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# The Special Collections Handbook

Alison Cullingford

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*The special collections handbook* was commissioned by the publishers to enable the author – the first ever Special Collections Librarian at Bradford University Library – ‘to share my experience and knowledge of developing special collections from scratch with few resources’ and is based on a decade’s worth of personal experience. In ten well-organised chapters, it aims for comprehensive coverage of the field:

- the care of special collections
- emergency planning
- understanding objects
- acquiring and developing special collections
- cataloguing, description and metadata
- legal and ethical issues
- user services
- marketing and communications
- widening access
- influencing and fund-raising

Each chapter ends with sections on ‘Further reading’, ‘Examples and case studies’ and ‘Useful websites’ (the latter two giving lists of web resources) and these sections are to be regularly updated on the author’s website accompanying the book: <<http://specialcollectionshandbook.com/>>. The book ends with an afterword sketching in possible future trends in special collections, brief appendixes on ‘Key reference resources for special collections’, and ‘Careers advice’, and a bibliography gathering together cited works with other recommended texts.

The text itself races across such a varied and extensive terrain that there are bound to be omissions: no mention of the *Oxford companion to the book*, by Michael F. Suarez, S.J. and H. R. Woudhuysen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010)

and *Medieval manuscripts in British libraries*, by Neil Ker and A. G. Watson, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969–1992; fifth volume of *Indexes and addenda*, by A.G. Watson and I. C. Cunningham (Oxford: Oxford University, 2002)); ‘Key reference resources for special collections’ really only lists resources helpful for the cataloguing of early printed books; the lack of illustrations is a pity in a fairly expensive volume, intended to appeal to student as well as to institutional budgets. The ‘Marketing diagram’ or ‘Special collections awareness pyramid’, one of only two visual elements in the book, might well be reversed in many institutions whose collections are well known to researchers, or very readily retrievable via Google. The case studies, of which the story of the not-in-Ker Macclesfield Psalter is one, are an excellent addition, but the brief mentions of the J. B. Priestley and PaxCat collections miss an opportunity to explain the significance of their Bradford provenance, giving the sort of nugget of information that sticks in the reader’s mind and may well spark future interest.

Caveats aside, this is a very well-produced book, with a rare absence of typographical errors, particularly vital in the listings of URLs. As a pointer to well-chosen and wide-ranging web resources across the whole field of special collections librarianship, the book is extremely useful, and if the author’s stated aim of keeping the links up-to-date is realised (by updating the links in the chapters on the *Handbook*’s website), the website will remain an excellent resource. Bookmark it now.