Reviews


While sharing an almost identical title to Disaster Management for Libraries and Archives edited by Graham Matthews and John Feathers (Ashgate, 2003), Matthews, Smith and Knowles base this new volume on the findings of a 2005-2006 survey project, Safeguarding Heritage at Risk: Disaster Management in UK Archives, Libraries and Museums, and incorporate feedback from conference presentations through Summer 2008. Recognizing the commonalities and differences among the three cultural heritage organizations, as well as size and type of institution, the authors offer insights into disaster management they hope will stimulate planning and action.

The book “aims to provide a contemporary overview of disaster management in archives, libraries and museums in the United Kingdom, and an insight into activities elsewhere in the world,” excluding digital resources and services. The authors describe the research project; lay out the context of disaster management in archives, libraries, and museums; provide overviews of the situation in the United Kingdom and other countries; analyze disaster control plans against an analysis framework; present the key themes in their findings using extensive quotes from interviewees; and suggest plans for the future. References conclude each chapter, and a final chapter of sources of information updates the guide in Matthews and Feathers’ 2003 book, while adding sources relevant to museums.

This is an excellent snapshot view of the state of disaster management in the United Kingdom. However, there are some minor flaws in the presentation. The “insight into activities elsewhere in the world” is extremely slight, and it is impossible to tell whether an attribution to “International museum and library” is from the US, Asia, Africa, South America, or Europe; none of the survey respondents are named to protect confidentiality. Some of the terminology may be unfamiliar to non-British readers, such as the “estates department” of a national museum; for a truly cross-institutional and worldwide audience an explanation of unfamiliar roles and responsibilities would help place something like estates in context. Although they allowed the respondents to speak for themselves in the Findings chapter, the authors failed to edit and tighten up the phrasing and sentence fragments to make them more readable; too often the paragraphs read like strict verbatim transcripts from interviews full of stops and starts. They even repeated the same paragraph under Training—Needs (p. 153) and Staff (p. 156). The whole book could have benefited also from more careful proofreading to eliminate typographical errors.

Now that we know the state of disaster management in archives, libraries, and museums, where do we go from here to follow through and implement disaster prevention, planning, and recovery? Many of the stories conveyed through the interviews in this book express dismay at the financial and hierarchical obstacles to the successful integration of cooperative disaster management plans and hint that the problem may not be across the cultural heritage fence but the financial divide between the well-funded and the shoestring volunteer operations. The resilience of the optimistic pragmatists shines through in two quotes: “Be prepared. Be practical. Be trained.” And “Always expect the unexpected.”

Matthews, Smith, and Knowles offer the professions an opportunity to take these research findings and craft working disaster management policies applicable across boundaries, within localities, and as best practices to emulate. This book belongs in the working collections of archives, libraries, and museums.

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FRBR (Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records), a conceptual model to represent the bibliographic universe, is based on an entity–relationship analysis commonly used for relational databases, and consists of 10 entities categorized into three
entity groups. The four entities in Group 1 consist of work (a distinct intellectual or artistic creation), expression (the intellectual or artistic realization of a work), manifestation (the physical embodiment of an expression of a work), and item (a single exemplar of a manifestation). Group 2 represents the agents (person or corporate body) responsible for the intellectual or artistic content, the physical production and dissemination, or the custodianship of any Group 1 entity. Group 3 represents a set of entities that serve as the subjects of works, such as concept (abstract notion or idea), object (a material thing), event (an action or occurrence), and place (a location).

As the authors of this volume state, FRBR “was introduced in 1998 to address the challenges facing the library community in light of the changes in the cataloging environment driven by technological advances, economic pressures, and the increasing user focus of library services.” As the Internet, and particularly Google, encroached upon libraries’ territory of information provision and organization, the traditional MARC cataloging format remained the sole province of librarians and was ignored by other information providers such as book publishers. A new way of thinking about cataloging that could be interoperable across geopolitical boundaries and reduce the clutter of duplicate records in the international databases (particularly OCLC) developed to harmonize disparate systems. Much has been written about the theories underlying FRBR, but very little until now deals with the implementation of and future directions that FRBR will take.

The authors state that the objectives of this book are to “provide an overview of the current states of FRBR development, to identify the key FRBR issues that need to be addressed, and to point to future directions of FRBR development.” Zhang and Salaba investigate the formats best suited to applying FRBR and conclude that it is most useful for fiction; useful with expansions for classical texts, live performing arts, moving images, music, and oral tradition works; and not applicable to serials, hand press materials, works of art, and cultural objects. There is still concern about the interoperability of FRBR with legacy MARC records, and the “lack of internationally agreed on FRBR-related standards for cataloging, record structure, and record encoding.” The authors note that current FRBR implementation systems for OPACs are based on existing MARC records or systems that conform to FRBR rather than newly created independent FRBR systems and thus cannot be adequately tested in a real-world scenario. Equally disconcerting, Zhang and Salaba found that, as of Spring 2007, “very few FRBR projects had actually conducted or reported user studies on their developed FRBR systems…” and do not know if what they are offering to users is helpful to their search strategies and retrieval of relevant information or just another repackaging of MARC in a different jacket.

One minor point and two errors mar this otherwise useful monograph: after noting that RedLightGreen (from RLG) is no longer available since OCLC absorbed RLG, the authors later discuss its FRBR features as if it still existed. They erroneously attribute responsibility for DACS (Describing Archives: A Content Standard) to the Department of Defense Information Analysis Center, when in fact this archival standard belongs to the Society of American Archivists. CMD and SMD refer to General Material Designations and Specific Material Designations, not Designators.

Zhang and Salaba raise important questions about FRBR and its efficacy. For a full understanding of FRBR and its implications in international cataloging standards plus the controversy over AACR2’s replacement, RDA (Resources Description and Access), this book is an invaluable tool.

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Leading and Managing Archives and Records Programs attempts to “provide insights into strategies for leading, developing, and managing effective archives and records management programs” by reflecting individual insights of selected authors. The volume is a compendium of 15 chapters, each by a different author, whose own perspective and specific case study drives the narrative on leadership. The book “offers accumulated experience and wisdom that can be considered and applied by others.” Unfortunately, the chapters are as disparate as the authors’ experiences, and the unevenness of this approach is the book’s fundamental flaw. As Dearstyne posits in the first chapter, “leadership styles, approaches, and successes depend to a significant degree on program settings and issues.” In this case, the individual authors’ pomposity, arrogance, and, sometimes, self-importance detract from the topic and the overall book. Several chapters should have been dropped from the book for nothing more than the sheer conceit of the author. Dearstyne, as editor, and the reader deserve better.

Speaking of Dearstyne, his chapters as lead author for both the opening and closing of the book anchor the discussion and methodology of the volume. In “Setting the Stage,” Dearstyne encourages archivists to “exert leadership and influence in their workplaces”, especially as the nature and challenges to archives, such as digital convergence, play such a major role in the future of the profession. His historical overview of the profession, its role of stewardship, the need for documentary heritage, strengthening collective memory, and rights protections are all solid reflections of archivists as they attempt to lead their profession into in the morass of 21st century information access. I would recommend this chapter as required reading for archival education programs worldwide.