

## Preparing Collections for Digitisation



Bülow, Anna E, and Ahmon, Jess: *Preparing Collections for Digitisation*. London: The National Archives and Facet Publishing, 2011. 184 pp, numerous illustrations. ISBN 978-1-85604-711-1. GBP 44,95.

This book is a very welcome addition to the world of publishing on preservation issues primarily affecting those with responsibility for paper-based collections. In this case we have an actual 'how to' guide, that to this reader satisfactorily bucks the trend of over-academic treatises on what is primarily a fairly practical, and some would say, common sense, activity.

The authors are to be congratulated on getting to grips with exactly what a digitisation project consists of. Finally we can be absolutely clear to all those who believe that a digital copy is the answer to all of the archive and special collection worlds problems. What this book does is sound the required clarion call for control—lets not throw the archive out with the digital data wave—but better, lets look at exactly what a digitisation project includes.

The key here is that digitisation does not mean scanning. This will come as a shock to all those managers and accountants who thought the archival money-pit was now damned (or should that be damned?). Digitisation is so much more than capturing the image and this excellent book makes this perfectly clear. In fact the image is the tip of the metadata.

The authors get just the right balance between technical detail and guidance.

The first two chapters set the scene very well and draw attention to the challenges that present them-

selves when planning a project to digitise collections. The emphasis is rightly on planning. The project will have a range of impacts, not only on the physical nature of the collections themselves, but also on the institution and importantly on its resources.

Chapter one gets right to the point by setting out the Four Phases of Digitisation, providing a very useful starting point for anyone embarking on a project to digitise collections. Chapter two focuses on the various impacts and effects of this planning process, especially regarding any preparatory conservation work. This activity is now known in many institutions as 'digi-prep' and requires a form of first aid conservation to ensure that each item is flat and secure enough to be digitised.

This part of the project can have a very significant effect on the original estimate of time required, and particularly the lead-in time—it might not be foolish to suggest a year as the minimum time it takes to prepare a large collection for digitisation. This sort of information is going to cause a lot of stress to those who thought this was a cheap, quick fix!

The rest of the book goes on to detail digital image technicalities—what all the jargon really means and why this is important to know, the vital importance of selection, surveying the collection, specifying the technical equipment, preparing damaged material, and getting the whole project underway.

There is much to recommend about this book and it is probable that each reader/user will gain different insights and guidance from the content. I thoroughly recommend this book and have already included this as a key text in teaching preservation.

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