Resource

Archives Task Force

Theme 4: Stewardship

A think piece report for
Resource: The Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries
on behalf of DCMS

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Executive summary

Examination of the current state of play reveals a depressing state of stewardship in many aspects, though some individuals are continuously attempting to push forward initiatives. Storage and conservation facilities are poor in most regional areas, though the advent of big grant giving bodies has improved some repositories dramatically. Conservation and cataloguing backlogs are substantial, and the loss of conservation posts in particular has led to a culture of short-term project work for private conservators. These, however, by definition are unable to carry out all the stewardship activities required in an archive. Digital preservation is almost non-existent in most archives. Training in all areas is patchy and uncoordinated.

Despite this gloomy picture some key initiatives are already making changes and there is promise of more to come. The development of regional facilities is likely to make a considerable impact on the facilities available to archives of all types. The merger of the PRO and HMC will streamline available advice and practical assistance and the development of the Digital Preservation Coalition will focus attention on an area of dangerous neglect. The National Preservation Office has already taken several key initiatives such as the outline of a national preservation strategy and the compilation of a national database of preservation needs.

Forces working against good stewardship at present are identified as including lack of strategic direction, lack of senior management support in the face of competition for other public services, the loss of posts, particularly in conservation and the almost complete lack of any structure for digital preservation outside the national institutions.

Models for improvement come largely from the museum world, with which archives have not worked so closely as with libraries in the past. The registration system, the Designation Challenge Fund and the national audit carried out by the Scottish Museums Council all suggest possible avenues for archives to explore.

Further research ideas include more analysis of the current situation in order to counteract public apathy or ignorance about the place of stewardship in safeguarding the cultural heritage. Research would also target senior management, providing cogent information on issues such as risk management and comparative costing for different stewardship solutions.
Re:source Archives Task Force Theme 4: Stewardship think piece

‘This area is vital to the sustainable use of archives and underpins all other activities.’

Issues of stewardship, collections management, preservation management and conservation skills have come up regularly in all archive survey and mapping exercises undertaken in the last five years. These include those taken specifically for the sector, such as Our Shared Past: Phase Two, a follow up survey on local authority record offices done by the Public Record Office (PRO), The Missing Link, undertaken for specialist repositories by the Society of Archivists, Sustaining Our Living Heritage by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), Archives at the Millennium by the Historical Manuscripts Commission (HMC), Archives in the Regions as an overview of the regional archive strategies by the National Council on Archives (NCA) and the sectoral and general reports issues by Re:source over the past three years. They all have slightly different objectives, but are unanimous in pointing out the need for ensuring the sustainability of the cultural heritage and the danger of losing scarce skills. Much of the problem lies in the tug between core responsibilities and project work, whether the material in question is traditional or electronic.

1. Current state of play
The current state of play is best looked at under a number of headings, though in view of the size of this report they are not exclusive and all could be expanded for more detail. Where possible the position of different types of archives is given, though the evidence does not always reveal variations.

Storage
‘Providing sufficient space for archival storage, with capacity for future growth, and offering the right selection of environments, is…critical to the mission of archive services.’ Despite an impressive building programme for new archives in the last few years, provision of the most basic element of care for many archives, adequate storage, remains pitiful. The latest overview, undertaken by the NCA concluded ‘Only a small fraction of storage facilities meet national standards.’ Several studies have concluded that the gap between the best provision and the worst has widened during the past five years, due at least in part to the effect of funding bodies, such as the HLF providing resources for a few new buildings.

Specialist repositories may sometimes benefit from being housed within headquarters of main buildings, but the actual storage is frequently poor and over half of those surveyed assessed accommodation to be inadequate. Those in old, or listed buildings are frequently unable to meet the considerable expense of converting them to repositories which meet current standards. Environmental controls are inadequate or non-existent in many, and the chance of meeting BS 5454 standards are minimal.

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1 Archives in the Regions (National Council on Archives, 2001) p 13
2 See Appendix 1. Bibliography
3 Changing the future of our past (National Council on Archives, 2002) p.20
4 Archives in the Regions, p. 13
5 The Missing Link (Society of Archivists, 2002) p.10
Specialist repositories frequently complain that parent organisations do not see the provision of air-conditioning as a priority.

In local authorities the situation is much the same ‘Over half of all local authority archive collections continue to be housed in poor or fairly poor accommodation… Some 70% of record offices report no change in their main storage since 1997 ’\(^7\) The National Preservation Office (NPO) assessment data also points to lack of environmental control as one of the major problems for archives.

National institutions are the most likely to have adequate provision but even in these there is room for improvement.

Storage space is widely interpreted, in virtually all the reports, as physical storage space for the preservation of traditional materials. While this is true for most archives there is also an urgent need for the provision of storage for electronic material. The indictment of local authorities is clear ‘only 3% (4 services) have the capacity to store electronic records in accordance with the British Standard\(^8\); ‘73% did not expect to be in a position to deal with electronic records within the next 2-3 years’\(^9\) leading to the conclusion that ‘Investment in appropriate storage for electronic records is essential’.\(^10\) Few other organisations appear to have made provision either; businesses, in some cases, have data-centres for their current information; the national institutions either have some facilities, or will have shortly, including some accommodation for the relatively small amount of material already accessioned in that format. Data-centres exist for specific purposes particularly in the HE sector but frequently these are for access and research purposes without concern about long-term sustainability. Only archive specific centres undertake such services – for example the National Data Repository at the University of London Computing Centre (ULCC) which stores selected databases on behalf of the PRO and other archives, and the UK Data Archive, at the University of Essex, which takes in digital data in the social sciences and humanities.

**Key point:** storage for both traditional and electronic archives is insufficient and rarely up to standard

**Conservation facilities**

In 2001 70% of the local authority archives\(^11\) rated the provision of conservation facilities as poor, or very poor. This is compared to 60% in the survey undertaken in 1997, revealing a declining trend, which in real terms means a failure to maintain existing facilities or upgrade existing equipment.

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\(^7\) Our shared past: phase two (http://www.pro.gov.uk) p. 14

\(^8\) BS 4783/1-8: 1988-1994 Recommendations for the storage, transportation and maintenance of media for use in data processing and information storage (British standards Institute, 1994)

\(^9\) Our shared past, p 11

\(^10\) Our shared past, p 30

\(^11\) Our Shared Past p.20
Specialist repositories fared even worse; 36% of the smaller archives surveyed in 2001 had to rely on one-off funding when conservation work became urgent, 45% had a budget for some external conservation work; only 19% had in-house facilities.

National institutions scored quite highly; being larger and more specialised they were likely to have better facilities and more staff.

No general data exists in the current reports on facilities for the preservation/migration/emulation of digital materials but the BBC is known to be undertaking information migration work from Betamax and other tapes in a multi-million pound 10 year programme. In Europe the French, Italians and Germans are involved in a multi-media preservation project, storing material on MPEG, MP3 or JPEG according to type. The specialist archive data centres rely on generic systems rather than migration or emulation wherever possible, separating the preservation format from the format required by the individual user.

**Key points:** conservation facilities are poor overall with many archives having meagre budgets for employing private conservators; digital preservation is rarely undertaken other than in specialist centres

**Cataloguing**
Correct identification of required items by users and staff is a positive contribution to good stewardship in that it prevents time wasted in issuing material which turns out to be unwanted, and safeguards such material from unnecessary handling. Recently, efforts have been made to quantify and identify priorities for cataloguing; this includes both those collections at present either partially or wholly uncatalogued, and manual catalogues which require retrospective conversion to electronic format. The HLF strategic plan for the next five years includes a commitment to ‘make available for viewing or use material that is currently inaccessible’; other funding bodies, such as the British Library Co-operation and Partnership programme, have made clear their intention of supporting cataloguing. The *Full Disclosure Prioritisation Study*, identified priorities across all three domains and recommended collaboration at a number of levels as well as a co-ordinating role for Re:source in ‘national standards of collection care and stewardship’.

**Key point:** cataloguing backlogs are significant and addressing the problem must be a priority in any stewardship strategy

**Staffing**
Posts with a specific remit to undertake stewardship, collections management or preservation tasks are largely confined to the national institutions. In many local authorities the responsibility may be down to the conservator, if there is one, or to an archivist who has other, additional tasks. In specialist repositories the staffing is

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12 *The Missing Link* p 14
13 Heritage Lottery Fund *Broadening the Horizons of Heritage* (HLF, 2002) p 21
15 *Full Disclosure Prioritisation Study*, p 49
usually too small for anything other than general care being given as and when possible; specialist knowledge or understanding may well be lacking.

Conservation posts in local authorities and in national institutions have been substantially cut over the last 10-15 years. As a result there is a dwindling pool of candidates for posts, since many trained conservators have turned to other work. Very few suitable candidates apply for local authority posts and in one case it has been impossible to attract candidates for grant-aided projects. Three major conservation/preservation/collections manager posts advertised within the last six months, at the Bodleian, the British Library and Trinity College Dublin (all of which have a remit for archival and manuscript as well as library material), have attracted very little interest. Seven candidates in all were interviewed; at the British Library no appointment was made and at TCD the successful candidate was Australian. This points to a serious dearth of suitable candidates.

Posts in digital preservation are few. The PRO is actively recruiting at present (autumn 2002) and the issue will have to be addressed by local authorities in the very near future. In 2001 94% of local authority archive services had no significant provision for the long-term preservation of electronic records, though more recently Worcestershire and Hertfordshire County Councils have recruited staff in this area. Specialist institutions vary according to their purpose, but it is doubtful whether any employ specialists in digital preservation despite 13% having professional staff trained in the appraisal, selection and accessioning of electronic records. Specialist institutions vary according to their purpose, but it is doubtful whether any employ specialists in digital preservation despite 13% having professional staff trained in the appraisal, selection and accessioning of electronic records. Data-centres are the most prominent employers of specialists to deal with digital material, but even there, the emphasis is on IT capability, rather than digital archiving skills.

Private conservators or consultants now carry out much of the work traditionally undertaken in-house. While the quality of their work is usually comparable to those employed full-time, they cannot provide the traditional on-going collections care and training and development. From their point of view, employment is precarious, depending on project work; many leave the profession in search of better-paid and permanent posts in other disciplines.

Key points: posts related to traditional stewardship are few and many conservation posts have been lost over the last decade; specialists in digital preservation are almost non-existent, particularly in local government and specialist archives; private conservators, while filling a gap in provision, are not in a position to carry out all the activities of collections care.

Stewardship methodology
The range of methods and techniques adopted to fulfil stewardship functions is very wide, moving from the broad approach of ensuring that all material is well housed in good environmental conditions to meticulous conservation work on a single item. Attitudes change too, for example over the extent of conservation intervention with archival material, and good managers must be attuned to arguments and discussion about what is best at any one moment. Additionally, a range of employment opportunities can be adopted and varied according to need. Long-term permanent

16 The Missing Link, p 17
posts need to be mixed with some short term or project based posts, to make best use of resources. Good stewardship is flexible, encompasses all these options, adapting and re-positioning them as appropriate. Solutions are not static. However, there has been a tendency in many organisations in recent years to opt for broad solutions at the expense of more detailed work.

**Key point:** the balance between broad and individual approaches to stewardship, both of which are valid, needs to be maintained

*Professional qualifications and organisations*
Conservators have recently introduced a scheme for professional accreditation, which has had a positive take up, though employers still need to see it as a requirement. Following this initiative the National Council of Conservator-Restorers (NCCR) is considering the establishment of a new single body to represent the whole of the cross-domain conservation profession. In the latest NCCR news it is ‘acknowledged from the outset that the rationale behind all thinking, actions and decisions was that the good of the profession, conservation and the heritage was paramount above any factional interests.’

Collections managers or preservation managers are usually archivists or conservators with their own original professional qualifications. No specific qualification is available, or required and there is no forum for participation and discussion other than through those existing for conservators or through membership of the Preservation Advisory Panel of the NPO.

Much discussion of digital preservation has taken place over the past years but at present there is no professional qualification available to staff, other than that for archivists, librarians or information specialists.

**Key point:** conservators are moving towards becoming a more cohesive body with the introduction of accreditation and moves towards a single professional body across all three domains

*Education and Training*
Training of archive conservators is undertaken at Camberwell College of Arts, part of the London Institute, where students can gain a BA Hons in Conservation, a postgraduate diploma or an MA which includes some research and investigation. Other postgraduate opportunities exist at the Royal College of Art which combines with the V&A to run courses for those wanting to undertake practical research or at Gateshead, where students specialise in works of art on paper. West Dean College offers a number of conservation options at postgraduate level which are examined by the University of Surrey. Practical training at a more basic level is carried out by the Society of Archivists, which runs a scheme requiring trainees to visit a number of different venues, as short-term interns, to develop different skills. The Society also runs one-day training events for conservators and preservation managers. Little dialogue occurs between the providers of training and the employers, although West Dean has recently convened a forum for discussion.

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17 *NCCR News* summer 2002
Preservation management is taught as part of the University College London (UCL) post-graduate archives course and an advanced module in preservation management across libraries, archives and museums is planned. Some preservation training is also given on the other two post-graduate courses, at Aberystwyth and Liverpool, and day-long courses have been organised by the PRO, by the Society of Archivists and the NPO.

Digital preservation is taught as part of the UCL courses, but in little detail; other university courses also offer basic insight into the problems but no specialist courses are available at present except through Glasgow University, which, as part of erpanet\textsuperscript{18}, offers training and workshops both in the UK and in Europe.

**Key point; little structure exists in current training for the stewards of the future, or dialogue on requirements.**

*Preservation policies and strategies*

Specialist repositories in England, responding to a questionnaire regarding their current and future needs\textsuperscript{19}, accepted the importance of developing both policies and strategies, but the majority are inadequately staffed to follow best practice. A recent co-operative venture in the Northeast region\textsuperscript{20}, however, specifically mentions the provision of advice on preservation policy and strategies as one of its aims.

Disaster control plans are widely acknowledged to be an important contribution to ensuring the survival of archival material, but 44% of local authority repositories have been unable to commit the time or resources to drawing one up, although 25% reported that there were plans to do so\textsuperscript{21}. Preservation assessment data collected by the NPO so far (summer, 2002) also suggests that this still remains a big gap in the provision of protection to archives generally. No data exists relating to the provision of integrated pest management planning.

Specialist repositories are currently unlikely to be able to fund microfilming or surrogating projects designed to reduce the wear and tear on their more popular or fragile holdings\textsuperscript{22}. Digitisation of images is necessarily very selective and although money is available for projects, this tends to be directed towards iconic items. Local authority archives are more active in that 55% have current microform programmes – but that still leaves 45% which do not\textsuperscript{23}.

The technology for undertaking statistically valid assessments of need, and consequential decisions on areas of greatest preservation need in archives, is available through the NPO and a country wide mapping exercise is taking place. It is progressing slowly however, due to limited resources, and the NPO does not expect to be able to present a representative sample before March 2005.

\textsuperscript{18} Electronic Resource Preservation and Access Network, an activity funded by the European Commission under its IST programme (IST-2001-3.1.2)

\textsuperscript{19} The Missing Link p 14

\textsuperscript{20} see Key Initiatives below

\textsuperscript{21} Our Shared Past, p 21

\textsuperscript{22} The Missing Link, p 14

\textsuperscript{23} Our Shared Past p 10
Much reliance is put on the national institutions for the development of suitable policies and strategies for digital material. There is little evidence of policies and strategies being developed in the local authority archives, albeit that the figure improved marginally, by 4%, between 1997 and 2001.\textsuperscript{24} Few, if any, mechanisms or strategies appear to have been developed for the transfer of selected electronic material from data-centres to archives. The picture is similar amongst specialist repositories; in the survey undertaken by the Society of Archivists in 2001 one comment made reflects the general picture - 'the parent body shows no interest in the future need for electronic record accessioning and storage'.\textsuperscript{25} The best that can be said is that some archives have taken the initiative to maintain back-up copies of electronic material, which is probably as far as many archives go.

**Key point:** although preservation policies and strategies are acknowledged to be important, few archives apart from national ones have developed them for any type of archival material

**Provision of advice and information**
Advice on archival preservation issues is currently available from the NPO, from national institutions such as the PRO, from the data-centres and the Society of Archivists. Conservation advice is available from many of these too, as well as from UK Institute of Conservation (UKIC), from the Institute of Paper Conservation (IPC) and from Camberwell College of Arts. Research information is available from the research section of the Conservation Department of the British Museum. Most county record offices will offer advice and guidance to enquirers. The internet also offers a wide variety of advice, available from round the world, with specialist sites like CoOL\textsuperscript{26}, a project of the Preservation Department of Stanford University Libraries offering reprints and advice on virtually every aspect of preservation and conservation.

The plethora of advice and information available about digital preservation in particular is daunting. Its characteristic as a global problem is ‘exploited’ by those who write cogently about the problems but rarely offer practical advice and a way forward. Internet sources are wide and diffuse, presenting the enquirer with a difficult task in finding real information about procedures and recommended practice. The national institutions offer advice to government departments and the NPO has published a number of papers on the subject and a very practical guide to best practice\textsuperscript{27}. ULCC, the UK Data Archive and erpanet also provide enquiry and advisory services.

**Key point:** much advice is available from both advice centres and from the internet, to the point that it is difficult to sort out what is really useful.

2. **Key initiatives, projects and players**

*Development of regional archival strategies;* the rapid spread of the idea of regionalism as at least a part solution to many problems faced by archives all over the

\textsuperscript{24}Our Shared Past, p 30  
\textsuperscript{25} The Missing Link, p 17  
\textsuperscript{26} http://palimpsest.stanford.edu/  
\textsuperscript{27} Jones, Maggie and Neil Beagrie *Preservation Management of Digital Materials A handbook* (British Library (2001))
country promises well for the area of stewardship. For the first time it has been possible to look beyond the constraints of local authority funding and produce a vision which lays out a picture of all types of archive in a region benefiting from a coherent policy in a comprehensible and relevant geographical area. The regional strategies produced over the past two years are robust and realistic; in some areas collaboration is already being put into practice, building on the ideas and suggestions made. If this can be assured as a practical way forward for the whole country it will have immense benefits for stewardship. The potential for cross-domain partnership, through the wider cultural councils, is even more encouraging.

Development of a national preservation strategy: NPO has repeatedly laid out the bones of a national preservation strategy, starting as early as 1984 when the Ratcliffe report was published on the needs of libraries. By 1995, at a conference entitled Piecing together the jigsaw, three requirements were identified, being
- the need to identify and locate the written and documentary heritage,
- the need to assess its condition and to identify,
- the need to agree and address priorities for collaborative remedial work

The NPO has since issued a leaflet on principles and prospects, spelling out in more detail the reasons for developing such a strategy and the benefits in developing it. Although it does not cover all the wider issues implicit in stewardship it is a basis for further development.

Standards; British Standard 5454:2000 recommendations for the storage and exhibition of archival documents; the existence of this standard, and earlier versions, provides a clear indication of the storage requirements for archival materials and is an initiative which must be maintained. It has been influential in driving up standards of storage and care, even if results are not yet as good as they should be. Performance measurement of this nature is an incentive to develop better care and provides ‘a structure for development’

In the digital environment standards are more flexible since the pace of change is so rapid. The DLM (Données Lisibles par Machine) forum, which includes a large number of UK archives and related organisations, suggests that three levels, de facto, publicly available and de jure are appropriate, rather than the standards reached after protracted negotiation. Initiatives issued through this group are likely to be current and applicable.

Mapping the Distributed National Collection - Scottish Museums Council; the Scottish National Audit carried out the first-ever national survey of holdings in Scotland’s museums and galleries earlier this year. This covered 170 organisations and covered a wide range of artefacts as well as archives and photographs. It revealed

29 NPO A national preservation strategy for library and archive collections in the United Kingdom and Ireland: principles and prospects (National Preservation Office, 2001)
30 Collections Management; preserving the past for the future p 19 http://www.resource.gov.uk/
Accessed on 21 August 2000
details of varied funding, varied services, varied staffing and varied stewardship. It uncovered uncelebrated national treasures and revealed wide variations in approach to access policies. The first theme identified for debate on what should happen as a result of the audit is how to ‘ensure effective stewardship of the distributed national collection’.  

Development of NPO National Register of Preservation Need; the NPO and PRO have recently developed, jointly for libraries and archives, a statistically valid methodology for assessing the preservation needs. Staff can carry out the required survey work with minimum training and as it is on a statistically valid sample of 400 items drawn from a collection of any size, it does not require significant resources in terms of time. The results can be utilized to review and determine priorities or optimum strategies for good stewardship, and also offer potential funders an opportunity to consider the comparative status of institutions making applications for grants. By feeding individual data into the NPO database a national picture of need is being developed, with confidence that the measurements are compatible and statistically valid. This is not only a UK initiative; similar methodology has been developed in the Netherlands and is increasingly being applied in different countries all over the world. In the Hungarian National Archives, one of the first to undertake such a survey, the level of need revealed led to the alteration of current strategic planning in order to afford stewardship a much higher role.

Benchmarks; the publication of a series of benchmarks by Re:source, by which institutions, across all three domains, can assess their own status and their aspirations for better stewardship is a valid method of levering up standards, without being overly prescriptive or expecting overnight change. Experience in the museum world, from which the initiative originally came, has demonstrated the value of presenting different levels of good practice to which institutions can aspire and the resultant tool for funders who can thus press for improvement.

Development of the National Archives; the proposed merger of the HMC and the PRO promises considerable benefits in terms of the application of uniform standards to the housing all types of archives and the development of digital preservation initiatives. The latter, in particular, will be beneficial since the generic systems being acquired by the PRO at present, and the policies and strategies which go with them, will offer models and proto-types to those without the current resources to undertake the necessary development. Shared arrangements for inspection of local authority and other archives will offer opportunities for giving stewardship advice and practical assistance to a much wider audience.

Grant aided projects; the advent of a number of funding opportunities for preservation and conservation during the past ten years has enhanced enormously the potential for project work, albeit sometimes at the expense of core work. The HLF strategic plan for the next five years makes specific commitments to improving storage and environmental conditions in museums, archives and other repositories of heritage material and to the training of conservators. That part of the archive community intent on stewardship, must seize these opportunities. Other funds

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33 A Collective Focus p 12
34 Re:source Benchmarks in Collection Care for Museums, Archives and Libraries (Re:source, 2002)
35 Broadening the Horizons of Heritage p 20 and Sustaining our Living Heritage, (HLF, 2001) p.6
devoted to stewardship, such as the Wellcome Trust Research Resources in Medical History, also need to be exploited to ensure that particular groups of archival materials are cared for in the best possible manner.

Pooling of resources; in a number of geographical areas some attempt has been made to operate central conservation centres, albeit under different types of regime. In Sheffield a conservation workshop has been operating for some years offering services to clients regionally, both local authority and private. More recently the Oxford Colleges Consortium has been established with its own workshop and Dundee University has run a conservation centre in Scotland for some time. In Liverpool the Conservation Centre of the National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside has enjoyed considerable success as a centre for all types of conservation including paper, though inevitably there are strengths and weaknesses within it. Most recently a partnership has been established between the North East Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (NEMLAC) and Durham University Library to fund a post in conservation. The aim is to support the development of preservation and conservation strategies, to raise standards and the levels of preservation and conservation expertise throughout the region. This type of partnership has been tried and tested elsewhere; in the USA the Northeast Document Conservation Center has been operating for many years, depending on joint funding and private work. These initiatives are to be commended but there are hazards in joint funding arrangements and unrealistic expectations of commercial gain.

Pooling of storage arrangements with access for public; the London Archaeological Archive and Research Centre is the first of a number of planned archaeological resource centres to make the extensive body of excavation archives available to the general public. The Archaeological Archives Forum, established as a joint co-operative body to develop the centres, has a wide membership and plans to promote archaeological archives using its combined resources. Another example of the pooling of storage arrangements, this time within one institution, UCL, is the planned Panopticon on Gordon Street which will house both the College special collections and the Petrie Museum, making both available to the public as well as academics.

Joint archival storage arrangements for data-sets has been practised for some years; as a key initiative in methods of storing electronic material it has been very successful but there are insufficient centres to meet likely future demand.36

Disaster control co-ordination; efforts have been made in a number of places to co-ordinate disaster control procedures and to pool resources in terms of equipment and personnel. Awareness is high after any disaster but tends to diminish very rapidly in the face of other demands on time and as a result it is difficult to maintain momentum within any such group. The M25 consortium of Higher Education Libraries, which cover both library and archival material, established such a group in 1999, to promote awareness and best practice, assist in the dissemination of information and undertake co-operative initiatives including purchasing opportunities. The participants also provide a basic level of support for any member afflicted by disaster in terms of library and information services to users. Similar groups have been set up in close

36 see p 6 above
geographical areas, such as Oxford or Cambridge, where there are a number of archives and libraries at risk.

*The Digital Preservation Coalition;* formed two years ago, the DPC is a forum for the dissemination of advice and information to those who are members as well as those who subscribe to the discussion list or attend the seminars. The discussion list draws attention to important international developments and initiatives, and acts as a source of information. Membership of the coalition is growing and although librarians outnumber archivists and record managers, the recent addition of the NHS Information Management Group is encouraging, being representative of a sector which need to engage with the problems of digital preservation. Current initiatives include a survey to evaluate hardware and software for preservation, and the possible establishment of a digital curation centre with emphasis on research and development and services. The DPC is also developing a set of central services, standards and tools across the Information Environment and Research Grid, as well as bid to the EU for preservation of web sites as an important part of cultural history.

*Development of study on mass de-acidification – INFOSAVE;* the NPO, and before that a joint committee of libraries and archives, has been assessing the feasibility of introducing mass-deacidification technology into the UK to combat the problem of ‘brittle paper’ and the potential for developing a co-operative service. Started in November 1999 it has now reached a stage where a pilot batch of material is undergoing chemical testing for process effectiveness at Manchester University following funding from Re:source. Other countries, notably the USA, Canada, Switzerland, Germany, France and the Netherlands are already using such technology with considerable success.

*SEPIA (Safeguarding European Photographs and Images for Access);* this is a European co-operative initiative to encourage and develop photographic conservation. Established by the European Commission for Preservation and Access (ECPA) in 1999 as the result of an EU grant, the partners in the project (including the PRO in the UK) have held workshops, conferences, exhibitions and expert meetings aimed at the long-term preservation of all kinds of photographic materials and defining the role of new technology in collection management.

3. **Snapshot of key issues**

*Lack of strategic direction;* responsibility for archives is spread amongst government departments/local authorities/private organisations with the result that no central body has taken responsibility for stewardship strategy or funding. The NPO, now with an extended remit to cover libraries and archives in museums, is closely tied to the British Library, (although with additional resources from elsewhere including the PRO and the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland), but is not funded to initiate central policy or direction. The HMC has worked hard in the past to promote good practice, but is hampered by the lack of any statutory powers, other than those it can exercise over manorial records. The Society of Archivists responds to issues and has

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38 e.g. *A standard for Record Repositories* (RCHM, 2001) and other advisory leaflets for owners and repositories
published best practice guidelines\textsuperscript{39}, but cannot do more than offer advice. The lack of such direction stifles ideas and initiatives, due to inability to progress them. Those consulted acknowledge that the establishment of Re:source was a move in the right direction but are still uncertain of its ability to provide the necessary leadership.

\textit{Lack of senior management support} for stewardship issues which appear to be ‘old hat’ or less glamorous than other projects, in particular electronic access projects or projects which promote government initiatives. Care and management of collections takes time, is expensive, produces no quick-win results other than obvious, individual conservation work, and in many cases, the benefits cannot be seen for years. In most archives digital preservation has not been developed as a core responsibility, due to the lack of a structure into which it can fit. Much of the work done has been in the form of projects, which rarely address the repetitive issues of care and attention required for archival materials.

A function of this lack of interest can be identified in the lack of agreement on how to quantify the benefits of ensuring the long-term survival of fragile materials or evaluate preservation programmes. Poor communication between those responsible and senior managers about the priority which stewardship should take is also partly culpable.

\textit{The balance between stewardship and access} has been noticeable in the past few years by its imbalance, as a result of efforts to address the government's imperatives for access, education and social inclusion. Adequate access depends on core activities, frequently unremarked by the general user and which appear merely to add expense to a public service with a low level of public awareness. '… access depends on a range of behind the scenes activities - rescue, preservation, cataloguing - but there is constant pressure to transfer staff from these longer-term tasks to meet the immediate needs of users in the reading room.'\textsuperscript{40} Without the support of core activities little will remain of the archival heritage for future generations.

\textit{Failure to communicate the complexities of, and requirements for, stewardship programmes}; an overwhelming need exists for the effective communication of stewardship problems and issues to the appropriate audience such as senior managers (as above), funding bodies and the general public. The latter are always fascinated by demonstrations of conservation, or horrified by the state in which some of their documents are delivered to their desks, but more general stewardship issues are frequently taken for granted. Digital preservation issues are in no less need of champions. Public ignorance and apathy over the fragility of electronic materials is frightening despite widespread personal experience of the inability to use hardware or software which is out of date or corrupt. Advocacy of the cause is urgently needed, in an attention grabbing way. Nicholson Baker hit the headlines with his accusations of the ‘wanton destruction’ of old newspapers\textsuperscript{41}, managing his audience so that any


\textsuperscript{40} Robinson, David 'The recorded heritage and its users' in Mourato, Susana, David Pearce, Ece Ozdemiroglu and Alexandra Howarth 'Beyond 'Dusty archives': the economic benefits of preserving the recorded heritage' \textit{Cultural Trends} 39, 2000 p 118

professional riposte risks looking like a weak justification. Clearly, journalistic skills are needed to get the right message across to the right audience.

*Loss of conservation jobs* in the public sector has led to more out-sourcing of work on a project basis. This, in turn, leads to a loss of practical skills and experience, which the public sector traditionally supplied and passed on, but which the private sector can rarely afford to maintain. In addition, the culture of short-term contracts has eroded the number of conservators available, since few are able to make sufficient money in such uncertain circumstances to support themselves or their families. Whole scale movement away from the profession a few years after the completion of training is a phenomenon not confined to the UK; in Denmark 50% of those trained are moving to other types of employment after three years.

The proposed merger of all existing conservation professionals into one organisation will offer the opportunity for sharing and extending skills, promoting professional discussion and making a greater impact politically than as small individual bodies. The proposals, bravely stated, mask considerable divisions within the current bodies about the extent and relevance of the ideas, but they should be supported as a considerable advance on the present divided picture.

*Revision of training courses for conservators and collection managers*; the issues surrounding stewardship training of all kinds have been of concern for a long time – ‘the situation for the sector as a whole is confused and lacking in structure’.42 All the courses appear to be operating in isolation and no structure exists to link any together, or to enable students to undertake flexible study. A forum is needed for discussion between employers and training providers on this and other issues so that the training given is relevant to the needs of the archive, library and museum employers. Further, a mechanism is needed for taking forward the conclusions. Opportunities are urgently needed for cross-domain training and a career path to take those who are interested on to wider opportunities for stewardship within the cultural heritage.

*Digital preservation outside the national institutions: Archives in the Regions* calls clearly to the PRO ‘to provide guidance on the management and preservation of electronic records for public bodies’.43 The solutions currently adopted by many organisations, or individuals for digital preservation lack any structure or mechanism for ensuring that the material is adequately safeguarded. Data-ware houses or off-site back-up systems are not geared towards data preservation, yet such storage solutions are regularly used. No archiving function is carried out, nor is there any attempt by manufacturers to indicate which of their tools are suitable for ensuring the long-term preservation of digital material.

4. **Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats**

**Strengths**

- Universally acknowledged need for better stewardship
- Archivists are aware of stewardship issues due to the unique quality of material and social interaction with people.

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42 *Collections Management* p 14
43 *Archives in the Regions* p 5
Archivists are aware of the importance of time frames and business processes, thus empowering them to deal with digital preservation on a logical basis. Archives benefit from standards such as BS 5454, which is widely known and has provided a valuable way of improving archive repositories. The recognition within Re:source of the place and importance of archives and their survival and the consequential establishment of the Archives Task Force.

**Weaknesses**

- Lack of management support and funding for a core activity, particularly in small archives.
- Lack of documentation about conservation backlogs.
- Loss of permanent conservation posts.\(^{44}\)
- Lack of preservation management skills and training.\(^{45}\)
- Confusion and lack of structure in training opportunities for collections management courses.
- Lack of a research base in the UK for archival and library conservation, bar the British Museum.
- Ambiguity between preservation for information versus preservation for artefacts; conservators not given guidance on which path to follow.
- Lack of common understanding between domains about language – this was picked up in the initial report for Re:source on stewardship.\(^ {46}\)
- Failure to explain complexity of issues and problems of all types of stewardship in terms which the public can understand – there is a general concern that the issues are sold short.
- ‘The great inconsistency between the various funders of cultural institutions is a serious hindrance to the coherent development of the sector and limits collaboration.’\(^ {47}\)
- Failure to date to get mechanisms into place to achieve what is universally agreed is needed.
- Failure of archives in particular to make sufficient applications to funders – the total of applications made by the archives sector to HLF and other funders is still significantly lower than that made by other sectors.
- Failure to provide models of long term costs or comparative benefits of all types of stewardship.
- Lack of archive data-centres to provide preservation and access services required for electronic materials by organisations of all sorts.
- Little provision of resources for stewardship of photographic/film/video/cinefilm material.

**Opportunities**

- To use Re:source to drive up advocacy of the issue of stewardship.
- To obtain funding through HLF and others, provided they are stringent about stewardship issues and the appropriate standards required.

\(^{44}\) Collections Management, p 9  
\(^{45}\) Collections Management, p.7  
\(^{46}\) Collections Management; p 4  
\(^{47}\) Collections Management, p. 14
• To advocate provision of cross-domain conservation workshops, at a regional level, as suggested in nearly all the regional archive strategies.
• To investigate the potential for further regional stores-cum-study centres
• To take a greater part in the Sharing Skills programme (Re:source)
• To take advantage of Best Value reviews to identify gaps in provision – e.g. Worcestershire Record Office has obtained money for preservation as a result of Best Value review
• To exploit, for stewardship, the publicity generated by the Archives Task Force and the Archives Year 2003 being co-ordinated by NCA
• To use access to web-sites and other digital materials to inform the general public about using digital technology to preserve originals from too much handling
• To own the management of the life-cycle of electronic records
• To take the opportunity offered by the merging of the PRO and HMC to ensure that good practice in stewardship of all sorts is widely spread.

Threats
• That funding for developing and maintaining digital projects will overtake provision for other core activities, or, conversely, that it will dry up
• That librarians take over digital archive preservation as part of information management without understanding the significance of archival material
• That cross-domain initiatives, as currently advocated and funded, will fail, leading to further fragmentation of resources for the cultural heritage in general and stewardship in particular
• That concentration on Best Value in local authorities, or central government initiatives, will swing the balance even more towards front of house activities
• That appropriate stewardship training will not be developed
• That funders fail to provide resources according to agreed criteria and standards for stewardship
• That conservation skills are lost due to inappropriate training, poor remuneration and poor prospects
• That conservators fail to follow career paths towards management jobs
• That the culture of making money versus that of public good becomes dominant

5. Possible future trends and issues

Many of the suggestions made related to co-operation and regional development; clearly there are other ways of achieving similar results but for clarity possible future trends are grouped together under the two headings.

Regional development and funding; this seems a strong contender for a better way to deliver major stewardship services, such as
• regional conservation workshop centres, taking work from a number of sources and giving advice
• regional storage and access centres not reliant on interpretive assistance
• regional training and disaster assistance centres

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48 Archives in the Regions p. 18-27
49 Collections Management p 21
• regional archive data-centres for the storage and preservation of electronic media
These could be combined or separate, according to opportunities or requirements.

Cross-domain co-operation; this is particularly appropriate for stewardship issues, as existing library and archive initiatives have shown. Co-operation might be developed in a number of ways, including
• amalgamation of information and advice sources
• development of a national research centre
• rationalisation of primary training and continuing development centres and schema
• development of stronger advocacy skills for all aspects of stewardship
• development of meaningful cost/benefit analysis

The major issues to be resolved would be
• core funding, for which there would have to be a permanent commitment
• managing co-operation between partners, dependent on the way in which regional or co-operative ventures were established.
• support from senior managers in the regions in the face of competing projects whether organisational or at central or local government level
• sufficient advocacy of the benefits of regional or co-operative schemes to raise the profile of stewardship to the public and funders

6. Models/parallels in other domains

Several of these have already been picked up by Re:source as useful initiatives, and are being progressed. Nevertheless they are worth noting for consideration. Museum parallels are dominant, since the library and archive world has worked closely together in many aspects of stewardship over the past ten or fifteen years and initiatives tend to be shared; the museum world offers initiatives with additional and further potential.

Museums registration scheme; this has been very successful in driving up standards of stewardship in museums and could be helpful in doing the same in archives.

Designation Challenge Fund; the fund was created by the DCMS in 1999 and the three year grant programme has awarded £15 million pounds to support museums with Designated Collections. By March 2002 significant improvements had been made to 14 collections and many of the projects undertaken with the funding had also improved their research and understanding, their presentation of the collections and their strategies and planning.50

Scottish Museums Council national audit of the contents of museums and galleries; see above, p 12

50 Re:source The Mark of Success (Resource, 2002) p.5
National Museums Directors Conference initiative on leadership\textsuperscript{51}; issues to do with leadership are important in promoting prospects and widening horizons. Those involved in stewardship are too often focused on the small picture rather than the larger strategic issues, and are not in a position to offer leadership or promote initiatives.

Sharing Museums Skills Millennium Awards\textsuperscript{52}; plans are in hand to extend this useful intern scheme across the three domains.

Regional museum services; these are now amalgamated into the regional councils for museums, libraries and archives but much of the collaborative work they undertook was well regarded and appreciated. The South-east Museums Service gained particular commendation as a very well integrated service.

7. Further research areas or requirements

The following suggestions are ideas mentioned during the course of preparing this paper; other possibilities undoubtedly exist and need to be recorded, prioritised and actioned systematically. Several are already in Re:source’s Stewardship work programme but were mentioned again by those consulted.\textsuperscript{53}

Development of a survey to measure public attitudes towards, and understanding of, stewardship\textsuperscript{54}. This has been an issue for some time but as yet is unresolved in any way which is meaningful to those who either need to be able to use the data to persuade funders to invest in stewardship, or to use it in comparative terms for different strategic options. Public opinion over heritage issues can be aroused, as demonstrated recently by Nicholson Baker; the requirement is to use that opinion in a meaningful and positive way.

Development of comparative costing of options for managing collections; agreement on the methodology for assessing the options and assigning costs to a variety of strategies would go far to assist decision making and funding. The options might include the costs of active preservation, passive storage of collections, creation of surrogates followed by the inaccessible storage of originals, or conservation work.\textsuperscript{55} The costings need to be developed for both traditional and digital archives.

Development of agreed risk management methods and techniques; risk management is now agreed to be a fundamental part of collections management, given that resources are not infinite and each organisation has competing demands upon its budgets. Strategic planning needs to be influenced by clear information on risk, together with realistic costings and options. Too few archives employ these techniques at present\textsuperscript{56}.

\textsuperscript{51} Collections Management, p. 21
\textsuperscript{52} Collections Management p. 21
\textsuperscript{53} Collections Management part 2, pp 17-28
\textsuperscript{54} Collections Management p.28
\textsuperscript{55} Collections Management p. 25
\textsuperscript{56} Collections Management p 27
Development of agreed terminology on stewardship issues; confusion arises from the failure to standardise terminology, even within the relatively small world of those involved with collections management and stewardship. An agreed terminology which incorporated similar exercises for the library and museum world would not only assist cross-domain thinking but would also help to develop the necessary dialogue with senior managers and the public.\(^{57}\)

8. Questions

The following questions were prompted by the study and would be worth putting to focus groups and individuals to provide the widest possible range of suggestions and solutions.

Are the available resources for stewardship adequate for need, and are they at the right level?

Are such resources spread unevenly, either geographically or by type of archive?

How can awareness of the crucial role of stewardship be heightened and strengthened?

How can a balance between broad approaches to stewardship and traditional conservation be achieved?

How can the problem of the backlog of work best be quantified?

How can it best be eliminated?

What should be the balance between the provision of permanent conservation posts and the private conservator in the future?

How can conservators be adequately rewarded for their skills?

How can an adequate standard of storage be provided for all archival material without prohibitive cost?

How can the dangers of failing to archive digital material be brought home to those who are currently ignoring the problems?

How can practical assistance in archiving digital material be disseminated to those organisations currently without appropriate mechanisms or structures?

How can the training available for conservators, preservation managers and those involved in digital preservation be upgraded, made relevant to employers and attractive to candidates?

Can cross-domain training really work?

\(^{57}\) Collections Management; p 4
How can additional training be provided in the near future for current needs or any contemplated development of stewardship services?

Should the role of the national institutions in training others in stewardship skills be more prominent?

Is there scope for developing stewardship skills by promoting short-term internships?

How can a research centre be developed which will pay attention to practical issues and the need for applied research?
### Appendix 1. Bibliography

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Appendix 2. Those consulted

The following were consulted either by phone or personally:-

Kevin Ashley  University of London Computing Centre
Neill Beagrie  Digital Preservation Coalition
Nancy Bell    Oxford College Consortium
Vanessa Marshall  National Preservation Office
David Ryan    Public Record Office
Chris Woods  Bodleian Library

In addition I had informal conversations with a wide range of people interested in the problems of stewardship. To all, I am most grateful for their willingness to spend time discussing the issues.