

Ephemera: the stuff of history

Report of the Working Party on Ephemera
set up by CILIP (the Chartered Institute of Library
and Information Professionals)

The report takes as its working definition of ephemera.
'The minor transient documents of everyday life'
(*Maurice Rickards*)

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1.0 Introduction

During 2001 the Preservation, Conservation, Security and Heritage Committee of the Library Association (now CILIP) raised concerns about ephemera collections within libraries, archives, museums and other organizations, and put together an initial discussion paper on the problems involved in the collection, preservation, and accessing of ephemera collections. It was agreed that the best way forward was to hold a colloquium with representatives from organizations recognized as having an interest in promoting the cause of ephemera. The Colloquium, held on 18 March 2002, was asked to decide on short- and long-term aims, and to consider outcomes and further action.

One of its conclusions was to form a small working party comprising people with a specific concern or expertise in the subject of ephemera, in order to carry forward some of the issues that had been raised at the Colloquium. These issues are reflected in the working party's objectives listed below.

2.0 Aim and objectives

2.1 Aim

To encourage a co-operative approach by archives, libraries, museums and others with a view to promoting good practice in the preservation, conservation and management of ephemera for the benefit of all users.

2.2 Objectives

Within the archives, libraries and museums world:

- 1 To draw attention to the variety and significance of ephemera in a curatorial context.
- 2 To promote the idea of an integrated policy for the acquisition and preservation of ephemera.
- 3 To identify and promote good practice in the management and conservation of ephemera.

- 4 To encourage links between the institutional world and private collectors, nationally and internationally.
- 5 To identify options for creating cataloguing standards and guidelines for ephemera.
- 6 To encourage the development of appropriate training courses for curators of ephemera.
- 7 To encourage a co-operative and integrated approach to the digitization of ephemera collections.
- 8 To identify areas of expertise in ephemera and related fields.
- 9 To encourage the archiving of electronic ephemera and the means of making them accessible.
- 10 To encourage the publication of finding aids for ephemera.

3.0 The world of ephemera

3.1 A long tradition

The formation of collections of ephemera is not a new phenomenon (Rickards, 1988). Bagford, Selden, and Pepys collected broadsides and similar material in the 17th century, and Sarah Bankes and Baron Rothschild trade cards in the 19th century. Since then many others have followed suit, including Ambrose Heal and John Johnson in the 20th century. Their collections are now preserved in major institutions. To such privately formed ephemera collections should be added those assembled by curators of our national institutions and, more recently, those responsible for preserving local and thematically-related material in archives, libraries and museums. Together, such material provides a vast historical resource. There is also a measure of expertise in dealing with ephemera: the reason for this report is that it remains largely uncoordinated.

3.2 Ephemera societies

Recent initiatives to encourage people to take ephemera seriously from various standpoints have come from individuals (private collectors and a few scholars). In the UK these initiatives were given a focus with the foundation of the Ephemera Society in 1975. Based in London, this society was from the outset, and remains, international in scope, even though several similar societies have since been formed abroad (in Australia, Canada, and the United States). The UK was not the first in the field. That distinction goes to France, where what is called ephemera in the English speaking world is normally called ‘vieux papiers’. A society with this name was founded in Paris in 1900 and soon afterwards began issuing a journal, which continues to be published. In addition to societies with general interests in ephemera, there are also numerous specialist societies in the UK and overseas which concern themselves with specific categories of ephemera (such as bookplates, book marks, beer mats, and postcards).

3.3 Ephemera as collectables

The emergence of ephemera societies has gone hand in hand with a growth in ephemera as collectables. Societies organize bazaars and fairs and have dealer members, some of whom specialize in particular categories of ephemera. In turn, auction houses and leading antiquarian booksellers have begun to take ephemera seriously. This trend to see ephemera as having value in the market place has had the effect of flushing out items that might otherwise not have been traceable.

3.4 Publications about ephemera

Academic interest in ephemera developed first as a by-product of collecting. The first book to deal seriously with a range of ephemera was John Grand-Carteret’s *Vieux papiers, vieilles images* (Paris, 1896). In this country Ambrose Heal’s works on trade cards in the 1920s helped to make writing about ephemera respectable, but it was not until the second half of the 20th century that general books on ephemera began to appear in the UK, starting with John Lewis’s, *Printed ephemera* (Ipswich, 1962). Thereafter, Britain and America joined

France in taking the lead. In the last few decades there has been a proliferation of publications on ephemera, most of them dealing with particular categories and themes. A landmark general publication was Rickards's *Encyclopedia of ephemera* (London and New York, 2000).

3.5 Ephemera exhibitions

From at least the 1960s exhibitions of ephemera began to be mounted. They include a series organized by the Ephemera Society in the 1970s and 1980s that was devoted to particular social themes, such as health, education, and travel. In recent years exhibitions have been mounted by the British Museum on popular prints (1999), the Bodleian Library on trade cards and invoices (2001), the Bibliothèque Forney in Paris on labels (2002), and the Musée de l'imprimerie de Lyon on ephemera in general (2001–2). Over the last ten years the University of Reading has organized a regular series of displays of ephemera on specific themes. These and other exhibitions have helped to raise the profile of ephemera in the curatorial world.

3.6 The Centre for Ephemera Studies

The potential of ephemera as a serious field of study was reinforced when the Centre for Ephemera studies, the first of its kind in the world, was established in 1993 at the University of Reading (in the Department of Typography & Graphic Communication) with Lord Briggs as its Patron. At the core of the Centre's work is the Rickards Collection of ephemera, which is a representative collection brought together by Maurice Rickards as indicative of the range of the field. The Centre has organized around twenty short courses, compiled a register of ephemera collections in the public domain in the UK (Centre for Ephemera Studies, 2002), and seen through the press the *Encyclopedia of ephemera* (3.4).

3.7 Joint seminars

The Centre for Ephemera Studies (3.6) works in association with the Foundation for Ephemera Studies, which has a legal responsibility for the Rickards Collection. Together these bodies have addressed aspects of ephemera through a

series of joint seminars organized in association with the British Library and the Public Record Office. Seminars have taken place at different locations (including the British Library, British Museum, and Public Record Office) to discuss curatorial issues relating specifically to ephemera, such as cataloguing and acquisitions. Those attending have come from across the curatorial domains.

4.0 The significance of ephemera

4.1 The impact of ephemera

The evidential value of ephemera has a particular significance for a wide range of people, both lay and specialist. This reflects the accessibility and particularity of much ephemera, and their ability to provide atmospheric flavour.

4.2 Historians and ephemera

Historians have come to recognize the significance of ephemera in recent decades. There is a growing awareness that ephemera reveal details of a kind that other documents may have ignored or treated differently, and that they often convey the spirit of an occasion or period evocatively through their content, language and graphic style. This interest in ephemera has been advanced by, on the one hand, improved access to collections and better finding aids and, on the other, by changes in technology that have made it easier to reproduce and disseminate ephemera.

4.3 Printing history and ephemera

In recent years historians of printing and graphic design have also come to recognize the importance of ephemera in the evolution of their subject. From the beginning of the 19th century ephemera have been the driving force in the development of printing technology and in the evolution of type design and graphic imagery. Any serious scholar concerned with print design and production of the last two centuries has therefore to consider ephemera (particularly security printing, advertising, and administrative and business printing) in tandem with

the history of the book – to do otherwise would be analogous to considering the history of architecture as relating only to cathedrals and churches.

4.4 Historical linguistics and ephemera

Ephemera also have documentary value for those concerned with the evolution of language. There is reason to believe that many words and expressions first found their way into print through ephemera. In addition, the subsets of language used in, for example, advertising and legal and bureaucratic documents are likely to be found in their ‘purest’ forms in ephemera rather than books.

4.5 Ephemera in schools

The significance of ephemera for the teaching of history in schools has already been demonstrated. In particular, Longman’s ‘Jackdaw’ series from the 1960s, and more recently the ephemera collections sold by the Public Record Office, have shown how effective reproductions of ephemeral documents of the past can be as part of a teaching pack. The educational potential of ephemera at all stages of education has increased beyond measure in recent years with the widespread availability of electronic methods of delivering images.

4.6 Ephemera and the heritage world

The heritage world has already recognized the documentary and communicative value of ephemera by using them effectively in exhibitions, permanent displays and electronic presentations. People from all walks of life seem to relate more directly to ephemera than they do to more substantial documents, presumably because they impinge on everyday matters and can usually be read or absorbed relatively quickly. When ephemera relate directly to people’s own lives and experiences they appear to be particularly effective in engaging interest.

4.7 Ephemera and the media

The widespread use of copiously illustrated magazines, newspapers and books in the second half of the 20th century, and the coming of television and, later, the Internet, have highlighted the value of ephemera for the communication

industries. Among the first to make good use of ephemera in this way was the *Oxford Junior Encyclopedia* (1949–54), which drew extensively for its illustrations on what is now the John Johnson Collection of the Bodleian Library (then belonging to Oxford University Press). With the development of the Internet the potential for using ephemera as illustrative matter has increased enormously (11.0).

4.8 Income generation through ephemera

The curatorial world is already aware of the value of ephemera as a means of raising much needed revenue. Many institutions publish postcards and posters based on ephemera in their collections as a means of income generation. Others have found that the cost of digitizing collections can be partly offset by income derived from the use of these images. Institutions and businesses that preserved their own ephemera in periods when they were seen as a liability have also begun to recognize that benefits may stem from greater public exposure of such material and the sale of the rights to use it.

5.0 Raising the profile and status of ephemera

5.1 Problems of definition

One factor that may have hindered ephemera from gaining proper recognition is that the word is difficult to define precisely. The definition cited on the title-page of this report ('the minor transient documents of everyday life') now has wide currency. The *Encyclopedia of ephemera* (3.4) has as its sub-title 'the fragmentary documents of everyday life' to emphasize that many items of ephemera now stand alone, divorced from both their original and archival context. The latest edition of the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (2002) provides a more prosaic definition of ephemera: 'Printed or written items produced for short-term use, as tickets, posters, and greetings cards' and this replaced one which began 'Printed matter of no lasting value except to a

collector'. No short definition is entirely satisfactory and collections of ephemera include some items, such as cigarette cards, that were designed to be collected; others, including playing cards, that were produced for continuing use; and yet others, like birth and marriage certificates, that were intended to be preserved over a long period.

In practice, in a curatorial context, ephemera usually tend to be considered by default. Single-leaf or short multi-page documents do not find a natural home alongside books in libraries, or – by virtue of their content – in departments of maps, music, or prints and drawings. In archives they tend to be buried among sets of thematically related documents. It is still the case within all three domains that the term ephemera is not widely used. We believe that this has to change, and recommend that every effort should be made by curators to adopt the word ephemera for appropriate categories of material whether they are in dedicated collections or not.

5.2 The trivialization of ephemera

The seemingly trivial nature of some ephemera (can labels, bus tickets, beer mats, etc), and the emphasis often put on such collections of material by the media, has tended to characterize the field in an unfortunate way, as demonstrated by the earlier Oxford dictionary definition (5.1). Work has therefore to be done to raise the status of ephemera and to encourage the curatorial world to accept them for their evidential significance (4.2, 4.3, 4.4) and take seriously the responsibility of preserving, cataloguing, and providing access to them (6.6, 11.1).

5.3 Status raising

Raising the status of ephemera is not an easy task and it rests with ephemerists to approach their subject in a way that commands academic and other respect. Ephemera already play a part in the world of scholarship: papers on aspects of ephemera are published from time to time in scholarly journals, a few PhD theses have focused on printed ephemera, and some books have made serious contributions to the field (3.4). In addition, scholarly exhibitions of ephemera (3.5) and specialist ephemera short courses and workshops have been organized

(3.6, 3.7, 13.1). Nevertheless, there is still a long way to go before ephemera are treated as serious evidential records.

5.4 Joint action needed

Though raising the profile and status of ephemera is primarily a matter for ephemerists, the serious treatment of ephemera in publicly available collections is the responsibility of curators in all three domains. Both communities are in a position to support and encourage one another, and there is a clear need for them to come together to address matters of common concern. We recommend all institutions with significant holdings of ephemera to consider appointing or training a specialist in the field to take responsibility for their ephemera collections. We further recommend all such institutions to draw attention to the importance of ephemera with a view to raising the profile of the field generally, and that the professional associations do likewise in relation to their members.

6.0 Existing collections of ephemera

6.1 The major institutions

Together, the major national institutions (principally the Bodleian Library, British Library, British Museum, Imperial War Museum, National Library of Scotland, National Library of Wales, Public Record Office, and Victoria & Albert Museum) have incomparable holdings of ephemera, some of which are probably unknown, even to specialists. The difficulty of locating particular items of ephemera in some of these collections is matched only by the considerable task of providing the necessary finding aids (6.6). Material that has been acquired from private collectors or from a firm or institution usually has some coherence and can therefore be accessed through a collection-level catalogue entry, but other ephemera may be buried away in miscellaneous collections. Though most of our largest institutions have staff with special responsibility for ephemera, the scale of their task often makes it difficult for them to provide face-to-face guidance of the kind usually available in smaller institutions. Many other national institutions

(for example, the National Museum of Photography Film and Television at Bradford and the National Maritime Museum at Greenwich) also have ephemera and must face similar problems in making their material known to potential users.

6.2 Local collections

Local authority archives (record offices), libraries, and museums are usually the first port of call for those interested in local ephemera and the way it elucidates the life of their region. They are often associated with local history groups and continuing education. Such collections may include ephemera with a thematic slant that reflects the commercial, industrial, or other history of the region (such as the pin and needle industry in Redditch, biscuit manufacturing at Reading, and the Thomas Bewick's Birthplace Museum, Cherryburn). Many such collections are listed in the register of ephemera collections (6.6).

6.3 University collections

University collections of ephemera may also reflect regional interests, though it is more likely that they were acquired or built up for their academic relevance. Examples of this kind are the trade union archives at Warwick and the collections of the Institute for Agricultural History at Reading. It is in the university sector that we find the two major representative collections of ephemera in the UK (the John Johnson Collection in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, and the Rickards Collection at Reading, which is much smaller and serves a didactic role). Among universities, Reading has probably been the pioneer in acquiring collections of ephemera in support of its interest in the history of printing and graphic design.

6.4 Business collections

Several major manufacturers and other businesses still preserve their archives on site and employ archivists, though there are fewer of both than there were a few decades ago. Understandably, ephemera figure prominently in companies that package their products and advertise them widely. Among the most important company archives of this kind are those of Bovril, Colman, Leverhulme, and Lea

& Perrins. In recent years, however, many company archives have been transferred to libraries, museums and record offices.

6.5 Private collections

Some of the finest collections of ephemera have been built up privately and remain in private hands (14.1). These include thematically-based collections (e.g. London history) and artefact-based collections (e.g. packaging). Some cover both categories. There are also more general collections that reflect a broad interest in the content and appearance of ephemera, both chronologically and geographically. It was private collectors who provided the starting point for many institutional collections in the past (3.1).

6.6 Knowledge of existing collections

Knowledge of existing collections of ephemera in the UK (as elsewhere) is extremely fragmented and largely anecdotal. The register of collections of ephemera compiled by the Centre for Ephemera Studies, although incomplete, includes over 500 entries, but presently excludes the holdings of our major national institutions. It is available in the form of a searchable CD and will shortly be published as a paper document (Centre for Ephemera Studies, 2002). As far as is known, this is the only directory of ephemera collections, though many entries in the *Encyclopedia of ephemera* (Rickards, 2000) are followed by listings of relevant collections. It hardly needs stating that good general finding aids are urgently needed. We recommend that CILIP and others encourage more institutions to contribute to the existing register, and that it is extended to include some general indication of the range of ephemera holdings in major institutions in conjunction with Resource. We also recommend that major national institutions with significant holdings of ephemera provide outline guides to them.

7.0 Finding the expertise

7.1 Different kinds of experts

Expertise in ephemera is distributed very widely. Most commonly it falls into two broad areas: the subject matter of ephemera (e.g. railways or costume) and particular categories of artefact (e.g. tickets or posters). Many ephemerists have expertise that covers both subject matter and kind of artefact. There are also those who take a much broader view of the subject and can be regarded as experts in, for example, particular periods or the design and production of ephemera. Others, though not many, can be regarded as experts in the cataloguing or display of ephemera. By contrast, expertise in the conservation of ephemera is not hard to find (7.4).

7.2 Starting points

The literature of ephemera (3.4) provides a useful starting point in the search for experts in that it identifies authors who are specialists in particular fields. Similarly, expertise among curators can be found through specialist collections. But probably the most important source of expertise are the members of ephemera societies, whose interests are listed in membership handbooks and are also evident in the range of topics covered by their society's publications. It is to these societies that professional bodies within the three domains should turn.

7.3 Curatorial expertise

Though aspects of expertise that are relevant to ephemera are to be found among information professionals (cataloguers, conservators, and database managers), there is as yet no coherent body of expertise that specifically addresses these issues in relation to ephemera. Training in curatorial aspects of ephemera is therefore of paramount importance and needs to be addressed, as it has been recently in some other countries (13.1).

7.4 Conservation expertise

Many conservators have expertise in dealing with ephemera, and access to advice from such specialists is essential to ensure the long-term preservation of ephemera collections. The number of in-house conservators working in UK archives, libraries and museums has declined over the past twenty years, though this has been matched by a rise in the number of conservators in private practice. A Conservation Register has been compiled with details of over 500 independent conservation practices throughout the United Kingdom and Ireland (United Kingdom Institute for Conservation, 2001). There is also a move by the professional associations of conservators towards a common accreditation framework; this will ensure that only qualified and experienced conservators are included on the Conservation Register.

7.5 Limitations of human networking

In practice, those looking for expertise on matters that relate to ephemera make use of a well-established informal network of collectors, curators, dealers, and academics. This works in every conceivable way, nationally and internationally, and the kind of advice given ranges from highly specific information about particular items to general guidance on routine matters. Inevitably, this informal network relates to a privileged few, and it seems sensible to find alternative channels of communication for those who are presently not part of it. It is recommended therefore that CILIP takes the initiative by forming a standing committee on ephemera across the three domains and with representatives from specialist ephemera groups. Such a committee would then be in a position to take action on those recommendations for which no initiator has been identified.

8.0 Acquisitions

8.1 The scale of the problem

Ephemera of the past have survived by chance or because they have been collected by individuals (and later institutions) with special interests. Consequently, some kinds of material were collected while others were largely ignored. The ephemera produced today present a very different problem: one of scale. In the 1860s it was calculated – albeit not very scientifically – that over one thousand million items of ephemera were distributed annually on the streets of London alone (Smith, 1863). This figure must be dwarfed by the present output of ephemera. Much of this material is readily available, but the sheer scale of production makes it hard to decide what to keep. Unlike those concerned with older ephemera, where it is possible to judge value in retrospect, those making decisions about current ephemera are in an almost impossible position.

8.2 Criteria for collection

There is at present no formal agreement or understanding between libraries, archives and museums as to what should be collected. Consequently, each institution operates in isolation, collecting material specific to their remit, or sometimes even the whims of its curators. This leads to omissions and duplications and does little to resolve the problem referred to in (8.1). Some countries have a deposit system that results in an accumulation of largely uncatalogued material on a vast scale. But with the exception of this approach, the process of collecting material tends to be *ad hoc*. Various other approaches have been tried. Some institutions collect in a regular and controlled way everything that can be found on a particular day; others collect around particular events they hold to be important locally or nationally; and at least one individual is known to have saved everything that fell through his letterbox over a period of decades.

It seems probable that the combined holdings of institutions across the three domains are grossly unrepresentative of ephemera as a whole by virtue of

the ways they have been built up. We should at the very least be aware of this and therefore recommend that broad criteria are established for preserving and collecting ephemera across the three domains. This should go some way to rectifying the imbalances of the past and creating more representative collections in the future.

8.3 National and local policies for collections

Statutory requirements exist for the deposit of books and some other kinds of documents, but no provision of this kind is made for ephemera. It is therefore unclear what exists and what might be acquired in the future. Scotland has undertaken a national audit of its museum collections, but has excluded ephemera; many surveys of collections have taken place on a regional or local level in England, though few identify ephemera as a category to record. This severely hampers the location of material by researchers and results in the under-exploitation of this important intellectual resource.

In our view all archives, libraries, and museums should consider having policies for the acquisition of ephemera, and to state publicly what they are. In this way significant gaps would be defined. Where appropriate, these policies should include – as the British Library’s does – categories of ephemera not being collected. Guidance may be needed for institutions and organizations acquiring ephemera in order to encourage appropriate collaboration over such policies. We also believe that future national surveys of collections of curatorial material should embrace ephemera unless there is a specific reason for omitting them.

8.4 Disposal of materials

Decisions have to be made about the disposal or retention of material. This tends to be a politically sensitive area, and general guidance is already available on factors that must be considered in any such decision making (e.g. Museum Association, 2002; Rare Books Group of CILIP, 2002 a). Collections may have originally been gifted, or there may be a statutory reason for the retention of certain material. Such issues have to be taken into account when deciding on the

future of an item or collection, which means that acquisitions policies (8.3) should include procedures for the documentation of provenance, and for any supporting material that explains why a specific item is held. A disposal policy should also give guidance about the valuation of material, and procedures for consulting with organizations or institutions with cognate collections. Ways of finding appropriate homes for material to be disposed of should be central to any such policy and would be helped by collaboration between institutions of the kind referred to in 8.3.

8.5 Funding acquisitions

Inevitably, the acquisition of items for ephemera collections is restricted by lack of funding. The main financial constraints are not normally the cost of collecting material (current material may be picked up on the streets), but those of staffing, storage, conservation, security, and the production of catalogues and finding aids. All the same, curators should have some awareness of the market value of rare items of ephemera (bearing in mind the considerable increases in prices in recent years), so that they can make informed judgments about what they buy. Some institutions might consider earmarking funding for the acquisition and subsequent management of ephemera.

9.0 Collection management

9.1 General policies

Ephemera present particular management problems because they are so diverse. They range in size from large-scale posters to tiny items, such as watch labels and binders' tickets, and include three-dimensional items, such as packaging, and items with moveable parts. In addition, ephemera will have been produced on a variety of unstable substrates, and not just acidic paper (9.2). Institutions should therefore regularly review their policies and procedures (in relation to building maintenance, environmental monitoring and control, security, storage, cleaning regimes, registration, accessioning and cataloguing, conservation, exhibitions and

loans, and disaster planning) to ensure that their collections are being cared for to the highest levels possible, given the circumstances under which they work.

9.2 Acidic (brittle) paper

Libraries and archives have long been aware of the problem of acidic paper (brittle paper syndrome) and the effect this has had on items and, consequently, on access to collections. This problem stems principally from the increasing use of wood pulp in paper manufacture from around the middle of the 19th century, which is the period when the production of ephemera increased considerably. A high proportion of surviving ephemera is therefore likely to have been printed on such paper or board. Wood pulp contains lignin, which causes the gradual discoloration and embrittlement of the material. Recent research (British Library, 2001) has highlighted the magnitude of the problem, and further research is in progress to develop a standard technical specification for mass de-acidification treatments and a review of the commercial processes of paper manufacture.

9.3 Storage

Appropriate environmental conditions for storing ephemera are in essence the same as those for books and archives, and guidance can be obtained from the National Preservation Office, the Historical Manuscripts Commission, the Public Record Office and mda. Information about such bodies can be obtained from their web sites. The recognized best practice standard is BS 5454:2000 (British Standards Institution, 2000). Specific guidance on the means of storing ephemera is difficult to give since formats vary greatly. Practices are by no means standard, and special problems arise when dealing with, for example, large, brittle posters and embossed work. In general, individual items should be stored in acid-free envelopes or clear polyester sleeves within appropriate boxes or drawers. Suitable cabinets, boxes and sleeves are readily available from reputable suppliers and the costs are not significantly greater than those of less suitable material.

9.4 Reading room practice

More damage occurs to ephemera through inept handling than any other factor, except perhaps housing them in the poorest environmental conditions. All staff and researchers should be trained in correct handling procedures, and appropriate guidelines should be posted in reading rooms. Security is also an important consideration in the management of study areas as small items of ephemera are vulnerable and can have a high market value. As with all such material, appropriate precautions need to be taken to ensure their security (from theft, accidental damage and vandalism). Guidance is provided in several recent reports (National Preservation Office, 2001; Resource, 2003), the latter giving good advice on the invigilation of study areas.

9.5 Surrogates

Copies of documents, often called surrogates, are an effective means of safeguarding vulnerable materials from damage and wear through use. However, making copies is time consuming and not always affordable, and those with appropriate credentials must be allowed to refer to original items, since copies do not meet the needs of all researchers. Surrogate methods include fiche, microfilm, photography, photocopying and digitization (11.0). Several high-profile initiatives have been taken in the archive, library, and museum sectors to digitize collections of ephemera (11.3), and guidance on digitization can be obtained from the University of Bristol Technical Advisory Service for Images (<http://www.tasi.ac.uk>).

All such copying processes are a form of use, and involve exposing documents to handling, light and other risks. Suitable precautions must therefore be taken to protect originals when they are being copied. It should be remembered that copying operations can breach copyright, and that the absence of a copyright statement does not mean that a document is in the public domain.

9.6 Assessing conservation/ preservation needs

The assessment of conservation/preservation needs has traditionally been done, if at all, through item by item condition surveys or environmental audits. These are time consuming, labour intensive and therefore costly to carry out. Well-designed sample-based surveys can give an accurate picture of the condition of a collection (Eden, Paul, et al, 1998), though more precise ways of identifying and prioritizing preservation needs have been developed (Resource, 2002 a; National Preservation Office, 2001). It is recommended that all collections are assessed using one of these schemes and that this process is repeated at intervals in order to ensure continued improvement in the level of care they are afforded.

9.7 Funding better practice

Charitable bodies and the Heritage Lottery Fund do not normally cover running costs, but will provide support to improve storage and for conservation and cataloguing projects (which feature strongly in the latter's strategic plans for 2002–7). Information about sources of grants is available through the publications of such organizations as the Charities Aid Foundation (2001), but no such source is aimed specifically at those responsible for ephemera collections. All applications for funding should show that there will be some tangible benefit to the user from any award made.

There is a need for a document that clearly demonstrates to potential sponsors and charities why ephemera are important and how collections can be used to inspire, inform, educate and give pleasure to people of all kinds. A document of this kind, incorporating information on potential sources of funding and basic guidance on making applications, would be a cost-effective way of helping collection managers who work with ephemera.

9.8 Search tools

The word ephemera is not yet widely used (5.1) and material that falls under this heading is frequently to be found – though not necessarily described as such – in all kinds of collections. New tools are being developed to help researchers locate

collections and particular material they are interested in, though at present the only finding aid specifically relating to ephemera is the register compiled by the Centre for Ephemera Studies (6.6). More generally, collection-level descriptions are now developed to either the RSLP Schema or ISAD(G) standard. These have been used by Access to Archives, Archives Hub, Cornucopia and various RSLP projects.

Ideally, however, collections should be catalogued item by item, in order to establish ownership, make items accessible, and facilitate inventory checks and other types of surveys. Key collections of national significance should be prioritized for cataloguing in this way (9.7). Catalogues should follow a recognized system and be accessible electronically (10.0). Though this is normal procedure for publicly owned collections, it is often not for those in private hands. We suggest that the Ephemera Society encourages all private collectors who wish to catalogue their material to adopt a recognized system of cataloguing.

10.0 Cataloguing and documentation

10.1 Book cataloguing standards

The Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules ([AACR II, 2002]) are widely used in the English-speaking world as a framework for cataloguing books, documents, manuscripts, and now electronic material. Along with format standards, the rules also provide for consistent use of capitalization, abbreviation and numerals.

However, they were created primarily with books in mind, and ephemera are not easily accommodated by the recognized data fields available for books. When ephemera are collected, the purpose for their collection and their long term use and storage will differ from their original purpose. Beer mats are collected not for use as beer mats, but for their relevance to breweries, advertising, or design. In this they resemble museum artefacts, whose collection and use is usually linked to historical, cultural or social research.

10.2 Museum cataloguing standards

The most widely used standard for museum cataloguing in the UK is SPECTRUM (Standard procedures for collections recording used in museums), which was created by mda (formerly the Museum Documentation Association). SPECTRUM is increasingly used for the exchange of museum data internationally. A recent project of the Society of Archivists looked at mapping the Encoded Archival Description standard (EAD), the General International Standard Archival Description (ISAD (G)), and the Manual of Archival Description (MAD) to SPECTRUM, to compare thesauri and name terms. The conclusions this project reached included a recognition that SPECTRUM tends to break units of information down into smaller sections than an archival catalogue. It may therefore be of value when considering the requirements for detailed description, and multiple access points required by those cataloguing ephemera. In addition, the International Committee for Documentation (CIDOC) of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) has developed a set of guidelines (CIDOC, 1995). These include information categories for object description, as well as recommendations on syntax, format and vocabularies, and are offered as a basis for new international and national standards. We recommend that the needs of those cataloguing ephemera be made known to all those bodies referred to above, specifically in relation to thesauri (10.5).

10.3 Metadata standards

There is also the *Dublin Core*, a metadata standard that was designed to be applied to resources in any discipline (Miller and Greenstein, 1997). Metadata standards, although originally defined for digital information objects, can also be used to refer to non-digital objects, though the experience of one leading institution is that its fields are not sufficiently refined to meet all the needs of cataloguers of ephemera. With the growth of digital ephemera and electronic finding aids, the need for metadata standards to describe, manage, administer and access items needs to be formalized.

10.4 Labelling and marking ephemera

Cataloguing depends on linking a record to the item it relates to. This should be done without damaging the item's intrinsic value, which may be extremely difficult when dealing with very small items of ephemera (e.g. binders' tickets). The problems of labelling or marking objects has been addressed by CIDOC in a fact sheet (CIDOC, 2000).

10.5 An ephemera thesaurus

To provide consistency between collection descriptions a thesaurus of artefactual and genre terms used for ephemera is essential. Encoded Archival Description (EAD), the General International Standard Archival Description (ISAD (G)), the Canadian Rules for Archival Description, the British Manual of Archival Description (MAD), the Library of Congress Thesaurus for Graphic Materials (Library of Congress, 1995), and publications of the International Organization for Standardization are just some of the recommendations and standards relevant to this task. Nevertheless, they are not sufficient to define the enormous range of categories of ephemera in existence. Any useful thesaurus would have to be updated on a regular basis to include new kinds of items (e.g. pictorial entrance ticket, post-it note).

There is also a real need for a concordance of American and English terms for ephemera (with synonyms in each language where appropriate). A useful further step would be to compile a related glossary of ephemera in several major European languages, as standard dictionaries are inadequate at this level of particularity. A start could be made with a French/English concordance through the society *Le Vieux Papier* and the *Musée de l'imprimerie de Lyon*.

10.6 Cataloguing standardization

Ideally there should be a common cataloguing method for similar ephemera collections so that catalogues can be standardized and the user's task made simpler. There is little chance that this will ever be the case. A seminar on cataloguing ephemera at Reading in 1995 revealed that (of those represented) no

two of our major institutions with holdings of ephemera were cataloguing their material in the same way. This is partly because their collections of ephemera vary so widely, and partly because the host institutions face different kinds of problems. The quest for standardization in cataloguing has therefore to be limited to matters of principle and structure (so that various systems can work in conjunction with one another), and to settling on a thesaurus of terms for ephemera. A new cataloguing standard may not be required, but it is important to modify existing rules so that they encompass ephemera of all kinds. We recommend that steps be taken to revise the most used cataloguing rules (and certainly AACR II) to take into account the issues raised above (10.1, 10.2, 10.5).

11.0 Digitization

11.1 Purposes of digitization

The scanning of archival and museum artefacts to produce electronic records was initially seen as a means of protecting valuable and often fragile items from frequent handling (9.5). Such electronic traces were seen as the first port of call for enquirers, so that they could decide whether they needed to see the original item. This function of digital records still exists; but digitized images that can be viewed locally or via the web perform other functions. They act as finding aids (6.6), publicize the holdings of institutions by showing representative items, and provide an opportunity for income generation (4.8). Over the last few years they have become general tools of the researcher and, as far as the market for ephemera is concerned, an important sales tool.

11.2 Suitability of ephemera for digitization

Compared with books and many museum artefacts, ephemera are well suited to digitization. They are usually two-dimensional and small enough to fit on to a flatbed scanner. Even when multi-page ephemera need to be scanned, the problems are usually not significant. In many cases, ephemera can be read on

screen the same size or nearly the same size as the original and look very convincing. For these and other reasons (11.1) some institutions and individuals have taken steps to digitize parts or all of their collections of ephemera.

11.3 Some digitization projects

The most ambitious project to digitize ephemera is probably the American Memory project of the Library of Congress (<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amhome.html>). The aim is to digitize 30,000 items of ephemera in the long run, and so far over 10,000 have been made available on the web. Among leading UK institutions who have pioneered the digitization of ephemera are the John Johnson Collection of the Bodleian Library (motoring ephemera and trade cards), the Bodleian Library (broadside ballads), the Guildhall Library, Department of Maps and Prints (prints, drawings, and ephemera), the Museum of London (Festival of Britain material). Many other institutions include ephemera within much broader programmes of digitization. Some individuals have begun to digitize items in their own collections, and efforts are being made under the 'Ephemera 21' project to harness such efforts in a collaborative way (14.2). In addition, dealers in collectables, principally through e-bay, and numerous specialist dealers in ephemera, make good use of the web to display digital images of ephemera they have for sale.

There are technical standards for digitization that have been developed by, among others, the Resource / New Opportunities Fund. Members of the ephemera community need to implement these to ensure that they can interoperate with other digital services.

11.4 Implications in general

Digitization projects – except when undertaken by individuals who do the work themselves – are costly in terms of labour. Most institutional projects have been specially funded, and this has frequently determined what was digitized. If the primary reason for digitization projects is to protect material that is at risk, there may be better ways of achieving this end, as all the available evidence suggests

that digitizing a collection simply increases its use and the demand to look at originals. The major arguments for digitizing ephemera may therefore not have to do with preservation, but with providing better finding aids (6.6). There is, however, a major problem. Much ephemera of the twentieth century and later is still protected by copyright and there is an obvious need to act cautiously with regard to the rights of artists, designers, writers, photographers, printers, publishers, service providers, manufacturers and suppliers.

11.5 Implications for cataloguing ephemera

Digitization of images came on the scene at much the same time that traditional approaches to cataloguing ephemera began to be questioned. Clearly digitization does not obviate the need for cataloguing in the traditional sense, since at present all search tasks have to be undertaken by means of keyword or other alphanumeric means. Effective search devices may be developed in the future that can detect the shape of an ephemeral item (e.g. a circular volvelle) or the broad outline of an image on it (e.g. a standing figure on a sheet-music cover). But whether such finding aids are made available or not, cataloguing seems likely to reflect in some way the increasing use of digital images.

Electronic cataloguing records need to be managed and preserved in accordance with standards for the preservation of other digital material (12.3).

12.0 Electronic ephemera

12.0 Defining electronic ephemera

By electronic ephemera we mean documents that are ‘born digital’ rather than digitized from analogue material on paper or some other substrate (11.0). Though there is currently no firm definition of this category of ephemera, it would include the electronic equivalents of paper documents (e.g. invitations, notices) as well as entirely new kinds of documents, some of which involve interactivity.

12.2 ‘Born digital’ ephemera

Examples of ‘born digital’ ephemera could include any of the following: database records, e-mails, online discussion lists, web sites, flash banner ads, computer graphic files, computer/digital art, computer and web interactives, text messages. This type of ephemera originates from an electronic device and is created in the form of a digital file which is transmitted to another electronic device for viewing or manipulating on screen or, when printed out, on paper.

12.3 Preserving electronic ephemera

‘Born digital’ ephemera tend to be more transient in their use and more elusive in terms of management and preservation than their paper-based counterparts because digital technologies are apt to change frequently. The digital file itself can be apt to undergo different changes to its digital form, for example, if a file is converted (Word to PDF) or if it is ‘repurposed’ for delivery to another digital platform (Internet or CD Rom for example). As with hard copy ephemera, there are no recognized organizations or authorities with responsibility for collecting electronic ephemera. Nevertheless, web sites have begun to be assembled, stored, and disseminated through the Digital Preservation Coalition (DPC), Minerva’s Web Preservation project (<http://www.loc.gov/minerva>), the Internet Archive ‘Wayback Machine’ (which has been collecting open access pages since 1996), and the Research Libraries Group and Online Computer Library Centre web archiving project group (<http://www.oclc.org/research/pmwg/>). These projects do not work within an overall strategy for collection and together they may omit or duplicate material. Moreover, they are not concerned with some categories of ephemera, such as e-mail and flash ads. The preservation of electronic material, though not electronic ephemera, has already been the subject of some studies (Muir, 2001; Beagrie and Jones, 2001).

This rapidly growing field presents too many problems to be addressed properly in this report, and we recommend that the Digital Preservation Coalition be invited to consider curatorial matters relating to ‘born digital’ ephemera, and

to collaborate in the production of recommendations for their long-term management and use.

13.0 Training

13.1 Professional development

Conferences and short training courses on topics that might be relevant to curators of ephemera are regularly advertised in the newsletters and journals of the professional curatorial associations. However, they are normally available only to their members. As far as we are aware, no training courses specific to ephemera exist in the UK. The nearest approach to training and awareness courses are the one-day workshops, seminars and similar events organized two or three times a year by the Centre for Ephemera Studies (3.6). These have addressed a variety of aspects of the subject and have been attended by, among others, curators from many of our national institutions. In addition, the Director of the Centre has been invited to run one-week courses on ephemera at the Rare Book School of the University of Virginia (2001, 2002, 2003) and similar ones for the Institut d'histoire du livre in Lyon (2001, 2002, 2003).

It is now recognized that continuous professional development should form an important part in raising standards and improving the morale of staff (whether paid or volunteers). We recommend that the Society of Archivists, CILIP, Museums Association, and Centre for Ephemera Studies work together to set up training and awareness courses for curators of ephemera collections.

13.2 Responsibility for training

The primary responsibility for training strategy for the sector rests with the two national training organisations (NTOs), the Information Sciences NTO and the Cultural Heritage NTO. They were established by the Department for Education and Science (DfES), though it only funds specific elements of their work. In April 2001 the DfES announced its intention to replace the NTOs with larger,

more broad-based sector skills councils. However, progress has been slow and it is not clear how the interests of the sector will be represented after the NTOs cease in March 2003. In September 2002 Resource commissioned Demos to carry out research on its behalf to establish an authoritative overview of current workforce development initiatives across the domains and to consult the views of stakeholders. Their report will appear by spring 2003.

13.3 Conservation and collection care

The United Kingdom has good primary conservation training facilities. The most relevant to ephemera collections are the paper conservation courses at Camberwell College of Art (part of the London Institute) and the University of Northumbria. Though both courses focus more on fine art documents (prints, drawings and watercolours) than ephemera, the knowledge and skills they develop are directly applicable to ephemera.

The combined total of graduates from both institutions is approximately thirty every year. The in-service training in archive conservation organized by the Society of Archivists also produces people fully capable of conserving and caring for ephemera, though those trained through this route tend to remain within archive institutions. The number training through this route at any one time has always been small and the take up in recent years has been very low. The problem seems to be a lack of willingness from employers to fund training posts and a diminishing interest in this branch of conservation work as a career. Overall there is no shortage of conservators capable of working on ephemera though, unfortunately, too few institutions employ them. A survey carried out in 1998 identified 82 archives, 31 libraries (5 public and 17 university) and 107 museums as having in-house conservation services (Coles, Alison, et al, 1998). Most institutions, if they use conservators at all, prefer to contract out their work to private conservators (7.4).

14.0 The role of the private collector

14.1 Private collectors of ephemera

Private collections of ephemera that found their way into British libraries and museums many years ago (3.1) are still among the prize collections of their kind anywhere in the world. This has been the traditional way in which ephemera have been acquired by institutions, and could still be a route today. Naturally, private collectors are discreet about the scale and value of their collections, but some collections of ephemera in private hands dwarf similar collections in national institutions. Potentially they are an important resource. Financial issues present greater problems in the UK (as compared with the US), but collections acquired from discriminating and punctilious owners often have extra value by virtue of the expertise that has gone into their assembly. They are also likely to come in an orderly, well preserved way, and they might even be catalogued.

14.2 ‘Ephemera 21’

When private collections of ephemera cannot be acquired, it might be possible for an institution to receive electronic traces of them before they are broken up. Under the title ‘Ephemera 21’ a private collector has taken the initiative to encourage other private collectors of ephemera to digitize their collections and deposit records of them centrally. The project is undertaken with the encouragement of the Ephemera Society and the Centre for Ephemera Studies and involves working to specified standards of a kind appropriate for non-professionals. In this way the expertise of collectors who have spent decades building up their collections and describing them can be harnessed for the benefit of a wider community, whether the collections in question are eventually dispersed or not. Guidance on digital imaging issues in general can be obtained from the University of Bristol Technical Advisory Service (9.5).

14.3 Tapping into the collecting world

Expertise in ephemera often goes hand in hand with building up a specialist collection. What is more, private collectors usually have a finger on the pulse of the ephemera world they are concerned with, and are in a position to react quickly to changing circumstances. By contrast, most curators of ephemera have to work across a broad field and do not have the luxury of specializing. They can also expect to move from one subject field to another in the course of their professional career. It therefore makes sense for curators of ephemera to take advantage of private collectors by drawing on their expertise.

14.4 Advantages of collaboration

Collaboration between contributors and private collectors may also lead to the lending of material for exhibitions and publications, and to collaborative digitization projects (14.2), particularly where private and institutional collections complement one another. In the long run, such cooperation might lead to the offer of material to public institutions on a basis that might not otherwise be affordable.

Summary of recommendations

General recommendations

- 1 That those involved with ephemera in archives, libraries and museums should cooperate on a continuing basis with specialist ephemera groups to address issues of common concern (5.4, 7.2, 14.2, 14.3, 14.4), and that CILIP takes the initiative in forming a joint standing committee on ephemera to take action on those recommendations of this report for which no initiator is identified (7.5).
- 2 That the three domains work with specialist ephemera groups to draw attention to the significance of ephemera with a view to raising the profile of the field generally (5.4).
- 3 That the professional curatorial associations raise the awareness of their members to the significance of ephemera in their respective domains (5.2, 5.4).
- 4 That broad criteria are established for the preservation, acquisition and disposal of ephemera to ensure the survival of significant and representative material and to avoid unnecessary duplication/replication nationally (8.2, 8.3, 8.4).
- 5 That better finding aids are developed both to help locate holdings of ephemera and to identify items within collections (6.6, 9.8, 10.1, 10.2, 10.5, 10.6).
- 6 That provision is made for specialist training in various curatorial aspects of ephemera (7.3, 13.1).

Specific recommendations

- 7 That the curatorial world adopts the word ephemera to describe the kind of material referred to in this report (5.1).
- 8 That institutions with significant holdings of ephemera consider appointing or training a specialist in the field to take responsibility for their collections (5.4).
- 9 That all institutions holding collections of ephemera should have explicit policies for the acquisition/disposal of such material, and that these policies might refer to earmarked funding (8.2, 8.3, 8.4, 8.5).

- 10 That the curatorial world should consider working with the Ephemera Society to build bridges between collectors and curators, so that it can draw on the specialist expertise of private collectors (14.3, 14.4).
- 11 That curators should be encouraged to take advantage of the popular appeal of ephemera by organizing exhibitions of ephemera on specific themes, or by using them as supporting material (3.5, 14.4).
- 12 That a document should be produced by the Centre for Ephemera Studies in conjunction with Resource to demonstrate to charities and potential sponsors why ephemera are important (9.7).
- 13 That the register of Ephemera Collections in the United Kingdom (which relates to publicly available collections) should be extended in co-operation with Resource to have wider coverage and to include the major national collections (6.6).
- 14 That individual institutions, including our major national ones, recognize the importance of developing introductory guides or some other general finding aids to the ephemera collections in their care (6.1, 6.6).
- 15 That key ephemera collections of national significance should be prioritized for cataloguing item by item in accordance with an appropriate system (9.8).
- 16 That the digitization of ephemera collections should be encouraged, not least because of the effectiveness of digital images as a means of widening access (11.1, 11.4).
- 17 That attempts should be made to harmonize the cataloguing of ephemera in relation to structural principles and terminology (10.6) (see also 18 below).
- 18 That the Joint Steering Committee for the revision of Anglo-American Rules should be asked to set in train a revision of the Rules so as to take better account of the specific needs of cataloguers of ephemera, and that a comprehensive thesaurus of genre terms applicable to ephemera should be compiled by them in association with mda in relation to SPECTRUM (10.1, 10.2, 10.5, 10.6).
- 19 That the society Le Vieux Papier, and the Musée de l'imprimerie de Lyon should be invited to participate in a French/English concordance of the thesaurus referred to in 18 above (10.5) .
- 20 That the Society of Archivists, the Museums Association, CILIP and the Centre for Ephemera Studies should work together to set up training and awareness courses in a range of areas specific to ephemera (e.g.

description and cataloguing, preservation, means of production, display, scholarship, valuation) (7.3, 13.1).

- 21 That future collection surveys include ephemera unless there is a specific reason for omitting them (8.3).
- 22 That private collectors should be encouraged to catalogue and digitize their own collections in association with the 'Ephemera 21' project, so that electronic traces of their collections survive as part of a national archive of digitized ephemera (9.8, 14.2).
- 23 That the Digital Preservation Coalition should be asked to consider the problems posed by the vast output of 'born digital' ephemera and to collaborate in the production of recommendations for their long-term management and use (12.3).
- 24 That the Ephemera Society should encourage all private collectors who intend to catalogue their collections to work to appropriate standards.

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Glossary of acronyms

AACR II – Anglo American cataloguing Rules, 2nd edn

BL – British Library

BM – British Museum

CAF – Charities Aid Foundation

CIDOC – International Committee for Documentation

CILIP – Chartered Institute for Librarians and Information Professionals

DfES – Department for Education and Skills

DPC – Digital Preservation Coalition

EAD – Encoded Archival Description

HMC – Historical Manuscripts Commission

ICOM – International Council of Museums

ISAD(G) – General International Standard Archival Description

ISO – International Organization for Standardization

MAD – British Manual of Archival Description

mda – (previously Museums Documentation Association)

NPO – National Preservation Office

NTO – National Training Organisation

OCLC – Online Computer Library Centre

PRO – Public Record Office

RLG – Research Libraries Group

RSLP – Research Support Libraries Programme

SPECTRUM – Standard Procedures for Collections Recording Used in Museums

UKIC – United Kingdom Institute for Conservation

V&A – Victoria & Albert Museum