CHALLENGES FACING PRIVATE ARCHIVES & COLLECTIONS OF AUTOMOBILIA

This paper will discuss some issues facing collectors of archives, books, memorabilia, ephemera and magazines. The initial focus of our study was mainly centred on the physical identification, location and storage of motoring collections. However, as the study evolved it became apparent that smaller collections are faced with Library Management Systems that are often not fit for purpose.

Challenges
1. Cataloguing and managing a Collection

a) Physical location and handling of books and journals:
The placement of books under author, marque, motor sport, biographies, etc are subject to personal choice but this gets more difficult as the collection grows. This is particularly so for active libraries – finding and returning books to their proper location.
These days most large public and institutional libraries do not allow access to "the stacks" and books are often placed in what appears to be random order. However, they are easily located by tracking with QR codes, barcodes, or even micro-chips. These are also great aids in supervising lending and returns.
At the other end of the spectrum, many private collections are not formally recorded at all – we like to think we know, or think we know, where our books are, but ultimately a formal listing system is needed.

b) Catalogue records:
The old drawers of hand-written record cards have now almost universally been replaced electronically and MS Excel is usually the popular initial choice for a searchable database. It is already installed on most computers. It is simple, effective and has considerable capacity, but it is not externally visible and control over the data is lost once it is shared. MS Access is the next step up in both sophistication and complexity. It provides excellent search features and storage of different media types, but it takes time to master.

Suggested fields for an Excel or Access files are
1   Catalogue number
2   Title
3   Author
4   Pub date
5   Publisher
6   Topic/Marque/Era
7   ISBN / OCLC (the latter is required for all pre-ISBN books (c1970). ISBN can be scanned by iPhone or simple scanner.
8   Cover Image
9   Condition
10 Location
11 Where and when purchased, cost
12 Personal assessment: "star ranking"

It is most important to have regular reliable data backups, preferably to cloud-based and off-premises facilities.

It is also suggested time is spent devising a "location" code that is easy to use and is intuitive.

> eg. A bookshelf with 7 shelves and three sections could be labelled as follows: [From top LH corner] SA1 to [bottom RH corner] SC7.
> Where S = Shelves, A = first section, 1 = first shelf, C = 3rd section, 7 = bottom shelf.

Library Management Systems (LMS):
As the collections grow, the custodians begin to look for more sophisticated systems including the opportunity to share their catalogues, if not the books themselves. Many specialists Library Management Systems are available, but some are complicated and expensive and are designed for larger lending libraries, including applications for tracking the books via QR or barcodes. They have features that private and research libraries might not want or need.

Sharing information: Online visibility of the catalogues and collections is needed – people want/need to know what is out there and what is rare and/or is important. Who has what and where?
There is international recognition of mutual benefits and a need for networks, but there are no common standards or systems. The REVS Institute in Florida, USA, sets the standard, but is virtually alone.

Advanced LMS: The international library cataloguing standard, as provided by Trove and WorldCat for example, is complex and technically difficult; but gives high-level national and international links and visibility. This (MARC) system has evolved over the past 60 years with successive layers of complexity.
Pathways to TROVE (Australian National Bibliographic Database) and OCLC /WorldCat are provided by Koha Library Software, or SoftLink Library, for example. However, these are felt to be too difficult and expensive for smaller libraries who are turning to a variety of new simpler software programs:

Basic library management systems (LMS): the library world disrupters are new, inexpensive, effective and easy to use: LibraryThing and LibraryWorld for example. They are designed for smaller libraries, have good visibility and data-sharing facilities, are cloud-based and feature on-line communication and accessibility, but also have short-comings, including rigid input fields and the lack of data control and reliability. Anyone can add and edit records.

There is provision in LibraryThing to have a private collection if you do not wish to share.
There is a need for a modern mid-way LMS system. It's probably out there, but we haven't found it yet.

2. Shelving and Storing your collection
Shelving
While it seems all you need is a bookshelf, cupboard or filing drawer, thought needs to be given how you shelve items.
By title or by author or by subject (marque etc) whichever is used it must relate to the catalogue.

There are advantages and disadvantages for each.

Storage
Books are easy, they sit on a shelf, magazines are best in a magazine box, in date order and if pre-1980, at least, should be in acid free plastic pockets. Large format items in flat folio drawers.
Take care of silverfish, moths (with camphor) and moisture, regularly check your collection for both.

3. Access

Private collectors are unlikely to give open access to their collections. Larger public reference libraries do not usually permit lending. Public access of some sort is ultimately the objective of all serious libraries. Personal visits to study and copy. Options for remote scanning. Costs need to be recovered. Membership or subscription fees. Scanning and copying charges.

Access can include sharing. Consider requests from known researchers for access to your collection so long as you are comfortable. This may be either a visit or "looking up a request" or scanning for private use. Be careful of those who are "takers and not givers" this means it should be a two-way street. You can form valuable circles of like minded collectors who share a common subject interest.

Digitisation:
A lot of material is in copyright and sharing it can be illegal – be aware before you scan journals and books. Many older titles have already been scanned and digitised and are available online and as eBooks. There is a need for more journals to be available – and particularly detailed indexes to the contents. Automotive Research Library in USA has scanned thousands of books, magazines and manuals which are available to members for on-line subscription.
Digitisation alone is not the answer. It's expensive and time consuming. Access to original print material is still needed now and will be well into the future.

4. Conservation

Books, magazines, photographs etc, all deteriorate, mostly happens before you collect them. Books and magazines over 60 years old get loose covers, splines, pages.
Two solutions -
    A professional restorer
    Do it yourself with the help of Youtube. (But be careful, sometimes it's better to leave it, than damage further with a poor restoration job).
    At the very least use library grade clear protective film and make slip on covers.

Photographs fade and turn yellow if they were not "fixed" correctly when printed. Get them scanned and photo shopped, adjusting contrast make the blacks black and the whites white. Photoshop does this easily with "auto levels" under the Image-Adjustments tab.

5. The Future - What happens when I die?

This is a reality check, we all die.
"What's going to happen to my library when I'm gone?"

What's considered interesting and valuable now is often quite different from what research interests develop over time – need to collect and record now the material that future researchers will want to use.

We want/need to preserve physical collections

Important to try to keep significant collections intact. Added complexity of diversified collections – journals, photographs, videos, DVDs, movies, slides, microfiche, brochures, pamphlets, documents, artefacts, engineering drawings, etc.

To avoid distress for a wife/partner/child plan for your collections future.
No planning: then expect one of the following -
- family throws it out
- family sees only the $ value
- family members take what they want and leave the rest
- it just sits in a shed going to ruin

Plan - most important to discuss with your family, what do they want to happen stops arguments later.
- If needed get a clause added to the Will.

Possible Outcomes
Donations
- talk to the recipient first - do they want it all or just specific items?
- is the recipient viable, if they fold what happens to the collection?
- will your collection be available for access and under what conditions?

Where to Donate?
Established libraries: national, state, municipal, universities - most have very selective acquisition policies and motoring/automotive is not a current priority. Inevitably they are under-funded and have insufficient space.

Specialist motoring libraries: Sporting Car Club SA; George Brooks Library at the National Motor Museum, Birdwood; Australian Motoring Heritage Foundation and Motorlife Museum being examples; hopefully others to be established. There will be a need to develop support bases; finance, volunteers, etc.
Melbourne Cricket Club library is an excellent example of what can be developed - it has grown into one of world's largest sporting libraries, but the focus is limited to Victoria/Australia and 'sporting' themes.

Victoria was once the home of the Australian automotive industry, which is now all but decimated. It still has a rich cultural and social motoring fabric with many active car clubs and museums. What is missing is a significant motoring library.

Or sell?
Inevitably the 'gems' are quickly sought by collectors and other libraries. The rest are left on the shelf. Private book shops, collectors, public internet auctions – <u>Donington Auctions</u>, for example. Good demand, but only for special titles.

Collections are intrinsically <u>valuable</u> and collectors don't want to see collection split up and "cherry-picked".

There is the potential for heritage and cultural loss of highly curated, specialist collections to future generations. Loss of potential reference material to researchers, academics and historians.

> Selling Up piece-meal:
> > Minus - breaks up collection
> > Plus - maximises value
> Sell complete collection to one person
> > Minus - does not realise true value
> > Plus – quick and easy (?)

Valuing your collection
> It's probably worth more than you think. A complete set of Wheels Magazines is probably worth $15,000 - $25,000 based on about $20/issue average.
> Any Holden sales brochure or PR booklet will fetch $90-100.
> How do you find someone who will pay a large sum for a complete collection?

6. Gold diggers - Just a warning
> These are people who turn up 2-3 days after you have died wanting items from your collection using phrases like:
> > I loaned it 10 years ago,
> > he said I could have it,
> > I'll help you sort it all out,
> > I can take it and sell it for you.
> Organise a trusted friend to assist your family manage this if required. Is it in your will?

This is a guide, if nothing else think about the issues covered and how they relate to your collection. After all you have spent considerable time, energy and perhaps money pulling it all together.

For your collection's future you need to plan now.

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