

Having investigated collecting *policies*, GLAM's survey seeks information on actual *practice* in collecting literary archives and manuscripts in Britain and Ireland in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, so far. A substantial amount of data has now been gathered from some 40 institutions and the number is growing, but here I'll have to keep to a few major aspects.

Remember, we have concentrated on surveying repositories known to have acquired literary collections over past decades or even centuries.

So, firstly, what have our respondents been able to achieve in their collecting recently? To find an answer we asked respondents to list five of their most significant acquisitions of the last five years (or fewer if unable to list five)

In fact, only about half the respondents actually did list 5 acquisitions; the other half listed fewer - including some who listed none at all. From this we can infer that many respondents had been unable to acquire what they consider to be significant literary archives or mss even at a rate of one per year since the year 2000.

Nevertheless, over 100 collections or items from the five year period were reported and regarded as 'significant'. We used that term so that respondents could refer to whatever they thought significant in their own particular circumstances – from an extensive archive to an individual letter.

An immediate observation is that very few institutions seem to have been collecting literary manuscript material from the nineteenth century or earlier. Such earlier collecting appears virtually to be confined to the national libraries, perhaps half a dozen large university libraries, and 'specialist' collectors like the Tennyson Research Centre and the Brontë Society. While this conference's concern is obviously with more recent material, we can hardly be complacent about the fact that any national responsibility for developing and adding to pre-20<sup>th</sup> century collections isn't widely shared at present.

The list of 20<sup>th</sup> century acquisitions is impressive, ranging over poetry, prose, drama and literary criticism, and including archives of magazines, publishers and other organisations as well as those of individuals. Leaving aside the better publicised major acquisitions of the national libraries, we see a selective five-year list that includes substantial collections of John Banville, Isaiah Berlin, Charles Causley, Paul Claudel, Daphne du Maurier, Herbert Farjeon, Elaine Feinstein, Alan Garner, Richard Hoggart, Philip Larkin, Frances Partridge, Philip Pullman, Piers Paul Read, Jack Rosenthal, George Szirtes, Sue Townsend and Evelyn Waugh, and archives of Carcanet, Enitharmon and the Rampant Lions Press, as well as many other important, though less extensive, acquisitions.

Almost all these acquisitions had strong local associations for the institutions making them, whether by purchase or by other means. From this one could infer that a regionally-distributed national collecting strategy is operating *de facto*, but of course this begs the question of what happens to material associated with those regional locations where collecting is comparatively limited (for whatever reasons) or non-existent at present.

In some ways, the national libraries fill the gaps with their national approach to collecting, but they can hardly act as universal back-up. The number of other institutions which regularly collect a range of material that *doesn't* have direct local associations for them – simply because the material is of high quality in itself – is very small indeed. In fact it's largely confined to the same handful of large universities which are also endeavouring to collect pre-20<sup>th</sup> century material. Beyond them, this limited 'non-local' collecting mainly takes place where there are distinct *thematic* collections such as Science Fiction at Liverpool, and writing for children at Seven Stories.

Two other points emerge. First, that there is very little collecting of younger writers whose reputations are still to be made. With limited resources – time and energy as well as money – collectors understandably play safe. But this must be missing excellent opportunities to exploit local knowledge and to buy at relatively low prices.

Second, many of the collections concerned can potentially grow – publishers continue to publish, a writer continues to write, and so on. The financial and other implications of entering into on-going commitments to add to such collections – even without formal obligation – are considerable and may be a deterrent to starting a worthwhile collection in the first place.

The survey then seeks information on how acquisitions had been made.

Though the national libraries generally purchase, we've found so far that nearly two-thirds of the significant acquisitions reported by universities were received by gift or bequest, or were on loan from their owners (and so comparatively vulnerable). Most of the gifts were offered by their owners, rather than being solicited, but they tended to be of low market value, with a few notable exceptions. Significantly, two of the highest value gifts were made by generous private collectors rather than by writers or others actually generating manuscripts.

Respondents were asked to state their actual expenditure on literary archives and manuscripts in the year 2005. No one year is ever entirely typical for all – but we have this recent snapshot.

Predictably, the National Libraries spent far more than any others, apart from the Bodleian which had a rather exceptional year. The total relevant expenditure by universities (excluding Oxford) in 2005 was £224,000. However, almost all of this was actually spent by just 7 institutions and three of them accounted for nearly 90% of the total. For England, at least, it appears that 4 large universities are normally able to purchase on a quite different scale from all the rest.

Apart from the National Libraries, only 7 places reported having reliable *annual* acquisitions funding from their institutions.

Otherwise, institutions are reliant on case-by-case funding as special opportunities arise and they can occasionally make large one-off acquisitions, but they're unable to purchase frequently or consistently. Some institutions reported never having any funds for purchasing at all.

About a quarter of respondents indicated having received acquisitions grants during the period 2001-05 from the MLA/V&A Purchase Grant fund and/or from FNL (and in one case NHMF). These grants accounted for proportions of their total expenditure ranging from 10% to 75% and clearly play a very important role. Only 2 respondents, both national libraries, reported having applied for grants and failing to get them.

Only one university and one independent archive reported success with an HLF application (and one of these related to a collection mainly of printed books), but two National Libraries reported significant success with pursuing HLF grants. We infer that the terms on which HLF grants are made available are perceived to present particular difficulties for universities in respect of contemporary literary manuscripts and archives and they're reluctant to apply.

Respondents were asked if they had recently failed to secure a particular acquisition they had hoped for and many respondents described disappointments of this kind. All but one related to potential purchases, the exception being one library's frustrated hope to acquire through Acceptance in Lieu.

In noting outstanding acquisitions of the previous 5 years, not one AiL acquisition was mentioned – indicating that in its present form AiL has had no direct positive significance for any GLAM member as yet.

Not surprisingly, some respondents reported being outbid at auction while others noted difficulty in putting together funding packages and in making purchasing decisions quickly enough to secure acquisitions.

However, none of the institutions reporting failures actually knew the subsequent final destination of the material they had wanted – apart from in the AiL case, which necessarily became public knowledge.

Respondents were asked for comments on taxation issues – and many predictably mentioned the unbound/bound vat anomaly with various forms of anger and bemusement; only one pointed out that advocating standardisation could lead to vat being imposed on bound manuscripts as well as on unbound!

Unexpectedly, three respondents (including two in universities) commented that they could reclaim vat. At least one of them derives this benefit from being classed as a university museum or gallery granting free admission to the public. It's worth asking why this museum/gallery concession does not also apply in the case of the equally accessible archival and manuscript collections in universities' libraries.

Respondents were asked for comments on valuation issues. Many expressed frank uncertainty about assessing the financial value of unique material, also mentioning the high, perhaps prohibitive, cost of professional valuations. A general assumption was evident that the cost should be borne by the potential buyer rather than the seller – though surely this is open to question.

In summary, much of what the survey is discovering confirms our suppositions. But it's very important for us to deal in facts rather than suppositions and we're now becoming far better informed about collecting practice than we've ever been before.