



# Libraries:

## Changing Purpose and Philosophies

### **Introduction to the GLAM Sector**

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# Contents

Introduction .....	2
Accessibility of Library Materials .....	3
Preservation of Library Materials.....	5
Role of the Librarian.....	7
Conclusion .....	9
References.....	10

Coverpage image depicts a pile of books (Pixabay 2015).

## Introduction

The traditional library came into existence with the advent of the lending library in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century (Crawford 2015, p. 129). Coined the 'democratization of knowledge', members of the public were for the first time able to gain access to library information repositories, and the services and tools of a Librarian as researchers and resource retrieval specialist (Richter & Lawrence 1984, pp. 58-59).

The modern library environment has brought sweeping change into the sector through digitisation, education, and intermediary services that meet the increasing information needs of their patrons (Rice-Lively & Racine 1997).

This paper will compare the accessibility and preservation of library materials, and the role of the Librarian in a traditional and modern library setting.

## Accessibility of Library Materials

Stevenson and Domsy (2016, p. 376) found that where once a Librarian accessed a set of index cards (see Image 1), or an electronic high-level catalog to locate a library resource, a catalog search engine (see Image 2) is now utilised on-site, or remotely by a patron. Library resources, if digitised, can be located through full text browsing, and downloaded straightaway to a patron's computer (see Image 2). Digitisation removes the requirement of resource retrieval by hand.



*Image 1:*  
*Cabinet drawer wood catalogue*  
(Neenuvimalkumar 2017)

Stevenson and Domsy (2016, p. 376) state that digitisation and inter-library cooperation involving the creation of shared catalogue systems provides patrons with access to a wider selection of materials. Unlike a traditional library resource, a digital resource can be perused by multiple users simultaneously (see Image 2). Thanks to the internet, email, messaging, and remote collaboration systems functionality, a Librarian no longer needs to be onsite to provide system access advice. Nonetheless, digital activities are dependent upon a power supply and internet access.



**Image 2:**

*Two patrons listening to the same eBook simultaneously (in foreground) and a patron accessing the catalogue search engine using full text browsing & talking with a remote Library resource (in background)*  
(Author's own 2019, unpublished)

Traditional 'Private' libraries and the modern library environment unfortunately share a similarity – the 'Digital Divide' (Thompson et al. 2014, pp. 43-49). Access to specialised information sources in the modern library may be subscription-based and have restrictive licencing and copyright rules which only enable a user to view the library resource following a monetary exchange. This is reminiscent of a time when only scholars, theologians and aristocrats owned and utilised knowledge. In fact, a lack of access to the internet and a computer has closed information avenues to certain societal demographic groups (Metcalf 2007).

## Preservation of Library Materials

Librarians share preservation practices across both traditional and modern library environments, namely, repair techniques in surface cleaning and alkalisation, mould, fungus, insect and adhesive removal, mending and filling, sewing, flattening, fragile page backing and rebinding (see Image 3). Extensive preservation activities are reserved for archival repositories whereas a public library will purchase a reprint of a book instead of making costly repairs (Pearlmutter 2012, p. 85).



**Image 3:**  
*Staff preserving the Blocksidge collection. John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland  
(John Oxley Library 2019a)*

Fredericks (1992, pp. 96-99) states that the reformatting of library materials, that is making a copy in a different structure, for example microfilm, has been a part of a traditional library since the 1930's. In a modern library, preservation activities revolve around the digitisation of paper-based items, parchment, photographs, film, magnetic media, maps and other large items (see Image 4). Unlimited, economical storage of digital resources reduces the physical space requirement of modern libraries, its only limitation a reliance on a power supply and internet access. As modern libraries share resources, the responsibilities and conservation costs are apportioned across library budgets.



## Role of the Librarian

Digitisation has expanded the Librarians role significantly, the traditional activities of library resource selection, acquisition, cataloguing, collection building, retrieval, preservation and dissemination (Burke 2002, pp. 40-41), although still performed, no longer meet the educational, recreational, and informational needs of library patrons. Modern Librarians require technology-related skills that include the ability to build and maintain virtual collections, exhibition APPs and computer networks, design and implement web pages and catalogue search interfaces, and maintain electronic booking systems for public use computers (Burke 2002, pp. 40-41).



*Image 5:*  
*Librarian in two Intermediary roles as advocate and academic researcher*  
(Author's own 2019, unpublished)

As community intermediaries, the modern Librarian is seen as a knowledge source, an interpreter of legal, council and state-based services (Burke 2002, pp. 40-41), and an advocate for ostracised societal groups and communities (see Image 5). Stevenson and Domsy (2016, p. 382) state that modern Librarians are community educators,

developers and presenters of computer-based systems, and educational initiatives, for example assistive technology for people with disabilities. Librarians still provide advice to their patrons on reference materials, academic research, reading recommendations and catalog search queries (see Image 6), as well as facilitating in-house events.



**Image 6:**  
*Librarian's daily responsibilities*  
(Author's own 2019, unpublished)

## Conclusion

Rice-Lively and Racine (1997, p. 35) predicted correctly that to meet the technological challenges of the future, a modern Librarian must become a permanent student and ensure that no opportunity is missed in providing resources to library patrons. With this in mind, and our findings we can state that digitisation has had a major impact on traditional library practices within this paper.

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