

we are here'.<sup>59</sup> To this, we might add: 'and so are the writers'. Proximity and access to living writers provides an opportunity to observe, in different ways and over time, their practice. This process, which the British Library is terming 'enhanced curation', is beginning to employ new digital technology in the recording of practice, in addition to the preservation of digital artefacts.

An acquisitions process will often now unfold over time, and may comprise several strands. Digital panoramic photography to record three-dimensional simulations of a writer's space will allow scholars to place archived manuscripts (paper or electronic) in their original space and context, while in-depth Life Story Oral History interviews with writers allow a retrospective perspective on their life and work that acts as a performative dialogue with the original artefacts.<sup>60</sup> New patterns of working are creating a complex interconnection of files – not only stored locally by the creator, but also through web-based solutions 'in the cloud' – whose long-term sustainability and access can be problematic.<sup>61</sup> Archiving solutions need to take into account the ephemeral nature of much online content, and early steps are being taken to archive UK domain websites.<sup>62</sup> This is especially important for authors, who operate in a field of production in which websites and associated blogs are increasingly gaining significance, and whose archives need to reflect both the creation and the reception of their works. Such 'enhanced curation' adds up to a new model of distributed collecting that involves active engagement with creators to collect artefacts where they exist, together with – much like a musical score that allows subsequent recreation of a work in time – the logging of writerly practice as it evolves.

The archiving of born-digital materials is presenting new challenges for British curators, who are now required to keep pace with global technological advances in addition to overseas collecting interests. Changing patterns of literary production will require a new understanding of the processes for growing collections of literary archives, addressing questions of technology, the law, market economics, and institutional practice. Will these changes lead to a collapsing of the boundaries that John Berger identifies between printed book libraries and archives? Whilst the processes required for the ingest of digital files differ little from those for published e-journals or books, the scale, variety and uncertainty of the creation and arrangement of digital archives (not to mention of the writers behind them) seem sure to preserve their unique and irregular nature. However, the recuperative ethic at work in Jonathan Franzen's ode to obsolescence may be compromised by the unpredictable and ephemeral nature of new digital creations: the boundaries between creation and archiving are collapsing, with implications for the composition, understanding, but not – with careful archiving – the survival of digital archives.

<sup>59</sup> Larkin, 'Neglected Responsibility', 105.

<sup>60</sup> <http://www.bl.uk/reshelp/findhelprestype/sound/ohist/ohms/olsauthor/authorshives.html> (accessed 18 February 2010).

<sup>61</sup> Examples of 'cloud working' include Google Docs, flickr, web-mail etc. A separate report on legal issues, especially relating to questions of Intellectual Property for such documents is being prepared by the Digital Lives project.

<sup>62</sup> <http://www.webarchive.org.uk/ukwa/> (accessed 18 February 2010).

## MAGICAL AND MEANINGFUL: THIRTY YEARS OF LITERARY MANUSCRIPT COLLECTING IN THE UK AND IRELAND, 1979–2009

BY FRAN BAKER, JESSICA GARDNER, CHRIS SHEPPARD AND DAVID SUTTON<sup>1</sup>

The cardinal text on the migration of modern British literary manuscripts is the talk by Philip Larkin entitled 'A Neglected Responsibility: Contemporary Literary Manuscripts', given at the British Academy and published in *Encounter* in 1979, and later collected in *Required Writing*.<sup>2</sup> It is a text coloured by Larkin's notorious prejudice against everything he grouped under the heading 'abroad' (elsewhere in *Required Writing* we read his recoil 'Oh no, I've never been to America, nor to anywhere else, for that matter').<sup>3</sup> But it is the text which first brought to wide public attention the issue of the migration of modern British (and Irish) literary manuscripts, and its prose has an excoriating clarity. Here is a famous passage:

. . . I think we all know . . . that during the last forty or fifty years, and more particularly during the last twenty years, the papers of the major British writers of this century have been intensively collected not by British but by American libraries. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that in so far as future studies of these writers, and definitive editions of their works, depend on direct access to their papers, these studies and these editions are most likely to be undertaken by American scholars in American universities. There are of course exceptions but in the main the popular view of modern literary manuscripts is that they are all in America, and when one considers the great American university collections one can only agree. A meeting of British national and university librarians to discuss modern literary manuscripts resembles an annual convention of stable-door lockers.<sup>4</sup>

Larkin was correct in stating that during the 1950s and the 1960s North American institutions had the field virtually to themselves. This was partly because they had money and were ready to spend it, but mainly because there were twenty or thirty North American university libraries which were committed to collecting modern British and Irish literary materials and were prepared to be very active and solicitous in acquiring the papers of authors who were not only still alive but in many cases were under the age of fifty.

The situation in 2009 is very different. Driven by the grassroots of the literary curatorial community, the Group for Literary Archives and Manuscripts (GLAM) was established in 2005 and is now a dynamic forum for collaboration between collecting institutions in the UK and Ireland. The group's success is the culmination of a series of initiatives and developments over the thirty years since Larkin threw down the gauntlet.

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<sup>2</sup> Philip Larkin, 'A Neglected Responsibility: Contemporary Literary Manuscripts', in Philip Larkin, *Required Writing: Miscellaneous Pieces 1955–1982* (London, 1983), 98–110.

<sup>3</sup> 'An Interview with *Paris Review*' in Larkin, *Required Writing*, 57–78, 70.

<sup>4</sup> Larkin, 'A Neglected Responsibility', 100.



In 1979, as now, the American libraries did not always proceed through purchase. Their success in attracting UK and Irish literary manuscripts must be partly attributable to how they solicited and accepted donations with charm and grace. They treated 'their' authors as true friends. They showed themselves much more ready than their British counterparts to collect the papers of women authors. And they supported their collections with superb programmes of conservation. The British approach up to 1979 was, by comparison, arguably mean-spirited as well as mean-pocketed. The 1979 conference that heard Larkin's paper identified two significant failures: first, the failure properly to collect the papers, and, second, the failure to record what had been collected in the UK. To address the first failure (the failure to collect) the conference called for strengthening of the funding available through Arts Council and other sources and called upon its own participants (the 'stable-door lockers' themselves) to change approach and direction. To address the second failure (the failure to record) the conference agreed to try to set up a national location register of modern literary manuscripts, and the pioneering campaigners for literary manuscripts known as the Strachey Trust agreed to become the first funders of a Location Register, based at Reading University Library.

The Location Register surveys, begun in 1982, quickly showed that the situation in the UK was not quite as bleak as Larkin had imagined, and was rapidly improving too. The national libraries (especially the National Library of Scotland) were shedding their time-constraints, and fine collections were also being established in many university libraries – most notably the Brotherton Library and the John Rylands University Library, but also including: Glasgow; Edinburgh; Aberdeen; Newcastle; Durham; Hull; Birmingham; Sussex; Exeter; and Reading. Rich holdings were also found in the main libraries and the colleges of the Universities of Oxford, Cambridge and London, and there were intriguing collections in public libraries and museums – notably: the Alan Brownjohn collection held by Lewisham Library Service; the Edward Carpenter collection in Sheffield Central Library; the Winifred Holtby papers in Hull Central Library; the Walter Brierley papers in Derby Central Library; the Housman papers in Street Public Library; the Jerome K. Jerome collection in Walsall Central Library; and the wonderful Thomas Hardy collection in Dorset County Museum.

In presenting these emerging findings the Location Register team began to develop the theme of 'appropriateness'. It celebrated the appropriateness of the Hardy collections in Dorchester, the Alexander Cordell collection in Newport Central Library, the E. M. Forster papers in King's College Cambridge, the Naomi Mitchison collection in the National Library of Scotland, the papers of Yeats and Lady Gregory in the National Library of Ireland, the Leonard Woolf papers at Sussex, the Douglas Dunn papers in Hull University, and so on. Even at the level of the individual poem, it was pleasing to record that the manuscript of Hardy's 'Aberdeen (April 1905)' is in Aberdeen University Library and the manuscript and working papers for Tony Harrison's 'Newcastle is Peru' in Newcastle University Library.

Some of the early reporting in the 1980s also indulged in Larkinian laments about inappropriate locations and this was probably unfortunate. It was too easy to dwell upon the fact that Tolkien's manuscripts had found their way to the Marquette University in Milwaukee and to stress examples of 'inappropriate' remoteness: the Frank Swinnerton papers in Fayetteville, Arkansas; the major collections of both Iris Murdoch and Angus Wilson being in Iowa City; the papers of John Betjeman in the University of Victoria, British Columbia. It was also legitimate, for example, to point out the problems for British scholars of Robert Graves' works, caused by the fact that five major North American institutions had established Graves collections: the Lockwood Library in

Buffalo; Southern Illinois University; the Ransom Center in Austin; the University of San Francisco; and the University of Victoria, British Columbia. However, it would have been more constructive to encourage British archivists to emulate their imaginative and enthusiastic North American counterparts.

The fact is that in 1979 most British librarians and archivists knew very little about modern literary manuscripts. Despite the brave pioneering work of Eric Walter White and Jenny Stratford with the Arts Council Collection of Modern Literary Manuscripts, there was no proper philosophy or policy. There was a sense that librarians in North America were collecting the whole of our modern literary heritage, but few people knew exactly how, why, or where. If there was any systematic collecting going on in the UK and Ireland, no-one knew much about that either. We are in a much better position now. Typically, by lamenting how terrible it all was, Larkin began a process of making it all much less terrible.

The publication in 1988 of the *Location Register of 20<sup>th</sup>-century English Literary Manuscripts and Letters* (now updated as a website) helped to further the changes – changes of attitude, changes of awareness, changes of practice.<sup>5</sup> Larkin himself (again perhaps typically) was not as aware as he might have been of the major collecting programmes already under way – with a very strong focus on appropriateness – at the National Libraries of Scotland, Wales, and Ireland. Only with the publication of the *Location Register* did the richness of the literary collections at, for example, King's and Trinity Colleges in Cambridge become widely known. From the 1980s into the 1990s we began to witness great collecting successes for British and Irish university libraries. The archives of John Wain and Arthur Koestler arrived at Edinburgh University Library; David Lodge's papers went to Birmingham University; the vast Ronald Duncan collection went to the University of Plymouth; Kevin Crossley-Holland's papers went to the Brotherton Library; and the Denis Johnston collection went to Trinity College Dublin. In the cases of the Peter Redgrove papers going to Sheffield University and the Joe Orton papers being bought for Leicester University, those institutions entered the field of literary manuscripts for the first time. Most appropriately of all, and in culmination, the Philip Larkin *Nachlass* has been deposited at the University of Hull.

We now have, very clearly, our own twenty or thirty major collecting institutions, which are worthy repositories for our modern literary heritage. We also have, starting from the *Location Register* and being taken forward now by GLAM, the beginnings of a national collecting policy. With the existence of the *Location Register* and the emergence of GLAM, the collecting approach in the major British and Irish institutions has to a significant extent helpfully 'frozen'. There is no national collecting policy, but there are professional understandings. No-one, outside of the University of Reading and Trinity College Dublin, is now likely to start a new Samuel Beckett collection, for example. If further Charles Causley papers came onto the market, it seems certain that colleagues would now be more likely to notify the University of Exeter than to think of bidding themselves. This is real progress, a huge advance on where we were a quarter of a century ago, and a genuine platform for the further advances in both cooperation and awareness.

GLAM was established in 2005, when the two literary archivists at the John Rylands University Library, Manchester, made some initial investigations to determine whether there were any formal networks to support professionals working with literary archives.

<sup>5</sup> *Location Register of 20<sup>th</sup>-Century English Literary Manuscripts and Letters: A Union List of Papers of Modern English, Irish, Scottish and Welsh Authors in the British Isles* (London, 1988). The online version can be found at <http://www.rdg.ac.uk/library/about-us/projects/lib-location-register.asp> (accessed 26 Nov. 2009).



Perhaps surprisingly, their research revealed that no such group existed in the UK, Ireland, USA, Canada or Australia – all countries with rich literary traditions. The work of the *Location Register* had already made it clear that hundreds of institutions across the UK and Ireland held and collected modern literary papers. The absence of a professional network for those curating such collections was a gap waiting to be filled. Responses to an initial mailing setting out a ‘modest proposal’ to establish such a group were enthusiastic, and those who participated in early discussions were able to identify numerous ways in which literary archives are sufficiently distinct from other collections to justify establishing a group dedicated to their care.

A major feature of literary archives is their sheer ubiquity. Writers are among our most voluminous correspondents and by their very nature their letters and papers scatter to the winds; these literary papers therefore provide a common link between many archival institutions that are otherwise very different as well as geographically dispersed. Literary archives also reveal complex webs of interconnections between individual writers – in terms of friendships, collaborations, relationships between writer and publisher, and literary movements. These networks do not respect institutional boundaries, and the prospect of ‘joining up’ collections by working collaboratively was therefore an appealing one. The commodity value of literary papers is something else which sets them apart from other types of archive, and they have been avidly acquired by private collectors in the past as well as widely sought by archives and libraries. This is due in large part to what Philip Larkin described as their ‘magical’ value,<sup>6</sup> or their value as artefacts: for a literary enthusiast little can be as exciting as handling an original document penned by an eminent writer, getting to grips with their own distinctive handwriting, and seeing at first hand the paper and ink they chose to use. This provides an added dimension to what Larkin described as the ‘meaningful’ value of literary papers, that is, their importance as research resources that enlarge our knowledge and understanding of a writer’s life and work.<sup>7</sup>

Encouraging a collective approach to particular aspects of literary archive and manuscript stewardship was recognised as important from the outset – and not just in the most obvious area of working towards a national collecting strategy. Literary archives pose specific challenges and have certain distinctive requirements in other areas of professional work too, including appraisal, administering Data Protection and copyright legislation, cataloguing, and negotiating the often highly sensitive issues involved in dealing with literary estates. GLAM has already gone some way to meeting the aims it set for itself in 2005. A primary aim was to promote awareness and raise the profile of literary archives and manuscripts. The group has accordingly had a presence at some major conferences focusing on literary papers, and it has built up links with the UK Literary Heritage Working Group, a high-level body established to address issues surrounding the sale and dispersal of modern literary manuscripts to overseas institutions.<sup>8</sup> GLAM is now routinely providing formal support for member institutions seeking funding for acquisitions and projects focusing on literary papers. The aim of encouraging cross-domain working between rare book librarians, museum curators, and others working with literary collections is already being reflected in GLAM’s membership. The group now has 122 members, drawn from a range of backgrounds including archivists, librarians, museum curators, manuscript dealers, literary editors, students, archive educators, and funders. Over fifty institutions are

<sup>6</sup> Larkin, ‘A Neglected Responsibility’, 100.

<sup>7</sup> Larkin, ‘A Neglected Responsibility’, 99.

<sup>8</sup> More information about the UK Literary Heritage Working Group can be found at <http://www.literary.org.uk> (accessed 26 Nov. 2009).

represented. Members from the University of Aberystwyth are providing a good model of collaboration between archive training and academic research, and it is hoped that in future GLAM will be able to work closely with archive trainers and postgraduate students who may be able to take forward some of the recommendations arising from GLAM’s first major project – a groundbreaking survey in 2006/7 focusing on the collecting of literary archives.

The aim of GLAM’s survey was to gather factual information about current literary acquisition policies and practice from a lively body of members who could speak for their respective institutions and use their contacts at other repositories known to hold literary archives and manuscripts. Responses were received from all the national and copyright libraries, from most university libraries (including Oxbridge colleges), from author houses, publishers, schools and relevant museums, although a low level of response from local record offices was disappointing and has exposed a gap that needs to be addressed as GLAM’s network grows. There was no need or intention to encroach on ground already covered thoroughly by the National Register of Archives, the Higher Education Archives Hub, the *Location Register*, and other relevant tools for discovering what is where. The aim was, rather, to discover more about *why* and *how* literary archives and manuscripts were being acquired, more about the challenges and problems inherent in contemporary acquisition as well as information about the considerable achievements.

Respondents were first asked to provide ‘headline statements’ of some 100 words each summarising the main features of their existing literary manuscript collections. Although this information can be assembled from other sources, these statements provide a shortcut to understanding how the surveyed institutions portray themselves as custodians of literary collections. In effect, a rich distributed national ‘collection’ is described, reemphasising the notion of ‘appropriateness’ that the *Location Register* had uncovered in its earlier data gathering.

The survey then turned to acquisition policies relating to such literary material. What were the surveyed institutions intending to collect – in principle, at least? Responses showed that only about one-third had formal and public written policies, though another third was able to describe less formal working policies. It became evident that the remaining institutions without communicable policies were largely those where opportunities to acquire were so infrequent that having policies seemed redundant. A determination to acquire the work of writers and other literary papers *local* (‘appropriateness’, again) to the collecting institutions was by far the most common feature of the formal and informal policies. The local association was often geographical, but was just as likely to arise from a writer’s personal connection with a collecting institution, typically a university where he – or occasionally she – had studied or been employed, if only for a short time. Almost every broad locality in the country – apart from London – appears to be covered by this regional approach to collecting policy, amounting to kind of *de facto* national policy. GLAM members’ greater awareness of this should now allow collecting to be more consciously systematic in future. A minority of institutions collect by genre or by following other non-local criteria and for this and other reasons conflicts of interest will naturally arise. Even so, greater awareness should again make resolution easier to achieve.

GLAM’s survey then went on to investigate the relationship between policy and actual practice. How well could declared intentions and preparedness be translated into real-life action? The policies of institutions which rarely if ever actually made acquisitions could look very similar to those acquiring regularly and extensively. Respondents were asked to list their five most significant literary archive and manuscript acquisitions of



the five years preceding the survey and a remarkably impressive body of material was reported. Leaving aside the collecting by the national libraries, there were significant acquisitions relating to John Banville, Isaiah Berlin, Malcolm Bradbury, Charles Causley, Robert Crawford, Daphne du Maurier, Herbert Farjeon, Elaine Feinstein, Alan Garner, Philip Hobsbaum, Richard Hoggart, Philip Larkin, Barry MacSweeney, Frances Partridge, Arnold Ridley, Piers Paul Read, Jack Rosenthal, Siegfried Sassoon, George Szirtes, Sue Townsend, Evelyn Waugh, Robert Westall and Israel Zangwill, as well as archives of Carcanet Press, Enitharmon Press and the Rampant Lions Press. There were also important, though less extensive, acquisitions of manuscript material by Samuel Beckett, Henry Green, Seamus Heaney, Ted Hughes, D. H. Lawrence, Philip Pullman, Stevie Smith, Hugh Walpole, and Virginia Woolf.

Despite this record of achievement, there were many reasons for concern. Fewer than one in seven of the institutions surveyed could actually list as many as five significant acquisitions over the five-year period. Of the thirty-five collections or items named above, eighteen were gifts and three were loans, while only fourteen were purchased. Benefaction is obviously of great importance, but it cannot be taken for granted and it may lack focus, while many of the most desirable literary archives and manuscripts are offered for sale. Significant, regular purchasing of archives and manuscripts was funded at very few institutions outside the national libraries; just four large university libraries accounted for well over 90% of expenditure in the period surveyed. Inevitably, with lack of experience, many respondents were uncertain about the valuation of archives and potential sources of grant aid. Thus, despite the aspirations and the sense of regional responsibility evident in policies, very few institutions had the capacity to pursue coherent acquisition programmes. There were also evident lacunae in collecting. Very little material related to the period before 1950, for although many of the surveyed institutions took justifiable pride in their established collections for earlier writers they seldom appeared to be able to take opportunities to develop them by purchase. Hardly any writers under the age of forty were collected, missing opportunities to establish the fruitful long-term 'friendships' so successful in the American context. There was much uncertainty about collecting, preserving, and providing access to digital archives, although their increasing prevalence and importance was widely acknowledged.

The survey was, in effect, a review, post-Larkin, of the health of the UK and of Ireland's literary collecting practices and its findings, now published online, will help to further embed collaborative working practices both at national level and between individual member institutions.<sup>9</sup> One of those priorities for collaboration, highlighted through the survey's findings, is access and learning. In a sense this focus represents another cultural change in the archival community since Larkin's speech in 1979. Major acquisitions – Harold Pinter, Ted Hughes, and Alan Bennett to name a recent few – hit the headlines and rightly so, but the modern archivist is not just a keeper. To do our job well we must also open our collections wide and *be seen to* engage new audiences, develop innovative access measures. In short, we must use our collections to celebrate our national literary heritage as widely as possible, for scholarship, for new creative work, for the public enjoyment of literature – for all that is 'magical' and 'meaningful' – and we must publicise when we do it well.

To gather a first-round of evidence of this activity GLAM used its survey. Respondents were asked to 'give one example of an interesting, exciting or innovative way in which your literary material has been used'. The single question about usage

<sup>9</sup> A full report on the survey's findings, with recommendations, may be seen on GLAM's website <http://archives.li.man.ac.uk/glam/index.html> (accessed 26 Nov. 2009).

elicited a rich response, and set the group's course to put access issues at the heart of its learning agenda. The survey responses on this topic may not have statistical weight, but they have proved a good starting point for gathering evidence that helps dispel the pervading traditional perception that literary archives and manuscripts are relevant only to the advancement of higher scholarship. Tell that to the school children, builders, poets, novelists, undergraduates, and members of the public that are coming through our doors to participate in the literary adventures offered by GLAM's members.

Builders? Yes. The Roald Dahl Museum's mission (which could be said to bind all GLAM members) to 'inspire a love of stories and creative writing in everyone' was put imaginatively into action when they held a poetry workshop for the construction team during the building works on their new premises. It is fair to say that GLAM's museums, author houses, national libraries and independent libraries (like Seven Stories, the Centre for Children's Books in Newcastle) have led the way with playful opportunities for public engagement with literary collections, with writers and artists in residence (at the National Library of Scotland and the Brontë Parsonage Museum) and curriculum-tailored schools activities (Seven Stories, Keats House, and the Roald Dahl Museum). Such collections tend to have better developed exhibition facilities, too, although there is evidence that this is changing. Over half of respondents reported exhibition-related initiatives to the GLAM survey and some higher education institutions, such as the John Rylands University Library and Cambridge University Library, now boast dedicated gallery spaces. Many respondents also flagged up the online potential, for virtual exhibition and interactive learning. However, although Oxford University was able to give an example of its large-scale digitisation plans for Jane Austen's manuscripts, copyright restrictions severely limit most GLAM members from moving more strongly into the digital environment with their literary treasures even for strictly educational purposes.

The university members of GLAM do enjoy one distinct access advantage: they have captive audiences in their student communities. The Universities of Manchester, Leeds, Exeter, Bradford, Bristol, Sussex, Southampton, York, Cardiff, Nottingham, and Hull, all report that engagement with literary manuscripts is now routinely integrated into core courses, for literary criticism, for creative writing, for life-writing, for research skills and textual editing. In this way, higher education curators are not just widening their audience base, they are helping to shape the next generation of scholars, critics, writers and curators who will influence public understanding of our national literary heritage.

In just four short years the initiative started by those two literary archivists at the John Rylands University Library has developed into an active and influential group working collaboratively (with and not against American counterparts) to help secure the UK and Irish literary archival heritage in 'appropriate' locations and to make these 'magical' and 'meaningful' artefacts more visible and valued by the wider community – archival and public. Its groundbreaking survey findings have been published online and presented to the UK Literary Heritage Group, with a set of recommendations (to further professionalise collecting, and to share skills and experience) that will serve to enhance the standing and professionalism of the group's members. Since that time, a cataloguing working party has been established, an access and audience workshop has taken place and, perhaps most importantly, there is hope of bringing the invaluable *Location Register* up to date. Philip Larkin's challenge still has resonance but today one feels he would find rather less to lament and a great deal more to champion.