



Library History Section

Survey of the Archival Holdings and Policies of the World's Library Associations

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Chair, Library History Section, 2003-7

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Libraries are in essence 'history institutions', preserving and making accessible the knowledge and written culture of the past, which is instantly and perpetually created by the flow of time.

Consequently, more than many professions, the library (and information) profession has a keen awareness of the importance of the past and of the need to study it, not least in terms of excavating and preserving its own history.

Yet too little attention has been paid to the *means* of studying the profession's history, an activity which is founded on the research of primary historical sources – that is to say, sources created during the period that a historian is studying.

Sources relating to the history of libraries and librarianship are manifold. One of the most important is the archives of the national library association. But to what extent do library associations around the world retain records, in the form of archival collections, of their activities? If collections are preserved, what are the physical arrangements for doing so, who manages them, are they controlled by a written policy and what is the level of accessibility to them?

To answer these various questions, in 2005 IFLA's Library History Section began a study of the archival holding and policies of the world's library associations. With the help of a small grant from IFLA's Professional Committee, a research assistant, under the direction of Alistair Black, the Section's Chair, was appointed. The assistant was attached to Leeds Metropolitan University's School of Information Management, the Chair's 'home' institution.

In February and March 2005 an analysis was conducted of the websites of all the world's library associations. Surprisingly, the subject of the association's archives had an obvious presence on only two websites: those of the Australian Library Association and the American Library Association.

In July 2005 a questionnaire (printed in Appendix below), in English, was sent to all national library associations (defined for the purpose of this study as the institution in a country with prime responsibility for the professional accreditation and representation of librarians); and, in addition, to the Special Libraries Association (USA). The archives of IFLA itself did not form part of the investigation. Just 10 replies to the questionnaire were received, these being from:

- Icelandic Library and Information Association
- Association of Library and Information Association of the Czech Republic
- Special Libraries Association (USA)
- Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (UK)
- Malta Library and Information Association
- Indonesian Library Association
- Polish Librarians Association
- Swiss Libraries and Librarians Organisation
- American Library Association
- Australian Library and Information Association

The Library History Section is grateful for the time given by the respondents in these institutions.

The following findings in this preliminary report are based on the 10 replies received.

2.0 FINDINGS

2.1 Existence and Nature

All associations reported that they retained archival holdings relating to their history, dating from the inception of the association. Holdings included the papers of various internal bodies, reports, newsletters and correspondence; annual reports, news releases, financial records and personal papers; as well as membership lists and diploma/chartership dissertations. Some associations considered public-domain organs such as association magazines, journals and year books to form part of their archive. Some associations held archives relating to the history of other organizations – for example, the papers of the Council of National Library and Information Associations 1941-1995, held by the SLA. Generally, the responsibility for archiving the records of special interest groups, branches, chapters and divisions attached to associations was not seen to be the responsibility of associations. However, the Australian Library and Information Association reported that: ‘Groups will negotiate with State/territory repositories to deposit agreements for their archival records. Divisional archival records should be sent to the State/Territory archival repository when no longer needed for administration. It is preferred that records are sent in batches every two to three years.’ In the UK, the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals does not keep the archives of its branches or special interest groups. However, as a pilot study, it has recently taken deposit of the archives of the Library and Information History Group, one of its oldest special interest groups.

2.2 Location

Six associations kept their archives in-house. Four associations out-housed most of their archives (current records and semi-current records being kept, naturally, in-house). The associations that out-house material are (with the 'deposit' institution given in brackets):

- Icelandic Library and Information Association
(deposited with National and University Library, Reykjavik)
- Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, UK
(deposited with University College London)
- American Library Association
(deposited with University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign)
- Australian Library and Information Association
(deposited with National Library of Australia; and various state archival repositories)

2.3 Finding Aids

Seven associations said that they had created finding aids and lists for their archival collections. However, one of these reported that its list was in draft form as the collection was in the process of being organized; while another said that its list was not available to the public.

2.4 Access

Seven associations reported that their holdings were, in appropriate circumstances, accessible to individuals other than those employed by the Association. Two associations denied access to the public, and in another association conditions of access were unclear from the reply given.

2.5 Management

Nine associations reported that a specific person (or body) was responsible for managing the archives. However, none employed an archivist directly. The four associations that out-housed material employed an archivist effectively indirectly.

2.6 Electronic Records

Four associations reported no arrangements for archiving electronic documents, although one of these made print-outs of significant documents to add to paper files. The remaining six associations did have such arrangements in place but in some instances these appear not to go beyond the type of 'ordinary' digital archiving that individuals and departments carry out in the normal course of events. One association reported that: 'At present [in regard to electronic records] different departments make different arrangements. There is no overall strategy.'

2.7 Policies

Four associations said that they had no written archives policy and one of these saw 'no need to make a detailed written policy'. In replies from two associations it was unclear if a written policy existed. Four associations reported that they had a written policy, but of these one was in

draft form, one was under review and one was in the form of guidelines. Written policies included instructions and advice for special interest groups, chapters and divisions within associations.

3.0 DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Notwithstanding the fact that the issuing of the questionnaire to national associations in English reduced the rate of reply, the response was disappointing. Arguably, this reflects the low priority given by associations to their archives and, it follows, to their heritage.

Yet, for a number of reasons, archives are crucial instruments for management in associations. Semi-current records (such as financial documents) may need to be retained for legal reason. Records of a more historic nature also have value, as a means of, for example:

- Marketing the profession and its association
- Celebrating the anniversaries of important past professional events and landmarks
- Illuminating policy formulation
- Exploring professional identity
- Reminding negotiators of past encounters with other bodies, including government

Associations need to take meaningful responsibility for their archival holdings. Meaningful responsibility means:

1. Appropriate arrangements for storage and preservation
2. Systematic organization, including listing, of material
3. Creating good accessibility
4. Ensuring, through the formulation and implementation of an archives policy, that the collection is replenished for future use

It is recommended that associations take note of best practice, which is especially in evidence in those institutions that out-house material (see 2.2).

Appendix: Letter and questionnaire distributed to Library Associations worldwide

On behalf of **IFLA**

**Survey of the Archival Holdings and Policies
of the World's Library and Information Associations**

The Library History Section of IFLA is conducting a survey concerning the archives and archival policies of the world's library and information associations. (The word 'archives' is used here in the sense of the past internal records of the work of an association. These records may include the records of special groups in the association.)

The retention of records by associations is of interest, of course, to those who research the history of library and information services and professionalism. Retention may also be important in terms of the general management and marketing of associations, as well as the meeting of certain legal requirements to archive records over the short and medium terms.

The survey aims to establish the extent to which associations have retained archives and how they intend to deal with 'current' and 'recent' material that may require archiving in the future. The survey also aims to discover the level of access that associations give to their archival collections – that is to say, if, and how, archives are organised, listed and made available to researchers who are not employed by the association. Some associations may have directly addressed these issues in an archive policy document or in the allocation of a responsibility for archives in their administrative structures.

The results of the survey will be communicated to IFLA in the form of a report and in a paper to be presented to a forthcoming IFLA World Congress as well as to the IFLA Journal. The report will be made available on 'IFLA-net'.

If you could spare a small amount of time to answer the questions attached, I would be very grateful. The questions can be answered either in the spaces provided; or you may find it more convenient to prepare a document yourself, organised around the issues we are attempting to address. Thank you for your co-operation.

Yours Sincerely

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1. Does your organisation have archives relating to its history? Please indicate broadly the nature of these archives. What years do they cover?

2. Does your organisation have archives relating to the history of other organisations? Please indicate broadly the nature of these archives. What years do they cover?

3. Where are your archives kept? Are they kept 'in-house' or are they 'out-housed/out-sourced'?

4. Is there a finding aid, or listing, for the archives?

(If there is a finding aid, or listing, would you be able to supply a copy? If the finding aid, or listing, is online, please supply the web address)

5. Are your archives available to researchers other than those employed by your association?

6. What are the administrative arrangements for managing the archives? Is there an archives committee? Is there a person with responsibility for managing the archives? Do you employ an archivist?

7. What arrangements are in place for the management of the current records of the association?

8. What, if any, are your arrangements for archiving electronic documents generated in your organisation?

9. Do you have a written archives policy?

(If you do have a written policy would you be able to supply a copy?)

Please return the questionnaire to: Professor Alistair Black, School of Information Management, Leeds Metropolitan University, Leeds, LS6 3QS, United Kingdom.

Or email your answers and statements to: a.black@leedsmet.ac.uk