

Preservation issues: the Veech Library Church music collection

by Kit Smith

Introduction

Preservation has become a major component of modern librarianship, and music librarians are well aware of the special problems relating to music (Roberts 1996, p.5). Printed music presents all the preservation problems of the printed word, such as acidic paper, brittle books, adverse environmental conditions and problematic bindings (Sommer 1994, p.258). To these are added important differences, including international sources of paper, storage and handling, varied formats and sizes, music notation, reformatting methods and performance acceptability.

In December 1997, following the advice of former Veech Librarian Hans Arns, a representative of the Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney invited this writer to accept an appointment to catalogue the Church Music Collection at the Veech Library, Strathfield. The proposal had enthusiastic approval and support from the Veech Librarian, Anne Hocking. A fifteen months contract was negotiated, and work commenced on the collection in February 1998.

Music librarians are ideally trained musicians, proficient in sight reading, and familiar with the literature and bibliography of that body of material (Smiraglia 1997, p.ix). The advice of Hans Arns was based on his awareness that the demands of such criteria were well met. This writer has a Licentiate of Music from the NSW Conservatorium of Music, with many years of professional experience, particularly in various areas of church music. Additional qualifications of Bachelor of Theology and Master of Applied Science (Library & Information Management) provide excellent academic and empirical skills for this specialist appointment.

It was in the very early stages of this project that significant preservation issues clearly emerged. During the course of studies for the Master's degree, this writer had discovered a personal 'passion' for preservation, and had been able to focus on this area of librarianship for most of the required projects. It was not surprising, therefore, that preservation needs were able to be discerned, quickly and clearly, in relation to work on the Church Music Collection.

One of the results of this growing preservation awareness was a successful application by the Veech Library for a Community Heritage Grant to assist with archival resources considered necessary for the project. Well aware of the increasing emphasis on preservation at the Veech Library, and indeed elsewhere, the organizing Committee for the Fourteenth Annual ANZ-TLA Conference, held in Adelaide in July, proposed the inclusion of a Preservation Issues Workshop in the programme. The Committee invited this writer to be a co-presenter at the Workshop, together with Jenny Tonkin from the State Library of South Australia, and Judith Bright from the Kinder Library, St John's Theological College, Remuera, Auckland NZ.

The Workshop, which presented a wide variety of experiences, provoked much lively and ongoing conversation on this crucial area of librarianship, and provided an opportunity for discussion of specific preservation issues relevant to the Veech Library Church Music Collection. In this paper, it is proposed to describe various stages of the project to catalogue this

collection, with some brief reflection on issues and concerns arising from the Workshop.

The Veech Library

The Veech Library, named after Dr Thomas Veech, Vice-President of the Faculty, and Librarian from 1942-1963, is the principal theological information resource of the Catholic Church in New South Wales, and forms an integral part of what has become the Catholic Institute of Sydney (Sydney College of Divinity 1997, p.23). The books, which began as a collection in Bishop Polding's first Catholic seminary in 1836 in the Colony of New South Wales, moved with the seminary from Woolloomooloo to St Mary's Cathedral, thence to Lyndhurst, to St John's College, to Manly in 1889, and finally to its present location of Strathfield in 1996 (Jenkin 1995, p.87).

The beginnings in the nineteenth century have left the Veech Library with considerable holdings of valuable early imprints (Fletcher 1980, p.199), and a number of special collections, including a major Church Music Collection. Much of the older material has suffered from inadequate storage at the Manly site. While funding for conservation and restoration is still being negotiated, the collections are now maintained in optimum environmental conditions. Air conditioning is used to avoid excesses in temperature or humidity, and to prevent an increase of mould infestation. Direct sunlight is minimal in the new library building.

The Church Music Collection

The collection is in printed music form only, and was moved from the basement to the second floor of the library, where all other special collections are housed in compactus steel shelving. There is no public access to this area, it is kept locked at all times, there are no windows, and constant temperature and low humidity are maintained. A generous amount of shelving was allocated for the collection, and the area includes an adjacent workroom with large work benches and computer facilities.

The collection comprised eight large tea chests of loose, unsorted, extremely dirty and often fragile sheet music items, three four-drawer steel filing cabinets of mainly photocopied music, and about six hundred and twenty-five bound volumes of hymnals, collections of oratorios and miscellaneous sacred vocal music bound together. The bound volumes appeared to be all in excellent condition.

Sorting

As the bound volumes were already safely on shelves, work began immediately on sorting the items in the tea chests. No decision about classification systems or cataloguing procedures could be made without a general idea of the contents and condition of the collection. It was decided that the music would be laid out horizontally on shelves, alphabetically by composer. Each item had to be carefully lifted from the container, gently brushed, creases straightened and rusty paperclips carefully removed, before shelving. By the beginning of March, the eight tea chests had been emptied (except for the rodent droppings!) and removed from the library. All items had been cursorily cleaned and temporarily shelved.

Classification and cataloguing

The music librarian consulted a number of libraries to seek advice on classification systems. It was decided to follow the example of the National Library of Australia which uses the following standards for its music cataloguing: *AACR2*, *Library of Congress Subject Headings*, and *Dewey Decimal Classification 21* (Haddad 1996, p.215). Further resources to be used

are: Smiraglia, R.P. (1997 *Describing music materials: A manual for descriptive cataloging of printed and recorded music, music videos and archival music collections for use with AACR2 and APPM*, *The Grove dictionary of music*, and *The Oxford companion to Australian music*. Cataloguing proceeded using the Dynix automated system.

Initial assessment

Just as Australia's history, with its changing social values, can be traced through its sheet music (Layland 1996, p.15), so are changing styles and fashions in church music relevant to scholars and historians. This collection of works, dating from approximately 1830 to 1965, has potential to contribute to an understanding of the development of church music, and church musicians, particularly in the 19th and 20th centuries Australian context. Much of the material has historical and liturgical significance, indicating as it does the importance of classical works for choirs, with emphasis on masses, oratorios, motets, cantatas, as well as choir and parish use of Australian composers' works in the late 1800s and early 1900s. There is valuable evidence of the work in Australia of prominent church musicians and composers, for example, John Albert Delany (1852-1907), Joseph Muset-Ferrer (1890-1957), Maurice J. O'Reilly (1866-1933), and many others. It is possible that this collection contains an amount of material not available nor accessible in other collections in Sydney, and even in Australia.

Post Vatican II music is conspicuous by its absence in the collection. Significant collection development, collection evaluation and acquisitions issues have, therefore, emerged in the course of this project. **Of immediate importance, however, are the obvious preservation needs.**

Preservation Developments

Definition

The literature abounds with scholarly definitions of *preservation*, *conservation* and *restoration*, and an examination of these is well worth pursuing. The National Library of Australia (1997, p.2) prefers to use the umbrella term *preservation* to embrace the broad categories of both preventive preservation and active preservation. It is proposed, for the purposes of this paper, to use the terms *preservation* and *conservation* interchangeably, and in a broad sense, encompassing all categories discussed.

Storage

The contract currently negotiated to have the collection professionally catalogued did not, understandably, include preservation activities. However, it became clear that it was not feasible to classify and catalogue the material without some simultaneous preservation investigation and archival storage measures being undertaken. Much of the contents of the tea chests had been exposed to rodent and insect infestation, atmospheric pollutants, light, and careless storage and handling. Many of the items have torn edges and mould stains, with some brittle and crumbling paper. Nevertheless, the music notation is clear and unfaded, and only in rare cases is it indecipherable or irreparable.

The collection includes approximately five hundred valuable mass, oratorio and cantata scores. Music scores have some characteristics which distinguish them from other library materials. First, they often have several separate vocal or instrumental parts. These are all catalogued and shelved together, but must be physically separate pieces so that performers

can use and study them individually. Any procedures must leave these items separate. Second, they are often quite thin and flimsy, with lightweight paper covers. This makes them very vulnerable to damage when shelved in an upright position. Third, they must open freely and stay open so that they can be easily used by musicians in performance situations (Gregory 1998). The collection contains also a large number of single vocal and instrumental items with similar flimsy and fragile characteristics.

Records in poor condition are difficult to handle, but conservation treatments are often extremely expensive and time consuming (Cook 1995, p.9), and the contract for this project stipulates that *cataloguing* of the collection is to be substantially completed within fifteen months. Unlike museum items, however, library materials are vital sources of information, and are meant to be used (National Library of Australia 1994, p.2). Suitable storage was, therefore, imperative, to prevent further deterioration and facilitate safe handling.

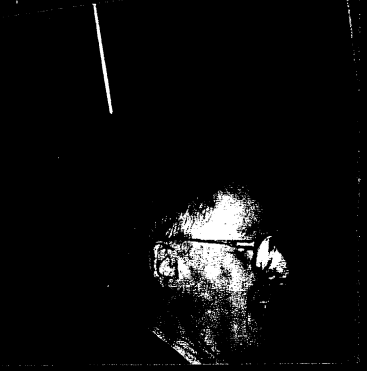
There is now an increasing number of companies throughout Australia marketing a wide variety of appropriate conservation products. The Veech Library purchased a quantity of acid-free polypropylene music satchels, in various sizes, from Albox, an Adelaide based company. Polypropylene is an inert plastic which is strong, stable and very adaptable to archival design demands. The satchels are ideal for thin, unbound material requiring support on the shelf without exposing the items (Cook 1995, p.10). While some of the collection's items in multiple copies were catalogued and shelved in labelled pamphlet boxes awaiting further consideration, most of the catalogued material has been shelved in polypropylene satchels, thus preventing further deterioration.

Black bound volumes - Sacred vocal music (SVM) Series

Included in the bound volumes is a collection of 268 volumes of miscellaneous sacred vocal music, which were apparently bound 'in-house' at St Patrick's Seminary. Although often collated in unrelated categories, these published works are valuable, and sometimes unique. The dilemma was how to classify and catalogue what has been put together as a type of series. Although normally they would receive different classification numbers, it was desirable to keep them together. The process of arriving at satisfactory solutions to these problems was a fascinating one, and no doubt warrants a paper of its own.

The physical treatment of these volumes was obviously crucial if they are to be preserved. As well as being bound in black material, each volume had also a number painted on the spine, with what appeared to be some sort of white paint. Staff of Conservation Access at the State Library of N.S.W. identified the binding as some type of cloth (not leather), and strongly advised against using any type of chemical or 'paint over' to remove the numbering. The safest procedure would probably be to try and scrape some of the white 'paint' off.

Before cataloguing, therefore, the music librarian scraped the surface of the white number with a draughtsman's implement (which would not damage the material), and then used a good quality brush to gently remove the residue. Sometimes many alternate scrapings and brushings were necessary to achieve the desired result - sometimes, in the interests of safety, it was necessary to be satisfied with removing only a portion of the numbering. This series has now been cleaned, catalogued, end-processed and shelved.





Community Heritage Grant

Each year, a small number of grants (up to \$7,000) are awarded by the National Library of Australia for preservation and access projects involving community documentary heritage collections of significance, or for certain training or research activities. The N.L.A. generally attributes 'significance' to documentary materials if they contribute to an understanding of Australia, its people, and the developments which have influenced its history. In October 1998, the Veech Library was notified that an application for a Community Heritage Grant was successful. The Library had been offered a grant of \$2,000 for a Preservation and Collection Survey of the Church Music Collection, and \$1,000 for preservation training.

The initial reaction to this was one of disappointment. It had been hoped that the grant would assist with the purchase of much needed archival storage material. However, the value, and indeed necessity, of the required survey was quickly apparent. It is now widely recognized in library preservation literature that if librarians are to plan for the most effective use of their replacement and preservation funds, or to convince administrators that such funds are needed, they must have data that not only indicate the scope of the problem, but also suggest ways of setting priorities among competing demands. A survey of the physical condition of the collection can provide this much needed information (Gertz & Blaine 1994, p.263).

The conditions of the Grant stipulated that the Survey must be conducted by a graduate of a recognized conservation of cultural materials training program. The Veech Library accepted quotes from Soderlund Consulting Pty Ltd, Newtown NSW, and work on the Survey commenced in August 1999. It is anticipated that the report resulting from this Survey will provide valuable advice on the outstanding preservation issues resulting from this project. The training day, which will involve as many Veech Library staff as possible, will take place sometime in October 1999.

ANZTLA Preservation issues workshop

Although most of the time allocated for the Workshop was occupied by the three presentations, a number of preservation concerns clearly emerged. The issues of *access*, and *preservation policy statements* are undoubtedly crucial.

Access

While the Veech Library recognizes the necessity of restricting use of the Church Music Collection at this stage, in view of its still fragile condition, it is conscious of the value of the collection to the wider community. Harvey (1993, p.5) points out that preservation is pointless unless it enhances access. The ultimate aim of this project, therefore, is to provide access to the Church Music Collection in the very near future.

The question of providing Internet access to these materials, using digitizing as a method of reformatting, was discussed, and it would appear that this is indeed the ideal preservation option, if copyright issues in Australia can be resolved. Duke University (1999), for example, has reported in detail on successful scanning procedures by which the *Historic American Sheet Music Project* provides access to digital images of over 3,000 pieces in a collection of 19th and early 20th century American sheet music. Hopefully, the rapid advancement of computer technology will ensure that in the next century, digitization is a cost-effective and available preservation option for most Australian institutions.

Preservation policy statements

Workshop participants considered also the urgent need for libraries to formulate preservation policy statements. Preservation is a library management problem, and must be considered in relation to other library management decisions. It is vital that libraries have in place clear definitions of policy priorities before a preservation program can be usefully implemented (Harvey 1993, pp.260, 11). Devising a policy enables administrators to consider the library's mission and goals, and to place them in a context anchored in the present and directed towards the future. It is primarily an essential planning device (Gorman & Kennedy 1992, p.7).

Conclusion

The project to catalogue the Veech Library Church Music Collection has served to expose, in the first instance, the complexity of the entire question of preservation of printed music collections. Fortunately, the Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney has recognized the importance of the work being done on the Collection, and has extended the time of the original contract. The project has made it abundantly clear, also, that the preservation of *all* of Australia's rich documentary heritage can no longer be ignored. Much of our history dating from the past one hundred and fifty years has been documented on paper that is now considerably deteriorating. Our knowledge of the past will disintegrate with the paper that carries it (Brandis 1997, p.9).

New forms of data storage and communication, and the availability of new technologies and techniques for preservation are forcing a reconsideration of fundamental issues. There are crucial management responsibilities for libraries inherent in these issues. The need for policies and strategies which will maximise the use of human and technical resources, which will define priorities, and which will provide effective access for all potential beneficiaries of our heritage, is paramount (Feather & Eden 1997, p.1).

References

- Brandis, L. (1997). Paper for posterity. *National Library of Australia News* 8(1), pp.7-9.
- Cook, V. (1997). Safe keeping: Australian developments in document storage. *National Preservation Office Quarterly Supplement* (February), pp.9-11.
- Duke University (1999). Historic American sheet music: Rare book, manuscript, and special collections library. [http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/sheet music/about.html](http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/sheet%20music/about.html)
- Feather, J. & Eden, P. (1997). *National preservation policy: Policies and practices in archives and record offices*. (British Library Research & Innovation Report: 43). British Library Research & Innovation Centre: Wetherby, West Yorkshire.
- Fletcher, J. (1980). The library of St Patrick's College, Manly. *The Book Collector* 29(2), pp.179-202.
- Gertz, J. & Blaine, S. (1994). Preservation of printed music: The Columbia University Libraries scores condition survey. *Fontes Artis Musicae* 41(3), pp. 261-269.
- Gorman, G.E. & Kennedy, J. (1992). *Collection development for Australian libraries*. 2nd ed. (Topics in Australasian Library and Information Studies: 5). Centre for Information Studies: Wagga Wagga NSW.
- Gregory, G. (1998). Music preservation - developing an ongoing program. <http://www.archival.com/NA6.html>

Haddad, P. (1996). The music collection and services at the National Library of Australia. *Australian Academic & Research Libraries* 27(3), pp.213-215.

Harvey, R. (1993). *Preservation in Australian and New Zealand libraries: Principles, strategies and practices for librarians*. 2nd ed. (Topics in Australasian Library and Information Studies: 7). Centre for Information Studies: Wagga Wagga NSW.

Jenkin, C.E.J. (1995). A movement of books - the history of the Veech Library, Catholic Institute of Sydney. In *Channelling the gushing stream: Theological libraries in Australia*. Monash University: [Clayton, Vic.], pp.61-94.

Layland, P. (1996). Facing the music. *National Library of Australia News* 6(12), pp.13-16.

National Library of Australia (1994). *Preservation policy*. NLA: Canberra, pp.1-9. <http://www.nla.gov.au/policy/pres.html> as at 24/9/96.

National Library of Australia (1997). Collections at risk! <http://www.nla.gov.au/niac/chg/risk.html>

Roberts, D. (1996). The byte makes the Bach more accessible: Dynamic changes in music librarianship. *Continuo* 25, pp.4-7.

Smiraglia, R.P. (1997). *Describing music materials: A manual for descriptive cataloging of printed and recorded music, music videos, and archival music collections for use with AACR2 and APPM*. 3rd ed. Soldier Creek Press: Lake Crystal, Minnesota.

Sommer, S.T. (1994). Knowing the score: Preserving collections of music. *Fontes Artis Musicae* 41(3), pp.256-260.

Sydney College of Divinity (1997). *Joint collection development policy: Appendix B of review document 1997*. Sydney College of Divinity: Sydney.

Kit Smith was formerly Library Manager of Catholic Theological Union, Hunter's Hill, Sydney; and is presently contracted to catalogue the Church Music Collection at Veech Library, Catholic Institute of Sydney.

Th' first thing to have in
a library is a shelf. Fr'm
time to time this can be
decorated with
lithrature. But th' shelf
is th' main thing.

FINLY PETER DUNNE,
"Books," Mr. Dooley Says
(1910).