

Preservation or access: the Kinder Library's New Zealand and Pacific Collection

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I am going to speak on one of the special collections in the Kinder Library, St John's College, Auckland, and, to set it in context, the work of a Heritage Responsibilities Group in the New Zealand library scene.

In 1992, the annual conference of the then New Zealand Library Association was held in Nelson. It was, in effect, a "Library Summit" at which a number of major issues facing the library industry were discussed. One of the groups formed out of the discussion was a Historical and Cultural Information Group (later renamed Heritage Responsibilities). The brief that this group took from the conference was to define the responsibilities and roles of libraries in collecting, providing access to and permanent preservation of New Zealand cultural and historical information and artifacts.

The achievement of this action was seen as a vital contribution to the creation of a complete and comprehensive record of New Zealand culture. An Auckland based steering group, (of which I was a member) started with the idea of a pilot project, which later became a national survey, the results of which are published as *Heritage collections in New Zealand Libraries: report of a survey*.

The group defined heritage collections as "those collections built and maintained with the intention of permanent retention". Most will be of New Zealand related material, but there are many exceptions, for example, bequest collections on non-New Zealand subjects, non-New Zealand rare books). Collections may be in many formats, for example, books, plans, photographs or microfilms.

Note that this was a survey of libraries, not of archive repositories, although many of the libraries surveyed did indeed include manuscripts and archives within their collections. The breakdown of collection content that requested asked for total measurement of manuscript collections. (And the four members of the steering committee all came from libraries where this was so).

I don't want to detail the results of the survey here, as they are not relevant to the majority of you, as few were theological libraries, and they were all in New Zealand. But it did show up some interesting statistics

- that NZ theological libraries as a group gave equal weighting to heritage collections as to other collections. This was well above the results overall.
- that most libraries had some restrictions on access to these collections for a variety of reasons ranging from the value of the collections, the lack of trained staff, or inadequate finding aids.
- that few libraries had a budget for conservation for these collections.

The findings of this survey led in time to the formation of the National Preservation Office at the National Library of New Zealand, which has been available to offer advice to librar-

ies. This led many of us to think again about preservation issues within our own libraries. It is a little hard to be part of a committee making suggestions and recommendations on preservation issues if your own house is not in order.

The Kinder Library at St John's College had, since 1976, put together a collection of the printed items by and about the New Zealand Anglican and Methodist Churches. This was a closed collection, stored in a locked, temperature and humidity controlled room, and accessible to users through, at that time, a card catalogue. Alongside this collection, we had developed considerable manuscript and archive collections relating to the Anglican Church at a national level, and to a lesser extent, some Methodist manuscript collections. But it was time to be a little more deliberate in the policy making for this collection. There had been some unresolved decisions about the print items that had come to us as part of the archives collections. Did we leave them with the manuscript materials, where they were not so easily identified, or did we move them to the book collection, where they would need to be identified in the usual library way – stamps, spine labels etc.

The other factor which came into play was the inadequacy of the Library of Congress classification system for the New Zealand Anglican Church. Did you know that there is just one number allocated, and that we share that number with Australia? We had written our own classification expansion about 20 years previously, but in hindsight, as with most attempts to “do your own thing” in a classification, it was no longer proving adequate for our needs.

We reviewed the reasons for keeping this collection:

- a) our need to preserve the printed literature of the New Zealand and Pacific Anglican and Methodist Churches;
- b) the need to provide a resource for use by the students researching in this area. The Colleges on our site teach a paper called “Christianity in New Zealand”, and we have a growing number of Masters and Doctoral students working in the area of New Zealand Church history. At present there are four PhD's in progress. We needed to ensure that these books and periodicals remained in the best possible condition for the future, but also were accessible for these students. There is a potential conflict of interest here, as the more use a collection receives, the less time it is going to survive. Many of these items were small pamphlet style publications, or church newspapers. As usual, they were adorned with library stamps and stickers. The archive collections still held a number of printed items which had come with collections of personal papers, and were not necessarily relevant to that collection. These were not always duplicated in the printed library collection, and were to all intents and purposes “lost”.

So what did we do? After much discussion, we re-wrote the classification expansion in the Library of Congress classification, in such a way, we hope, that future expansion is catered for. In doing so, we departed significantly from traditional library subject classification. We used provenance as the key to the arrangement. By that I mean that we arranged material by the organisation that had created it, allowing room for future organisations. We are well aware that churches are wonderful at creating new committees for just about anything! So there is mostly no subject organisation, but the assigning of subject headings we hope will cover that shortfall. This is a closed collection, and it needs to be accessed by the catalogue anyway. This arrangement has also enabled us to create a classification for faculty publications, and also, if necessary to keep printed volumes with the ownership signature of some-

one such as Bishop George Selwyn together, without compromising accessibility to them through the catalogue. We are careful to note such ownership in a note, so that it can be keyword searched in the library catalogue.

Items in our archival collections had been stored in acid free containers, with no markings except for those done in pencil. This became the model for the New Zealand and Pacific Church Collection. No more stamping and no more sticking. The only thing attached to these items is a pencilled barcode number. The barcode itself and the classification is attached to an acid free card, which is slotted onto the book if it is a hardcover or substantial paperback book. Many items in this collection are pamphlets. These are housed in acid free envelopes, which have the barcode attached.

A decision was then made to remove printed material from the archive collections where possible (but noting that fact on finding aids), as it would be much more accessible in a library catalogue, and therefore much less handling needed to identify a particular item. All the cataloguing records for the collection were transferred over time onto the computer database. We had much correspondence with various church organisations to ensure correct identification of organisations and their prior and subsequent names.

Alongside of this policy runs one of purchasing a borrowing copy of all substantial publications. These are on the normal library shelves. We have decided not to keep borrowing copies of pamphlet material, partly because our pamphlet collection is in a separate collection anyway, but also because these items are not so difficult to read in the library as a more substantial book.

So, has this been a successful decision? On the negative side, it takes slightly more time to locate an item, as you are looking through lots of white envelopes, rather than a more distinctive book cover. The lack of tattle tape is still an issue, although these items are signed for at time of issue for use in the library. There are all the negatives of a closed access collection. We all know the positives of being able to browse. On the positive side, however, it has ensured that we take care with catalogue access points, and we are reasonably confident that we have done all we can to ensure the existence of these items well into next century, and so fulfill one of the major goals of the library which is to preserve the heritage of these churches.

Preservation versus access has always been an issue for all libraries. The moment you restrict access to library materials in any way, you are moving away from a perception of the library as the friendly place to be. And in our multicultural colleges at St Johns, that is vitally important. But if we hadn't done something about our rather unique Anglican and Methodist resource, it probably would not have survived intact for future generations of users. The present solution would appear to be a reasonable compromise.

1. Heritage Responsibilities Group of the N-Strategy (N.Z.). *Heritage collection in New Zealand libraries: report of a survey*. Wellington: Heritage Responsibilities Group of the N-Strategy, 1994.

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