

Collection Security Summer School Vienna

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Session “Moving collections in an emergency or simply due to suggested/forced relocation”

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A survey to monitor our collections for brittle paper in 2005, made my library aware of serious problems with large amounts of brittle paper in the modern collections of both legal deposit and the special collections. First step taken was a project to find out how to solve the problem. We could either start a mass-deacidification program, or build a new cold-storage facility. The group of scientific conservators working with the decision making, headed by M.Sc. Cons. Birgit Vinther Hansen, made clear that the best long time plan was to build new storage with the possibility of various climatic zones, ranging from passively steered temperatures around 16 degrees C to cold storage down to 5 degrees C.

When the Royal Danish Library finally started to plan for new stacks in 2012 I had no idea that I would be as involved as I am, right now in the middle of 'the move of the century'. It has been a long process, frequently filled with very large obstacles, such as finding a well suited building site, how to get funding, how to work around a total lock-down during the pandemic, and many small things, that in the end turned out to have far larger importance than we had anticipated. In spite of this our brand new facility was finally inaugurated early May 2022, and Monday this week (September 5.), I and my colleagues could drink to the completion of the first moving sequence. Eight shelf kilometers containing materials from our special collections, and the legal deposit ephemera collection, are now safely placed some 30 kilometers outside Copenhagen at the remote storage of Vinge.

The most important lesson learned: Planning takes time, a lot of time!

As this is supposed to be an inspiration for further discussions I like to make a short summary of what I have found to be important during our preparations.

First of all, to secure the best possible storage for valuable cultural heritage collections the aim, the scope and the specifications must be checked, double-checked and refined until they are impeccable. The organization works best if the project has a clear structure and involves cross-disciplinary participants. The ways of command and decision have to be clear.

Our current organization consists of a governing group (two deputy directors, several heads of departments and the main project leader). A small executive group with only three participants coordinates the moving sequences, and the overall work (the main project leader, the storehouse inspector and a chief executive administrator from the staff of the deputy director at the National Heritage collections). A larger project-group with partners from all departments concerned (Special collections, legal deposit, preservation, catalogue, library system). Specialist working groups dealing with details and planning (mark-up for moving, placement, monitoring pests, re-packing, cleaning, mass corrections in the library system, expedition in the new stacks, transport, climatization from cold storage and many many more aspects).

The most important business apart from the actual construction, are placing and security. The large jig-saw puzzle assigning each object in every collection to the correct shelf in the specified climatic zone has been expertly handled by our storehouse inspector, who has developed a new digital tool in order to virtually control and monitor the space available. It was developed in cooperation with Swedish IT-firm Revit. The details of our security system has been managed by our chief of security (Claus Friis who is with us here in Vienna) and involves various installations, systems and rules to ensure the highest level of security for the collections, both when in the stacks, or in transit to the reading room.

I will end this short talk telling you about some of the main problems we have encountered. To change status in our library system (ALMA) for materials in transit, has due to various reasons proved impossible to fulfil in the current work flow. Lack of resources has forced us to pare down re-packing and recording to an absolute minimum. We have to ensure that these collections are treated and catalogued before reaching the reading-room. Transport and daily maintenance is not yet thoroughly established and will probably experience a trial and error period. The cooperation with our sister institution the National Museum requires tact and diplomacy, as we encounter two different cultures in need of unification.



Material from the Special collections before treatment, i.e. packing in book boxes.



Materials after boxing and barcoding.



From the new stacks in Vinge.



The main hall in the old stacks before moving. This hall once housed the elder part of the Danish legal deposit collection, with bound books from around 1650-1950.