

REVIEWS

Helen Forde and Jonathan Rhys-Lewis, *Preserving Archives*, 2nd ed., Principles and Practice in Records Management and Archives series, editor Geoffrey Yeo, Facet, London, 2013. 272 pp. with index. ISBN 978 1 856048 23 1. UK£49.95. (<http://www.facetpublishing.co.uk>).

Preserving Archives was first published by Facet Publishing, wholly owned by the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, in 2007, and was favourably reviewed by Kylie Scroope in volume 36, no. 1, May 2008 of this journal. As Kylie noted, it is a comprehensive treatment of the subject covering the characteristics of archive materials, digital preservation, archive buildings, storage conditions, disaster prevention and management, and handling, copying, moving and exhibiting archives. She wrote: ‘its strength is in setting out the multiplicity of considerations and issues that apply to archival preservation, and ... provides a strong basis for development of a comprehensive preservation policy and management framework’.

If you already have the first edition, you may be wondering what new information the ‘fully updated’ second edition offers. The original 320 pages have been reduced in the second edition to 272 pages but don’t be fooled. There is actually more content, not less, achieved by a slightly reduced font and more stylish graphic design.

There are brief updates on current issues: the use of Cloud storage in digital preservation, the application of ‘green’ principles in archive building, information about electronic data loggers for environmental control, and new case studies scattered throughout the text such as the use of a low-oxygen storage system for fire prevention and accounts of more recent archival disasters. There are more notes at the end of chapters, particularly references to websites. Many paragraphs of the text are however exactly as they were in the first edition so the basic advice provided is the same.

A chapter in the first edition on setting up a conservation workshop has been reorganised and abbreviated to form Appendix 2 and there is a new appendix providing a template for compiling a preservation policy. The bibliography and the listing of British, European and international standards have been updated to 2013.

A welcome addition is a new chapter on training and the use of volunteers (and a new appendix which includes a sample volunteer agreement). The coverage in this chapter is at a high level, raising issues rather than discussing them in depth or providing advice on practical solutions. To illustrate this, on page 206 under the heading ‘What are the key challenges of using volunteers?’, there is a dot-point list:

- confidentiality; often due to restricted access or sensitivity of content
- security
- health and safety
- liability and insurance
- training and supervision – the impact on staff time
- changing groups of volunteers requiring regular training and updating sessions
- the rising cost of travel expenses (where these are paid by the volunteer).

This list is followed by a reference to a best-practice guide published by the Archives and Records Association UK and Ireland available online (Helen Lindsay, *Volunteering in Collection Care*, 2010). It is in this source that you get the goods, not from the brief listing of issues. This is in contrast to the much more detailed treatment of issues in the chapters from the first edition.

Preserving Archives remains an authoritative overview of the subject, written by experienced practitioners and archival educators, and valuable as a one-volume reference on the many aspects of archival preservation, from managing a pest control program (with illustrations of six common insect types, p. 191) to exhibiting archives. On page 161, the extracts from reports by couriers to exhibitions are sobering reading, one of which concludes: ‘As a result no one was waiting to meet the by-now frazzled courier, and the borrowing institution, being in a different time zone, was closed.’ I can particularly recommend Chapter 9 on moving records, having recently overseen the move of three kilometres of records across the Australian National University campus. On reading on page 142, ‘the failure of the archive to ensure the security and wellbeing of its holdings during the course of the move is the very reverse of what every director of archives wishes to experience’, I could only agree.

Maggie Shapley
 Australian National University
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Susan Howe, *Spontaneous Particulars: The Telepathy of Archives*, Christine Burgin/New Directions, New York, 2014. 80 pp. ISBN 978 0 811223 75 1. USD\$29.95.

Susan Howe describes *Spontaneous Particulars* as a ‘swan song’ (p. 9). Originally conceived as an illustrated slide-show lecture, the beautiful colour images and text brought together in this slim volume form a tribute to the pleasures of working with literary manuscripts and ephemera, pleasures she fears may be diminished as new technologies transform how we engage with such artefacts. ‘We need to see and touch objects and documents,’ she writes, ‘now we often merely view the same material on a computer screen – digitally, virtually, etc.’ (p. 9). Howe opens with the indisputable proposition that ‘the nature of archival research is in flux’. Although she does not elaborate explicitly on the implications of such flux, this idea nevertheless frames her creative homage to the ‘material details’ (p. 21) or ‘historical-existential traces’ (p. 24) that for her make an archive an archive. They are also the qualities of the archival experience that inspire her work as a poet and as a remarkable literary critic.

Howe’s attachment to cards, paper, scraps and thread in *Spontaneous Particulars* should come as no surprise to anyone familiar with her creative history. Originally trained as an artist, from her earliest experiments in concrete verse the page was for Howe always more than a basic support to words. She concerned herself with the page itself (‘You could [...] turn the paper sideways or upside down’¹) and the very shape of words upon the page. She talks of how her sketchbooks from this period were filled with lists of words, ‘usually nouns typed then cut out and pasted in’.² Thus, for Howe the manipulation of the page or a work’s physical assembling was always inseparable from its textual assembling. In this respect her attraction to – and investment in – the