

fully developed, and the processes of deciding what approach and tools, and how to use them appropriately, all involve significant investments of time and other resources. There is also some risk of either real or perceived ‘lock-in’ that may complicate future options. So preservation programs may still be potentially large and uncertain undertakings, regardless of an organisation’s size and existing infrastructure.

Nevertheless, there are tools available; there are services available; there are options. For the motivated information or collection manager concerned about the preservation of digital assets, this book will be an essential guide to taking the next steps, before the bushfire of deterioration or the urban in-fill of technological change sweep all before them.

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Thomas Lidman, *Libraries and Archives, a Comparative Study*, Oxford, Chandos Information Professional Series, 2012. xv + 123 pp. ISBN 978 1 843346 42 5. USD\$70.00.

Thomas Lidman has produced an informative, easy to read history of libraries and archives. As the title suggests, the work is a comparative study with the purpose being to establish some fundamental truths that will inform and protect libraries and archives as distinct institutions in the twenty-first-century world dominated by mergers and efficiency gains. With extensive experience as both a librarian (University Librarian, Stockholm) and an archivist (National Archivist, Sweden), Lidman has the credentials to investigate the differences and similarities between libraries and archives.

The book is well written and informative. While passionate in his argument and diligent in his historical research and descriptions, the work is not conclusive for Lidman’s central thesis. Lidman fails in the second part of his stated aim, ‘to show the differences and raise the debate from another standpoint’ (p. 2). He is concerned to debunk the opinion that ‘archives, libraries and museums are very similar institutions’ (p. 2). He does demonstrate significant differences in purpose, function and status, but this exposure does not raise the debate. Lidman also fails to clearly establish the ‘other standpoint’.

The majority of the book (chapters 3–5) is solid scholarly reporting on the divergent developments of libraries and archives from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when larger central government required dedicated recordkeeping to manage increasingly complex administration. It can be argued that Lidman’s historical narrative from prehistoric times to the twentieth-century archives (chapters 1–5) convincingly outlines the shared beginnings and interchangeable nature of information-gathering activities by both libraries and archives without establishing the necessity to maintain unique independent institutions.

Lidman records the key differences as being: libraries developed as ‘collecting bodies’, archives as receiving bodies (p. 87); archives deal with ‘unique records and documents that could not be standardised in the same way as a multiplied book’

(p. 49); and library materials ‘usually consist of discrete items, whose significance is independent of their relationship with other items’ (p. 87) whereas archival materials derive their value from context, their ‘organic relation to other archival materials in the same file, series or record group’ (p. 87). Archival records are depicted as more complex, more interconnected, each one unique. Lidman also claims that ‘archives have never had to justify their own existence’ (p. 95).

These characteristics are given as reasons why archives are now ‘regarded as more impenetrable and exclusive’ (p. 95). Libraries are more popular, more accessible, more in the community conscious, largely due to libraries also being more cooperative, more standardised and systems based.

Chapters 5 and 6 deal with current challenges and future environments where relevance, accessibility, collaboration and a high community profile are key determinates of success and funding. Lidman acknowledges failures by archives to rise to these challenges but his commentary reads as excuses. Arguments of challenges of new technologies being ‘too great’ (p. 96), variations of practice too entrenched (p. 96) and standardisation an unreachable aspiration (p. 78) reflect poorly on archives. The uniqueness and complexity of the archival record has become a rod for the archivist’s back. By arguing so strongly on the complexities and at the same time acknowledging the archives’ and archivists’ inability to address these complexities, Lidman has undermined his own argument.

The differences between libraries and archives were well defined and articulated, but I found the book unconvincing. The central premise of these differences being so significant that they must be maintained and nurtured in separate institutions was not proven. The arguments are academic and self-serving. The author argues at the end of the book for a future ‘unbridled by tradition’ (p. 114), but the previous chapters have used ‘tradition’, historical events and institutional developments through the ages as a basis for justifying the status quo.

Lidman identifies three distinct audiences for this book (p. xiv). The first is ‘persons with some power ... those with little knowledge of the topic but at the same time ready to make decisions’. His aim is to inform and influence this audience. The second audience is students of library and information science. Here the aim is education of the profession, for the book to be a textbook. The third audience Lidman identifies as ‘the ordinary reader with an interest’. These three audiences are quite distinct and in attempting to reach all three within the one work, Lidman fails to do adequate service to any.

The hard-headed ‘persons with power’ will gather little new hard evidence of distinctly different value propositions. In fact they may come away thinking that the archives have not tried hard enough. Students will find the slim volume an excellent overview of the subject, but no more. The ordinary reader will perhaps derive the most from this compact, thoughtful but not taxing guidebook on the history and traditions of libraries and archives.

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