited them from doing this routinely, many felt the deterrent impact derived from press reports had a substantial payoff.

**Warning letters.* Exactly half of the academic libraries surveyed despatch warning letters to the perpetrators of attempted theft and, in the case of students, to their tutors or heads of department as well. Warning letters are only dispatched by 12% of libraries in the public sector and they will almost certainly – for obvious reasons – have less of a deterrent effect than in the academic sphere.

**Temporary bans.* A third of academic libraries impose temporary bans on readers caught trying to steal books. The threat of being temporarily banned from an academic library can have a real effect. Those who use academic libraries generally need access to work or study and the library at which they are registered is often the only source available to them.

Only 15% of public libraries impose this type of penalty. This is indicative of the abilities of the different types of libraries to enforce certain sanctions. Preventing people from entering public libraries, which generally have open access, can prove virtually impossible: their controls are limited to restricting borrowing.

**Permanent bans.* While very few public or academic libraries impose permanent bans on users caught trying to steal books, this penalty is imposed by almost a quarter (24%) of specialist libraries. The tough approach adopted by these libraries is perhaps indicative of the value of their collections and the problems that theft can pose for them. The threat of a permanent ban is also likely to have a deterrent effect on would-be book thieves as the same material will often not be available elsewhere.

**Preventing the resale of stolen material.* The Provincial Booksellers' Fairs Association recently established a database in order to provide booksellers and libraries alike with information about lost and/or stolen books. Any library which knows that it has had an item stolen can have it added to the database. Similarly, any dealer to whom an item is offered for sale can check the register. Although this register does not currently cater for books which are simply suspected of having been stolen – and concentrates, predictably, on highly prized items – its potential is significant. Recent agreements have resulted in the transfer of information between the UK register and “BAM-BAM”, its US equivalent, and there are hopes that the scheme will be extended to cover all of Europe.

The need for international cooperation of this nature was amply demonstrated by the recent identification of major thefts from the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin. Items successfully stolen from the library's Islamic collection were sold to a foreign buyer. The thefts only came to light when a US expert on Islamic art recognised two pages of a 9th century Kufic Qur'an being offered for sale to a New York Museum for more than £25,000.

**Summary.* There are a number of sanctions available to libraries for dealing with those caught trying to steal books. The majority of academic and specialist libraries prefer to deal with such incidents internally and tend to impose penalties that they are able to enforce. Public libraries have fewer enforceable sanctions available to them. This may be why the majority of those who impose any sanctions for attempted theft choose to refer offenders straight to the police.

Staff responsibilities

Preventive actions fostered by the individual library will not achieve much impact if they do not command the wholesale support of staff working there. The conventional wisdom is that the librarians' main objective – of fostering open and welcoming institutions that will encourage access and borrowing – sits uneasily with responsibilities for security and custodianship. Ample evidence of the strength of this argument was found at various stages of this enquiry. Indeed, it has been one of the principal targets of the NPO's campaign against book theft to indicate that the two are not incompatible, and that the failure to ensure the care of collections renders a grave disservice to the reading public.

One, less frequently voiced, explanation for any reluctance to adopt more stringent policies of custodianship is that by no means all books are of course to be preserved

'for posterity'. Many librarians spoken to in the course of the enquiry clearly found it difficult to view theft seriously when the "scrapping" of books is literally as much an everyday part of their function as book preservation. Many libraries, particularly in the public sector, will dispose of up to 10% of their stock each year, either because material has been damaged through regular usage, or never used. Moreover the informal advice received from librarians was that the tight central control that frequently used to be applied to disposing of books has grown more relaxed, with authority increasingly delegated to individual institutions. This is a marked contrast with the commercial concern, where all stock represents investment and therefore value, even if it requires savage price cuts to realise this value.

But although this may help explain why library losses are seldom high on the librarians' agenda, it remains a simple fact that, unlike managers of any type of "stock" in a business environment, librarians have not traditionally been held directly accountable for their stock. While their commercial counterparts will often face fierce management scrutiny – and ultimately the loss of their job – for presiding over 'unacceptably' high stock losses, such a concept of accountability is clearly alien to most senior management within the library service.

Controlling mutilation

Few libraries take specific action to combat the problem of deliberate book mutilation: less than a third of libraries responding to the main survey were able to provide any details of strategies they employed.

This is unremarkable. While mutilation is commonplace, the most direct means of monitoring its extent and of identifying perpetrators – the checking of all material before and after its use --is clearly unsustainable except in respect of the most prized items. Even in these circumstances, when the credentials of users have been verified in advance and labour-intensive measures can be taken to supervise usage and conduct checks, the few cases of "trusted" individuals who mutilate unbound archive material demonstrate that risks cannot be entirely eliminated. The mutilation and thefts of Islamic material reported recently from the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin (see page 39) were mostly of material not fully archived, and indeed theft charges have been made against the curator whose duty it was to compile such a catalogue.

Cases such as these are far removed from the more commonplace defacing of material accessible to general members of the public, but they demonstrate the simple point that the more rigorous steps are obviously taken by those libraries with material which is more valuable and difficult to replace. The measures employed by respondents who did specify the actions they took against mutilation included:

**Staff vigilance.* The largest number of those who identified specific measures taken to combat mutilation (24%) referred to "security patrols" and "vigilant staff" as the means they used to prevent readers from damaging books. The sight of security

personnel patrolling the library may be sufficient to deter many readers from carrying out the more obvious forms of mutilation, such as annotating the books they are reading. The more damaging forms of mutilation, such as the removal of plates, tends however to be done quickly and surreptitiously. Patrolling security guards and “vigilant staff” have very little opportunity to act.

Relying on staff to detect the occurrence of mutilation during the course of their usual duties is probably the most obvious means of prevention for most libraries. But more than a quarter (2796) of respondents to the main survey felt that the primary factor preventing their library from tackling the incidence of mutilation was a lack of staff.

**Maximising supervision and enhancing layout.* Constraints on library spending make it unlikely that the majority of libraries will ever be staffed to the extent which they would desire, but this does not prevent them from maximising the supervision of readers by their existing staff. Many however hold that identifying staff in a manner that will make them more conspicuous can change readers’ perceptions of the level of supervision. Similarly, ensuring that staff desks are positioned in visible locations, which allow them to observe the more vulnerable areas, can maximise the appearance of supervision.

Library layout is a further factor that hinders some libraries from extending staff surveillance. The main survey revealed that 9% of respondents felt that the layout of their library was the factor contributing most to the incidence of theft, and 6% that it was the main factor preventing them from tackling mutilation. Poorly laid out libraries in which there are numerous dark corners, and areas that cannot be seen from staff desks, allow greater opportunities for dishonest borrowers to steal and damage books.

**Setting and advertising standards.* Mutilation can take a number of different forms and while libraries may regard all forms with equal disdain, it is self-evident that the perpetrators of at least some types of mutilation do not perceive their actions to be particularly damaging or antisocial. The frequency with which books, particularly those in academic libraries, suffer mutilation from highlighting and annotation suggests that many who deface books in this way do not consider their actions to be particularly heinous.

If the majority of those who deface books are genuinely unaware of the adverse effects of their actions, then the clear implication is that some libraries may be able to reduce mutilation by raising awareness. Indeed, Gouke and Murfin (op cit) showed that raising readers’ awareness of the consequences of their actions, in terms of the cost and difficulty of replacing items, can sometimes be effective in reducing the incidence of damage.

Nine per cent of libraries in the survey used warning posters to raise users’ awareness of mutilation. Posters aimed at encouraging readers to report incidents of mutilation and

actively to support the library's determination to eliminate damage may persuade perpetrators that they will come under an increasing level of supervision and could face the condemnation of their fellow readers.

**Provision of photocopying facilities.* Libraries may be able to reduce the frequency with which items are mutilated through the provision of an adequate photocopying service (under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988). Indeed, the main survey revealed that 13% of libraries felt that the factor contributing most to the incidence of mutilation was an inability or unwillingness on the part of borrowers to make photocopies. It is probable that if there are long queues for the copier, if it is frequently broken and if the copies supplied are of poor quality, there will be little incentive for readers to copy rather than remove the item they require.

**Checking of books.* Just under a quarter (21%) of those libraries who reported taking specific preventive measures check books for evidence of mutilation before and after use. This procedure is of course the most straightforward, but it is wholly impractical to do this 'across the board'. Even when staff do have time to check books before and after use, they are unlikely to have time to examine every item with the necessary thoroughness. Even so, if carried out in front of readers, book checking can be a high profile means of deterring mutilation.

Other, more rigorous, means of checking books are carried out by some of the larger libraries and those whose collections are particularly valuable. In some there are restrictions on the type of paper that readers can take into the library. The reading rooms of the Public Record Office, for example, only allow readers to use yellow paper, thus reducing the opportunities for secreting pages or manuscripts inside bundles of paper. This form of defensive action will only work in these institutions that are also able to operate obligatory bag and coat deposits. The colour of the paper will make no difference to detection if it is hidden inside a briefcase or coat pocket. Some libraries also operate procedures for weighing materials when they are issued to and returned by readers. Although their weighing techniques may not be particularly accurate, this is believed to serve as an effective deterrent to the removal of manuscripts, articles and plates.

**Restrictions on access.* Restricting access to vulnerable materials is relied upon by 18% of libraries taking action to prevent mutilation. In most cases, access is restricted by requiring readers to demonstrate a justifiable reason for wanting to use the collection before they can be registered at the library. Some go further and apply more stringent access to highly prized parts of collections, and in these circumstances libraries will also often require users to request specific items.

**Prosecution.* Only 5% of libraries responding to the main survey had, in the last five years, referred any readers to the police for book mutilation: a finding which may be more indicative of the difficulties inherent in identifying perpetrators than of an unwillingness to prosecute. Some libraries did report informally that they used

retrospective records from their computerised loan systems to enable them to identify and monitor those suspected of persistently mutilating books. Informal contacts also suggested that some libraries widely advertise the discovery and subsequent punishment meted out on those found mutilating material, in order to boost the deterrent impact of the few cases in which court actions have been pursued.

Developing a security policy

For librarians to take concerted action on any of the quite extensive range of issues that may impact library loss clearly requires their efforts to be co-ordinated within an official framework and strongly endorsed by management. It was for this reason that the British Library in 1990 issued advisory guidelines on considerations to be taken into account in combating loss.

Although the time elapsed between the issue of these guidelines and the fieldwork for this enquiry was not substantial, it was striking that *four out of five respondents to the main survey (84%) indicated that they had no written security policy within their library.* The marginal priority given to security issues was reinforced by the extent to which this topic was the focus of staff training: over 40% said no training was given to staff, but even amongst those conducting staff training, the majority dealt solely with the operation of the security system (17%), or simply with the need for staff to maintain general vigilance over users.

These findings are not only consistent with the more general tenor of the main survey, which indicates the quite low priority given to loss within the library service, but imply that much of the indifference derives from senior management. A more positive implication is that security considerations are not issues that have been introduced to library professionals and rejected by them. To this extent, there may be considerable progress to be made if and when senior management can be persuaded to foster security objectives as priorities within the service. The process of developing policy requires defining and prioritising the goals and objectives of an organisation. If security can secure a place on this agenda, junior staff will be given the 'go ahead' to address these issues and explore avenues towards meeting them.

Summary

Despite the low priority generally accorded to security problems by libraries, and the fact that few institutions have developed security policies, the response to the main survey indicated *the very substantial investment the library service has already made in the prevention of theft and mutilation, and towards minimising the consequences of these acts.* The take-up of some strategies was much higher than anticipated: library security systems, for example, were operated by 36% of all respondents, and 27% referred their outstanding loans to independent book recovery officers. Moreover, there is clearly a great deal being done directly by library staff themselves, such as organising and implementing book amnesties (which have been tried by two-thirds of respondents),

or by less publicised activities like making book recovery visits themselves to readers' homes.

But a good many of these defensive activities are concentrated in particular sectors of the library service, and most notably in academic institutions. Nine out of ten of the academic libraries surveyed operated a security system, and – although by no means all academic libraries operate comprehensive defences – they are certainly the principal users of more costly forms of protection such as security personnel and closed-circuit television. This reinforces the implication that academic institutions, at least, owe their lower loss rates (which the survey established were less than half those of the public libraries) to their investment in prevention and to the greater control they can exercise over their users, rather than to intrinsically lower levels of theft and non-return.

The majority of institutions, particularly public libraries, operate no supplementary physical or procedural impediments to theft and mutilation. Their sole reliance is on staff vigilance and the operation of the fine system. While most of these institutions do not have sufficient problems to warrant expenditure on physical controls, the lack of emphasis on the “custodianship” of library material is a cause for concern. At the level of the individual library, one explanation may be that there is very little local autonomy for them to change direction. But, prompted by the encouragement in the government's “Competing for Quality” consultative document (which primarily examined the feasibility of contracting out support services, like the acquisition, cataloguing and processing of books), several library authorities have done much to boost local autonomy. Cambridgeshire's library service, for example, has devolved decisions on issues such as opening hours, training, pricing and the purchase of information technology to seven local managers (see Mason, 1992).

The fact that very few libraries have framed a security policy is indicative that there is little central direction from management on this issue. Indeed, the absence of hard empirical evidence, and of reliable analysis, on fine policies (or even on the payoff achieved from quite major investments, like those on security systems) implied consistently that the critical analysis of security issues has not permeated management thinking.

Inevitably the survey focused on physical defences against theft and mutilation: most of which have significant cost implication, whether in terms of library staffing or resources. These costs are clearly too large for a good many libraries to countenance: nearly 4 out of 10 libraries (39%) believed inadequate resources was the main factor preventing them from tackling theft. When coupled with a further 28% who believed staff shortages were their prime hindrance, *fully two-thirds of libraries regarded cost implication as the main obstacle preventing them from acting against theft and mutilation.* While there is clearly advantage in ensuring that prevention of loss and mutilation secure a central place in the objectives – and thus in the policy and procedures of the library service, the cost implications cannot be overlooked.

4 MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This final section of the report summarises the main findings derived from the enquiry, and the implications for the prevention of theft and mutilation.

Findings

The national survey carried out, which elicited 727 responses from a broad cross-section of libraries in the UK, focused both on the problem faced by libraries and the actions they had taken in response.

The principal findings on the scale and characteristics of the problem were:

*Counting practices in the UK libraries surveyed are poor: more than a quarter (28%) never carry out comprehensive inventories for counts, even over long periods of time. Less than half of those who carry out assessments could provide information about their results;

*The average loss rate recorded at the "last check" by those libraries able to provide information was 4.4% of their total stock;

*Losses differ between library sectors. The average loss rate for public libraries alone was 5.3% while the losses recorded by academic and specialist libraries were lower, at 1.9% and 2.1%. Within sectors, losses differ substantially between institutions;

*Counts are performed even less frequently on audiovisual (AV) material: nearly half of those libraries which hold this material never carry out full checks. The mean loss rate of those that do was 5 items per month;

*The types of material lost from libraries vary substantially between different types of collection: contrary to one common belief, the survey found no strong or consistent evidence that new acquisitions are disproportionately at risk;

*Books not returned from loan account for almost a third (29%) of all losses in the libraries surveyed, although there were indications that some libraries simply do not regard such items as "lost". Non-returns account for a higher proportion of public library losses (33%), than they do for academic (18%) and specialist (17%) collections;

*Few librarians believe that thefts by staff are a significant problem;

*Few libraries escape the deliberate mutilation of their book stock. Inevitably much goes undiscovered, but six out of ten libraries have cases come to their notice at least monthly;

*Overall, the book losses revealed by counts in the libraries surveyed reflect a national loss (though not necessarily a *replacement* cost) in excess of £150 million each year. This figure is 50% higher than previous estimates.

The principal findings on the preventive actions being taken by libraries were:

*Many of those who do carry out inventories and counts derive little direction from them on the preventive actions required. The inadequacies of methods short of 'title by tide' inventories impose severe limitations on the preventive process, because they cannot furnish details of precisely what has been lost;

*The management of loss seems to be exacerbated by the high number of loans allowed by most libraries: 45% allow adult readers to borrow 9 or more books at a time;

*There was little evidence of many libraries trying to promote the responsibilities that borrowers have in caring for loan items and ensuring that they are returned on time;

*The development of an effective structure of fine penalties, the main means of enforcing the loan system, is a complex management priority. Although philosophies abound, the enquiry was unable to reveal substantive evidence of empirical evaluation in this area;

*Book recovery visits to borrowers' homes – either by independent agents, or by library staff themselves – have now grown to be more commonplace. About a quarter of practitioners believe they have a very significant payoff. Those making home visits are extremely selective, but many have developed local "formulas" that persuade borrowers to return items;

*Book "amnesties" have been tried by most libraries, but with varying degrees of success. Factors critical to their success appear to be widespread advertising in advance, the suspension of all fines, allowing books to be returned anonymously and – contrary to some expectations – keeping them short-lived;

*The "tagging" of library material has become increasingly commonplace. The survey found that just over a third of all libraries have security systems, and two-thirds of users believed they were successful;

*Detailed enquiries amongst "tagging" users found little evidence that they were being rigorously evaluated. Most envisaged that the 'payback' from installing systems would take several years;

*It is comparatively rare for libraries to refer those caught stealing books to the police. But many academic and specialist institutions do penalise perpetrators by preventing them from using their libraries;

*Few libraries take specific actions to combat deliberate mutilation. Those that do so are generally protecting highly prized material;

*Librarians widely perceive that they are constrained from acting against theft and mutilation by staff shortages, and by limitations on other resources;

*There is little evidence that the control of theft and mutilation is universally viewed by library professionals as a valued objective. Only about one in five libraries has developed a security policy.

A way ahead?

Given the upward trend in all forms of property crime over recent decades, it is not surprising that libraries have been targets, despite the fact that they primarily serve sectors of the population not traditionally associated with offending. As this survey provides one of the first national perspectives on the problem (and certainly the first spanning different library sectors), and as its predecessors have adopted different approaches, it is difficult to determine precisely whether there has been a substantial increase in loss. Certainly, however, comparisons with Lincoln and Lincoln's 1984 survey indicate a significant growth.

Even at this point, it is evident that the problems of theft and mutilation are not endemic to the library service. Many locations remain largely unaffected. Nonetheless, both problems are proving a drain on the book stock of many library authorities and have already warranted substantial costs in control. The process of prevention, in other words, is well underway at the local level.

The cost sustained by the public purse nationally also requires that central organisations – professional and governmental – should play their part in fostering debate and issuing guidance. A good many of the issues central to this emerging debate have been addressed in this enquiry. At this early stage of development, it is appropriate that the lessons from the review should largely be directed at 'defining the problem', rather than promulgating solutions. The central issues are:

**Defining loss.* Clearly one of the first principles that needs to be addressed is the striking differences that exist on what constitutes "loss", and progress towards agreement. Differences were evident at nearly every stage of this enquiry. Some major institutions have formally never "lost" stock. In other libraries stringent criteria are applied soon after any item is discovered missing and proves untraceable. The classification of material that is not returned from loan is a critical dimension.

While common standards of measuring loss are desirable, it is clear that these cannot – and should not – be imposed. Moreover the mechanism for moving towards consensus in such a diverse, and locally-run, service may require several strands. Coordination would be required between the National Preservation Office (NPO) and appropriate government departments (DNH, etc.); the Library Association and the various professional groups representing different sectors of the library service.

**Counting requirements.* It is important that any dialogue on advancing common definitions of loss should also address counting conventions. One of the principal

points highlighted by this enquiry was the infrequency with which many libraries carry out comprehensive checks of their stock, and indeed the shortcomings of anything other than “title by title” inventories in framing an appropriate preventive response. Moreover the view that computerised loan systems have, or will, allow libraries to “dispense with” comprehensive counts was frequently voiced during informal discussions: a view that would amount to total heresy in any organisation that depended for its commercial survival on accurate stock records and on maintaining stock availability!

**Computerising audit procedures.* A substantial gap now exists between the stock audit disciplines expected of librarians and their commercial “counterparts”, and in the techniques used to carry out counts. In the commercial world these techniques – ranging from advances in electronic point of sale (EPOS) methods that now allow many supermarkets to process all product movements across scanners, to the use of portable data capture (PDT) devices to count stock on the shelves - have developed in leaps and bounds. They have done so because of the inescapable commercial, and legal, necessities to monitor stock movement accurately,

If book inventories in libraries are to prove feasible, experimentation is needed to investigate how similar applications can be developed in the library context.

**Promoting awareness amongst library professionals.* Recent work by the NPO seems to have done much to raise awareness amongst senior librarians of theft and mutilation, and their training video and posters have been targeted at the professional librarian. The generally low levels of concern reported by librarians to this enquiry, however, suggest that this work is far from complete. In particular renewed focus is required to raise awareness amongst those working in public libraries.

The concept that the “custodianship” of library materials is an equal – and not lesser – partner to the “service” principle also needs to be advanced by those controlling libraries, especially the local authorities. Arguably one of the underlying reasons why the “custodian” ethic has not found strong support is that few librarians have been held in any way accountable for the losses sustained by the institutions for which they are responsible. To have done so would have been inequitable in circumstances where loan terms, fine penalties and budgets for preventive devices are controlled centrally. There are nonetheless signs that local accountability may increase under the “Competing for Quality” proposals.

**Promoting awareness amongst library users.* The other side of the “awareness” coin is for the library service to direct efforts at raising awareness *amongst library users* of the critical role they have to play in preventing theft and mutilation: both in their own behaviour, and in creating a ‘climate’ that will discourage and deter the irresponsible.

Action on this front – which should focus not only on the costs sustained, but on the damage to library services - is probably best started within library premises: by

handouts to users, by poster, and perhaps in the notices sent out to remind readers that they have material which is overdue.

**Experimentation and the sharing of 'good practice'.* Although major differences in convention and objectives divide the various library sectors and institutions within them, this enquiry has nonetheless highlighted the lack of empirical evidence and critical analysis on the whole issue of book mutilation and theft, and indeed the absence of suitable means for sharing common experience. The contrast with other disciplines, or with the priority given to these same issues in the US, is dramatic. Central organisations and those responsible for financing library services can do much to overcome this by requiring more exacting analysis and encouraging libraries to pool their experiences (not simply through one-off seminars, but also through coverage in library journals and other appropriate media). One issue requiring priority attention is the operation and evaluation of different structures of fine penalties.

Action on these issues will provide a former foundation from which to advance the preventive process. The recommendations made here are primarily aimed at central authorities, and they are concerned with determining the vocabulary, and standard, of the debate that should follow. But actions from this quarter should also serve to stress that the prevention of theft and mutilation at individual institutions cannot be dictated centrally. The role of the central authorities is to advise on the methods and approaches that each institution might need to apply in assessing their own problems. The individual institution's task is to tailor its preventive actions to meet its own particular problems.

APPENDIX 1. SURVEY SAMPLING

This appendix supplements the broad description of the sample of the national – or “main” – survey in Section I (page 6) administered by PAS Ltd., and provides details of the sampling conventions employed.

Public libraries.

Amongst public libraries the primary objective was to elicit responses from a representative sample of collections operating from “static” and self-contained premises open to the general public: in other words, all except mobile libraries and those contained within the confines of old people’s homes, hospitals or other institutions. CIPFA statistics indicated that 4,852 such libraries were operating in the UK in 1990. In order to achieve at least 10% representation – some 480 to 500 libraries – and in the belief that it was realistic to anticipate that the survey would not necessarily exceed a response rate of 55 to 60%, 715 such libraries were included in the sample.

The distribution of questionnaires amongst the different types of library authorities, and thereafter amongst individual authorities, was determined by the *size of book stock* held in each (again, according to CIPFA figures). Thus the combined “volume” holdings of the Metropolitan Districts, English Counties, Welsh counties and so on, determined overall sector allocation of the 715 questionnaires. Thereafter, individual authorities within each sector were allocated questionnaires on the basis of broad bandings of the book stock they held: one questionnaire was allocated for approximately every 200,000 volumes.

When allocation per authority had been calculated, distribution was geared towards obtaining a representative cross-section of main, area/regional and branch libraries. There are no central records of book holdings between these different types of location, and indeed the same labels are by no means universally applied. In view of this, authorities allocated only one questionnaire had this directed at the central library; those allocated two had them sent to the central, and one – randomly chosen – regional library; and those with three had questionnaires sent to these two locations and a randomly chosen branch library. Clearly, as there is only one central library per authority, representation of regional and branch libraries increased as numbers rose. Again, as there is no central directory of the smaller, “branch”, libraries in existence, the choice of these had to be made by random selection from branch library listings in the telephone directory covering each authority: a considerable exercise. Overall, the sample of 715 public libraries comprised 167 central libraries, 129 regional or area libraries, and 419 local or branch libraries.

Academic libraries

One of the most accessible and widely used listings of academic libraries is “Libraries in the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland”, published annually by the Library

Association (Library Association, annually). The drawback of this index is that it includes only university and polytechnic main libraries (and excludes all college and institution libraries within universities and polytechnics, except for the Institute libraries within the University of London). Moreover, it does not cover libraries in colleges of further or higher education, etc. Despite these drawbacks, it was decided to rely on this as the best central reference of academic libraries.

The 1991 LA listing covers 135 academic libraries and, to achieve a reasonable response, questionnaires were sent to all these libraries.

Specialist libraries

As the range of specialist libraries is so wide, it was decided again to rely on the LA listing as the most comprehensive index for drawing a sample. The criteria for specialist libraries to be included in this guide is that they are believed to be the most extensive collections within their own field. The main libraries of all government departments, together with the National Libraries of Wales and Scotland, and the British Library, are also included in this section of the guide. Some of the libraries registered as being specialist collections were also academic libraries (e.g. The Royal College of Music Library): their responses were treated as being those of specialist collections, and not as academic institutions.

The 1991 LA listing covers 236 specialist collections in the UK. To ensure adequate numbers for analysis, it was decided to sample 150 – or 63% – of these. The selection made was entirely random, although collections noted as being strictly “reference only” were excluded.

APPENDIX 2. NATIONAL BOOK LOSS: ESTIMATION METHODS

The estimates of total UK “last count” and annual book loss provided in the Summary to Section II (page 19) were derived by the following convention:

Survey estimate of loss multiplied by estimate of total UK book stock =
total volumes lost. Total volumes lost multiplied by average book price =
Total replacement value.

In the case of the annual book loss estimate provided, this was: 4.0% of 200 million volumes = 8 million loss. Eight million volumes @ £21 each = £168 million replacement per annum.

These are general estimates, and it is feasible to refine them by applying more concise data. Two alternatives are:

A. Applying a higher estimate of the national book stock

Estimates of the book stock of UK libraries summarised on pages of the report incorporate:

Public	(CIFPA 89/90 estimates)	157 million volumes
	Nationals	23 million volumes
Academic	Universities (SCONUL average)	63 million volumes
	Polytechnics (COPOL)	10 million volumes
	Other institutions	not known
Specialist		not known

In other words, accessible data from the “public” (180 million) and academic (73 million) sectors alone indicate book stocks of around 253 million. Applying the criteria used above, it could be estimated that annual losses in these two sectors are: 4.0% of 253 million volumes = 10.12 million lost. This number @ £21 each = £212 million replacement per annum.

B. Deriving separate estimates for public/academic sectors

Rates of loss, and indeed book prices, vary substantially between the public and academic sectors. Separate calculations could be applied:

Public: 4.2% of 180 million volumes = 7.56 million lost. This number @ £21 each = £159 million replacement per annum.

Academic: 1.8%, of 73 million volumes = 1.31 million lost. This number @ £28.57 each (LISU average academic book price, 1989/90) = £38 million replacement per annum.

Total: £197 million replacement per annum.

None of these estimates attempts to account for losses of audiovisual material, those from specialist libraries, or for costs other than those of direct book replacement.

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