

The Special Collections Handbook, Second Edition

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With nearly 20 years' experience in a special collections environment, Alison Cullingford is well qualified to have authored and revised the handbook for this second edition. Furthermore, she is also a peer reviewer for the National Archives' archive accreditation scheme, of which the University of Bradford, where Cullingford works, was the first university to achieve accreditation in 2014.

Special collections is a term I had encountered, yet I may not have been quite clear as to what it encompassed. For the purposes of the handbook Cullingford provides a definition from the Association of College & Research Libraries (2003). The introduction defines special collections materials as "the entire range of textual, graphic and artefact primary source materials in analog and digital formats, including printed books, manuscripts, photographs, maps, artworks, audiovisual materials, and realia."¹ Thinking of the Marist Archives, I definitely have special collections materials on my hands. With this in mind, I looked for things that could assist me.

The book maps to the UK Archive Accreditation Standard, which covers organisational health, collections and stakeholders and their experiences. Once accredited, archives can receive public records. At the end of each of the 12 chapters are examples of further reading, case studies and useful links. There is also an accompanying website, which unfortunately has not yet been updated, due to an injury to the author. Cullingford also provides more definitions as required throughout the book.

As I delved into the first chapters, I started creating a list of things I need to check at work. While the first chapter is on the care of special collections, what struck me the most was that it made me think more of health and safety than about the materials. Air pollution, red rot and mould affect people as well as materials. I appreciated clear guidance in the section on glove wearing.

Cullingford dedicates a chapter to emergency planning. She notes developing networks for disaster management. This made me reflect that while I have a disaster management plan, apart from the Fire Service I have made no contact with the external suppliers I listed at least to introduce myself and to find out the extent of services available.

Chapter 3 presents the range of objects found in special collections.

Cullingford mentions inherent vice with regard to audiovisual media. I have recently been checking the extent of any acetate degradation in film-based materials, but I had not realised that records were also at risk from degradation to the polyvinyl chloride.

Another indication of the comprehensiveness of this book was the note on 'permanent loan', where Cullingford recommends renegotiating such agreements when possible. Yet another thing to add to my to-do list.

Transferring materials which require more specialised care is also presented. This is something I have been dealing with recently with films. Again due to New Zealand's small size, I have had to look overseas since many of the films are not within Ngā Taonga's collecting scope.

In the chapter dedicated to digitisation and digital libraries, Cullingford treats the question of retaining originals that have been digitised. My one criticism of the book comes in here; the use of cloud services such as Dropbox or Google Docs is mentioned without the caveat of checking the terms and conditions of such providers.

The handbook highlights our disadvantage of being a small sector in a small country when it comes to the section on copyright, since it presents information pertinent to UK legislation, though it was pleasing to see that the LIANZA copyright resource is referenced. Cullingford recommends joining campaigns for copyright reforms.

Three chapters are dedicated to access to special collections, including user services, marketing and building new audiences. I have a display to prepare and from this section, I have tips and links to other resources to follow.

Requirements for space and staff are also covered. From this I took note of the advice that standardising box sizes as much as possible will assist with calculating space requirements. In fact, combined with moving shelf clips, this will help me maximise the space I have.

Other aspects included in the handbook for which I do not have an immediate need are cataloguing, description and metadata and influencing and fund-raising.

For students and sole archivists in particular, this is a very useful, comprehensive all-round guide, and one which I will keep close to hand.

One aside, it is curious and ironic that Facet Publishing selected an image of fresh pomegranates and citrus fruit for the cover considering food is such an anathema to material held in special collections!

Elizabeth Charlton

Endnote

1. p. xiv.