

# What are you doing when you throw things away?

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## 1. Introduction

In 2009 the University of Southampton Library closed its Biomedical Sciences Library. The closure was as a result of the University decision to relocate activities from its Boldrewood satellite campus to the main Highfield Campus in Southampton. The Boldrewood campus library was forty years old at the time of closure and thus relatively new in terms of library longevity. Stock had to be relocated to the main campus library at a time when the main library itself was relatively full, having recently absorbed collections from the closure of another site. This paper outlines some of the processes that were undertaken in order to reduce and relocate the stock and concludes with some reflections on the nature of collection management and how collection knowledge can be 'relearned'.

## 2. Planning for closure

The library had three years in which to plan for stock relocation. This planning and subsequent activity involved a number of people across the two libraries. In addition to the stock activities, the Boldrewood campus library had to continue to deliver business as usual right up until closure at the end of AY 2008/09. There were key responsibilities associated with metrics and logistics, which became more intensive as time went on. The Boldrewood library store, was demolished a year before the closure of the library itself which meant that relegation and relocation decisions about stored materials had to be made quite quickly although not without due consideration. A tremendous amount of journal relegation and stock movement was being coordinated at the main university library in order to accommodate the biosciences stock. The UKRR project manager at Southampton was an integral part of the planning process and her guidance was absolutely essential to the success of the project.

## 3. Staffing

During the life of the project, key expertise was lost when the main collection expert retired. The designated stock editor left after a year and another stock editor was recruited. The stock editor who worked with the collection for two years until transfer had subject experience in health sciences as well as experience of working with other libraries that were planning for closure. The accumulated knowledge of the breadth of holdings was at some times quite slender and this was not helped by a number of retirements of academic staff who might have assisted with background knowledge of some of the collections. A tremendous amount of activity involved

physical moving of collections, interspersed with much measuring and much intensive use of collaborative spreadsheets to audit the process. The staff were committed to the task at a time of great uncertainty for them personally. None of the work could have been achieved without their skills and absolute commitment to the task. Thus the key component in mass collection moves is the team supporting the task. We would not have achieved our aim without them.

#### 4. Journal approach

The need for the biosciences stock relocation was the trigger for two key activities: the decision of the University to provide additional funding for electronic backfiles and participation in the UK Research Reserve project. A agreement with a commercial store, FileStore<sup>1</sup> had been established in the previous two years as a result of the ingest of other collections and this provided space and time to evaluate relegation decisions outside of the timeframe for the move. A journal risk register created during the collection evaluation exercise, helped us with relegation decisions in terms of the sustainability of future electronic access and perceived importance of the title in research terms. A simple decision table was developed by the UKRR project manager at Southampton (Figure 1).

The development of a Service Usage Model for transfer of journal titles to electronic only, using the Southampton experience, has been documented as part of the 2011 JISC SCONUL Shared ERM Requirements project<sup>2</sup>.

Journal category	Policy
Trusted e-surrogates available	Offer to UKRR or discard
Current taught subjects where no robust electronic surrogate or risk register indicates retention.	Consolidate collections at sites where space allows. Consign earlier runs to store and offer duplicates to UKRR
Subjects no longer taught	<u>UUUU</u> Less than 30 year holdings (less than 20 year holdings for foreign language titles). Offer to UKRR or to specialist collections <u>Greater than 30 year holdings</u> . Offer to UKRR or offer to specialist collections or put in FileStore for further evaluation

**Figure 1. Journal decision table**

<sup>1</sup> [www.filestore.co.uk/](http://www.filestore.co.uk/) (viewed 15 February 2012)

<sup>2</sup> <http://sconulerm.jiscinvolve.org/wp/files/2011/05/110112-ERM-Use-Case-Southampton-v2.0.pdf> (viewed 15 February 2012)

## 5. Monograph approach

A pragmatic approach enabled the monograph collections to be evaluated in a structured way. In the first instance, the library management system generated reports indicating collection activity relating to undergraduate texts and items supplied through ILL to other libraries. An extensive stock take, ensured that the monograph catalogue was up to date and this time investment saved an unnecessary duplication of effort later in the process. In terms of undergraduate stock, items with low circulation, earlier editions and duplicates were easily relegated. Research monographs posed evaluation challenges that were exacerbated by the loss of collection specialists and academic staff who might have been able to identify core collections and give the context to those collections. In our case, botany, forestry and agriculture were notable examples.

It was important for our stock editor and colleagues to ‘get the measure’ of the collections and this involved extensive volume by volume examination of the collection with iterations to develop destination decisions about individual volumes and of coherent collections. The destination decisions can be expressed in a simplified form (Figure 2) but in reality the perceived ‘duty of care’ felt towards the collections meant that some of the destination decisions were very difficult to make.

Destination	Notes
Closed Archive	Requiring preservation or special protection owing to age, value or condition.
Open shelves Special Collection	Identified as being in coherent curated collections with a Southampton link (content or donor)
Open shelves	Deemed to be of value to Southampton users
Closed store (FileStore)	Collection decision not possible to make in time available but evidence indicates that item is of value to Southampton. Ensure item is fully catalogued and defer decision for 3 – 5 years pending use statistics from time in store.
Offer to specialist collection	Collection coherence identified but not deemed to be of value to Southampton users
Discard	Item not required – has not been accepted as part of an offer and does not fit any of the categories above

**Figure 2. Simplified monograph destination chart**

The processes were time-consuming and painstaking as the decision had to be made on the basis of best evidence in the absence of resident collection experts. The bioscience theme of the collections meant that vital intelligence was gleaned from the catalogues of special collections for example those of Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, Natural History Museum, Wellcome Trust and Royal Horticultural. COPAC was also used extensively for collection identification and also scarcity

checking. The COPAC Collection Management Tools<sup>3</sup> would have been of inestimable help if they had been available during our collection evaluation phase. In some cases, the stock editor left notes in the catalogue and inside the item to indicate areas of uncertainty or to furnish additional context for a future decision maker.

During the stock evaluation, some important collections were 'rediscovered'. In the life of this 40 year old collection, a significant donation of flora had been made. 1978, Sir Edward Salisbury gave a collection of British regional floras to the Library<sup>4</sup>. There was also a significant collection of books on agriculture<sup>5</sup> which in previous years had been separated from a larger collection in the main University Library in order to support a particular research need at the site. Diligent analysis by the stock editor with no background in the subject areas but with years of collection management experience identified these significant corpora. They were never 'lost' as such, but their true significance had been forgotten. The collections were transferred into Archives and Special collections and have since been appropriately highlighted. Some of the items will be suitable candidates for our digitisation programme owing to their regional focus on Hampshire.

University of Southampton library has been involved with significant digitisation projects for many years and we have skilled staff and bespoke facilities to enable a wide range of digitisation to take place. Digital preservation of material from the biosciences collection was deferred at the time although we are now looking at ways of funding a significant tranche of work in this area. Our strategy was to ensure that volumes of a certain age and those deemed to be at risk of deterioration, were consigned to Archives for evaluation and appropriate conservation treatment.

## **6. Collection relocation metrics**

The metrics derived from the relocation of the Biomedical Sciences Library brought out some useful management information. Through the UKRR project, the 2,000 metres of journal holdings were reduced by 37.5%. The remaining 62.5% of the journal collection went into storage and are subject to on-going collection management decisions and further reduction through UKRR and other strategies. As FileStore costs of this collection alone, amounted to £13,750 p.a. (based on an average cost of £11 per metre/year) there has been a strong incentive to continue with the collection evaluation activities.

Following analysis of the 845 metres of monographs originally in stock, 23.6% was identified as 'live' teaching stock; 47.3% was retained as research stock on open

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<sup>3</sup> [www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/di\\_informationandlibraries/resourcediscovery/copac.aspx](http://www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/di_informationandlibraries/resourcediscovery/copac.aspx) (viewed 15 February 2012)

<sup>4</sup> [www.soton.ac.uk/library/resources/collections/specialcollections/salisbury.html](http://www.soton.ac.uk/library/resources/collections/specialcollections/salisbury.html) (viewed 15 February 2012)

<sup>5</sup> [www.southampton.ac.uk/library/resources/collections/specialcollections/perkins.html](http://www.southampton.ac.uk/library/resources/collections/specialcollections/perkins.html) (viewed 15 February 2012)

shelves or within Archives and Special Collections and 29% was relocated or discarded. The stock librarian (0.5 f.t.e.) discarded approximately 100 metres of books per year over the three year period in addition to all of the other activities that were part of the role.

## **7. Reflections**

Reflecting on our experiences of reducing and moving the collections, there are some learning points which we found invaluable.

### **Communication**

It is very important to use all possible channels for continuous communication with academics and students. The current and future stakeholders of the collections have to be consulted in this process and there has to be an audit trail of consultation. Webpages, bulletins, emails, notices and tabled papers at meetings were all important in the consultation and information process. In some aspects, it was hard to engage the interest of biosciences researchers who work almost entirely in a virtual research environment.

We had found that over the life of the collections, their origins had become obscure and we did not always have contextual information to determine provenance or collection intelligence. Even during the lifetime of our project, colleagues left the service or retired which meant that their knowledgebase disappeared. This was particularly noticeable as so much work is transacted using email. Personal file store and email space is highly transitory and with hindsight, some of the work in progress could have been collected in a wiki or a SharePoint site.

### **Catalogue quality**

Many times during the project, it was noticeable that the catalogue metadata in some areas was not complete. As a result of the project, many records were enhanced and some retrospective conversion was done to ensure that every item in the biosciences collection had an electronic record. We felt it was important to devote time to improving the records, particularly as they were also part of COPAC.

### **Collection management skills**

It is increasingly rare to have a 'ready-made' collection specialist on hand, when there are relegation and relocation decisions to be made. We found that it is possible to get to know a collection from scratch, but this process required allocated time within the project. A working knowledge of preservation issues is vital, to inform decisions about final destinations for material. The confidence to contact and consult with academic departments is also part of the equation, as is the willingness to network actively with curators of other collections. The collection manager also needs tools and solutions in order to recommend particular strategies with

confidence and this is where the COPAC tools and hopefully a future UKRR Monograph Collection will deliver this much needed adjunct support.

### **Finally**

People matter! We could not have done this work without hours of dedicated and skilled work from library staff. We think we have done the best job that we can, for our current and future users... but of course only time can tell!

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