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The Material Handling and Protective Housing Guidelines for Digitisation

Introduction

During the past decade, the role of digitisation as a preservation tool for the collection material in libraries and archives has grown stronger. Despite the fact that the digital copy is in itself a source that requires preservation, the great benefit of digitisation is that it provides potential for the global access of the material. Digitisation ensures that the original material does not need to be handled any longer, thus, the deterioration caused by handling, exposure to light and changes in the environmental conditions would be minimized.

Before a document, picture, book or other digitised material becomes available online it requires scanning. The scanning process involves much handling of the original material and can easily cause physical damage. Scanners are continuously being developed to be material friendly, however, the scanned material itself can be complex. Consequently, additional tools, aids and handling guidance are required in order for the operator to produce the best possible digital image without causing damage to the object.

In 2009-2010 'The Material Handling and Protective Housing Guidelines for Digitisation' were created in the National Library of Finland’s Centre for Preservation and Digitisation. The aim of the guidelines is to instruct the operators to safely and correctly handle all the different types of library and archival material during the scanning process. The guidelines were accomplished through collaboration between a conservator and the operators who had long term experience in operating scanners and handling different types of library and archival material.

The Aim of the Guidelines

The objective of the guidelines is to produce the best possible digital image, while taking into consideration the correct handling of an object during all the stages of the digitisation process. The guidelines give detailed and illustrated information about the different types of library and archival material, their characteristics and the correct handling of them. This will enable the operator to choose an appropriate scanner for each type of material and minimise and prevent the physical damage to the original items that often occur during the scanning process.

The Material Handling and Protective Housing Guidelines for Digitisation

'The Material Handling and Protective Housing Guidelines for Digitisation' is divided into four main parts:

- Introduction and Glossary
- The Most Common Damages to the Material Caused by Handling
- Material Handling and Housing
- Guidelines for Scanners

The first chapter defines the concept of digitised material and explains the terms used in the text. As bound items are the most scanned library material, the construction of a book and different binding types and their features are described. This part of the chapter helps the operator to understand what effect the physical characteristiscs of a binding have on the scanning operation and to choose a suitable scanner for the bound material.

The second chapter illustrates and explains the most common damage caused to the material by incorrect handling during the scanning process, and explains the cause and effect of improper handling.

The third chapter consist of five topics. The first, second and third topics outline the appropriate protection and handling required during the transportation of the material for digitisation, to and from the National Library in Helsinki and the Centre for Preservation and Digitisation. The correct packing of the material onto book trolleys, safety issues during delivery, the receiving and dispatch of the material for digitisation and the storage of highly valuable material, are all implicated.

The fourth topic on chapter three covers material related guidelines. The first part includes the general instructions of protecting and handling material before and during the scanning process. In the second part is an explanation of the different types of scanned material and types of scanners. The instructions for safe handling are shown in step-by-step illustrations. These include instructions such as hand washing, safety issues, tools and materials used for working that have to be considered prior to and during the scanning process.

The fourth chapter includes instructions on how to handle material in each scanner; the flatbed scanners, over-head camera scanners and film scanners. This chapter works as a summary to the third chapter about the material, and helps the operator to choose the most material friendly scanner.

Conclusions

Digitisation allows an easy access to important and unique library collections and archives and enhances their long-term preservation. By studying collections online, the original material can be protected from damage caused by handling, light, air humidity and temperature changes. From point of view, digitisation projects can offer a great chance to assess and/or stabilise the condition of a collection or an object when material is conserved before or after digitisation.

Although scanners are being developed to be more material friendly, the digitisation process is not entirely risk free. Handling material during delivery and during the scanning process can cause damage to it and the potential for this should be minimised. Consequently, it is important that a conservator together with an operator carry out a risk analysis of the scanning process and form guidelines for the correct housing and handling of the digitised material.

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