An Examination of the Issues Impacting Rare Books in Irish Libraries

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Abstract

Since the publication of Judith Panitch's *Exploring Hidden Collections* in 1998 special collections and rare books have become an increasingly important focus for libraries. This publication prompted the ARL to set up a Special Collections Working Group and has publicised many of the issues surrounding rare books. The issues identified by the ARL bring into question the survival of historic records that are crucial in accurately understanding and interpreting our past. Limited research has been carried out in Irish libraries to determine the depth and scope of the issues identified by the ARL and for this reason the current research will attempt to address this area. This thesis surveys Irish rare book librarians with a selection of follow-up interviews to analyse the issues that challenge the preservation of rare books for current and future generations.

The aim is to identify the issues facing rare books that have been identified in the literature and to determine whether these exist to the same extent in Irish libraries. This study has found, for example that there are no coherent collection policies for rare books in Irish libraries and that no common definition of rare books exists. It identifies that, particularly as a result of digitisation, budgets are less focused on the preservation of rare books and the role of the librarian as custodian of the cultural heritage of Ireland is being called into question. Finally, it establishes that there are cataloguing backlogs in the majority of institutions in Ireland and that the problem is actually increasing as budgets are reduced. These findings highlight some of the dangers facing rare book librarianship in Ireland today that need to be addressed to ensure the safeguarding of our past and present so that the next generations can learn from these experiences.

Chapter 1: Introduction

In books lies the soul of the whole past time; the articulate audible voice of the past when the body and material substance of it has altogether vanished like a dream.

(Carlyle 1840, engraving at the Mitchell Library Sydney)

Chapter Summary

The aim of this research is to compare the definitions of rare books in Irish libraries in order to understand the level of consistency being employed in their collection and to determine whether a more consistent definition is required to safeguard the cultural heritage that these books represent. It will explore the impact of digitisation on rare books and compare the findings from Irish institutions with research carried out on similar international institutions. Finally it will examine the question of 'hidden collections' and cataloguing backlogs to identify the ability of current practices to preserve Irish literary heritage for current and future generations. These aims will be explored under three broad themes: 1. How rare books are defined in Irish libraries and how these compare with international findings; 2. The impact of digitisation on rare books; 3. The question of 'hidden collections' and cataloguing backlogs.

Motivation

The first area to be outlined is the motivation for the research. I have always found pleasure in handling and reading old books viewing them as gateways to the past and remnants of that past, each with a unique provenance (chronology of the ownership or location of a rare book). Reading a computer generated ledger from a shop that exists today does not have the same impact on me as reading a ledger from fifty years ago, as it provides details of what people were buying and an insight into how they lived at a point in time. A ledger I read recently at the cemetery in Glasnevin had details of how people died as far back as 1832 when Daniel O'Connell opened it. It provided an insight into how far we have come in the area of medicine and the extended lifespan that has been achieved. This interest in rare books was reinvigorated when, in early 2010, during a module in the first year of my masters Dr. Charles Benson gave a presentation on rare books in Trinity College. I discussed briefly my

intention to carry out research in the area and found him to be very encouraging. This was followed by tours of Trinity on culture night in September 2010 and the National Library and the Royal Irish Academy on culture night in September 2011.

One of the first articles I read for this research was Stephens (2009) article on the potential loss of cultural heritage in Australian libraries and this stimulated my interest as it highlighted the dangers for the future of special collections in an age of digitisation. I believe that rare books are vitally important for interpreting our past and that history is being revisited and reinterpreted regularly and therefore primary sources are fundamental in this research. This point had been reiterated by Stephens (2009, p. 180)) when he noted that 'no Australian library responsible for significant holdings of heritage book collections should be making long-term decisions about these collections without considering the possible impact on the future understanding of this material and its cultural context'. The Association of Research Libraries (Hewitt & Panitch 2003) findings from North America indicate that most institutions have cataloguing backlogs and that some older catalogues are inconsistent posing a threat to the cultural heritage they represent. This prompted me to question if this was the case in Ireland and having done some preliminary research I identified that there was very little research carried out on Irish institutions.

In fact, Benson (2005, p. 5) noted that 'in the early 1950's [Trinity College Dublin] had begun to emerge (…) from a long torpor to begin to function as a twentieth century research library'. He describes the college since 1801 as being 'desperately short of storage' and 'chronically understaffed'. (Benson 2005, p. 6) He also describes Marsh's library, recognised today as one of the best rare book libraries in Ireland today, as 'a quiet little used place with scant financial resources'. These insights provide a glimpse into Irish librarianship in the middle of the twentieth century. Things have improved since then with Benson (2005, p. 6) noting that 'Trinity had been one of the earliest libraries in the British Isles to use computers for cataloguing'. These readings demonstrated the paucity of studies undertaken on Irish rare book libraries. This lack of insight at a national scale presents a widening of the cracks through which collections such as these may fall and it is on this merit I have undertaken this research.

Ireland & Rare Books

The production of manuscripts and rare books has been synonymous with Irish culture since the arrival of Christianity. Scherman (1981) notes that Ireland has a culture of writing and learning that began when Brigid, Finian and Enda introduced monastic life in the sixth century AD. She suggests that 'the monastic ideals and practices that were to bring Ireland into the light as the 'Island of Saints and Scholars' had their foundations in the sixth century houses founded by their pupils'. (Scherman 1981, p. 116) The monks that inhabited these houses were central in preserving manuscripts and texts that still exist today such as the Book of Kells and the Book of Dorrow. They 'copied the scriptures in illuminated manuscripts' and 'helped preserve the ancient classics'. (McMahon 2001, p. 17) For this reason Flood maintains that 'Ireland was the secure abode of European culture' in the monastic period. (Flood 1918, p. 2) In fact Scherman suggests that the 'Irish brought back to the continent the disciplines of learning that had been buried during the centuries of barbarism'. (1981, p. 277) She maintains that during the dark ages Irish monks were producing texts and educating themselves when the middle ages arrived they were in a position to teach others where learning had been lost. It is clear that from ancient times there has been a proud tradition of preserving our cultural heritage in the form of books and manuscripts. This thesis will explore this tradition of preserving rare books by examining the role of libraries today in safeguarding our rare books and the risks associated with this.

Method and Scope

The methodology employed in this thesis involves a mixed-methods approach to the research using a survey and two follow-up interviews. This allows for a pragmatic approach to the issues helping to provide an overall view of rare book librarianship in Irish institutions. Furthermore this approach facilitates the development of an understanding of the main challenges facing rare book collection in Ireland and, due to the flexibility of the approach, enables the researcher to explore the issues identified during data collection. The scope of the research is the institutions that have rare book collections in Ireland. This allows the study to gather the opinions and views of rare book librarians and providing an insight into some of the issues identified by international research. Twenty-four institutions were identified, including university, public, private and religious libraries with ten institutions replying to the questionnaire. The method involved using the online tool www.surveymonkey.com to design

and distribute the survey. This was practical from a geographical and time perspective and had the advantage of leveraging off a flexible tool in the design of the survey.

Thesis Structure

The first chapter will explore the literature available on the subject of rare book collection. It will examine the definitions of special collections provided in the literature and the level of consistency employed. It will also explore the impact of digitisation on rare books and what this means for the future of rare book collection. It will provide views on the adequacy of current collection policies and their capability in preserving Irish cultural heritage for current and future generations. Finally this chapter will summarise the issues identified in relation to rare book collection and explore the differing views on the future of rare book collection in Irish libraries.

The next chapter will outline the methodological approach to the research summarising the method employed in gathering results and interpreting data. It will define the key concepts analysed proposing how they will be measured. It will also outline the reasons for employing a mixed methods approach to the research and summarise the criteria used in developing the scope of the research. The chapter will then explore the methods used in gathering the data presenting arguments for choosing them. This will be followed by an examination of the timing, weighting and mixing choices and how they support the pragmatic approach to the research. Finally, this chapter will summarise the process used to interpret the data and the type of analysis that will be employed to examine the results.

The results chapter will present the findings from the questionnaire and the interviews. These will be outlined based on three of the main themes being explored in the research. Firstly it will outline the findings in relation to the definition of a rare book in Irish institutions and their importance as cultural heritage. The next section will outline the impact of technology on rare books focusing on the advantages and disadvantages of physical and digital copies of rare books. This will be followed by an overview of the status of backlogs and 'hidden collections' in Irish institutions. This will explore the capacity of current collection policies to capture rare books and the status of cataloguing in Ireland. Finally the chapter will present the proposed solutions to the main challenges facing Irish institutions based on the views of rare book librarians in Ireland.

The discussion chapter will analyse the findings from the research and compare and contrast them with the findings from the Literature Review in an attempt to answer the questions posed in this research. It will outline the key concepts being explored and examine the themes that have been identified in the research comparing them to international findings from the literature. It will outline the views in relation to the definition of rare books and the cultural value they represent. It will then explore the impacts of technology comparing the main arguments for and against digitisation from the literature and this research. Finally it will outline whether the current definition and collection policies are sufficient to capture and preserve rare books for current and future generations.

The final chapter will outline the answers identified in the thesis to the questions that are posed in this research. It will attempt to summarise and draw conclusions from the main arguments in relation to the definition of rare books, rare books as cultural heritage, the impact of digitisation and the status of cataloguing backlogs and 'hidden collections' in Irish institutions. Finally, based on the findings in the research and the literature it will provide recommendations for the future of rare book collection in Ireland.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis is to use the results from the research to provide insight into rare book librarianship in Irish institutions identifying the key concerns. In the course of this research it was identified that there were many published studies on international rare book institutions but the number, based specifically on Irish institutions, was quite limited. The intention of this research is to provide an overview of rare book librarianship in Ireland and compare and contrast these findings with international results. This will provide an insight into rare book librarianship in Ireland, identifying areas of concern and supporting future decisions being made in the profession.

Chapter 2: Methodology

Chapter Summary

This chapter of the thesis will outline the methodology and particular methods used to gather and interpret data and explore why they were chosen. The first area to be examined will be the methodology defined by Dawson (2006, p. 14) as 'the philosophy or general principal which, guides the research'. This section will aim to define the key concepts to be measured and propose indicators to measure these concepts. It will also explore the mixed methods strategy of inquiry employed and examine why it was chosen. The second section will focus on the methods used to gather data. The type of data collected and scope of participants will be presented and details of timing weighting and mixing choices will be summarised. Finally, this chapter will describe the types of analysis used to interpret the data, summarize the analysis techniques used and outline the sequence in which they were employed.

Research Aims

As identified in the introduction there are three areas that this thesis aims to explore: 1.How rare books are defined in Irish libraries and how these compare with international findings; 2.The impact of digitisation on rare books; 3.The question of 'hidden collections' and cataloguing backlogs. To tackle these three areas this research will ask the following three questions: What is the definition of a rare book as seen by rare book librarians of Ireland? How do Irish librarians view the impact of digitisation on rare book collections? What is the status of 'hidden collections' and cataloguing backlogs in Irish institutions? The methods used to answer these questions were a questionnaire distributed to all Irish institutions with rare book collections and follow-up interviews with two Irish librarians. These methods will be examined later in the chapter but firstly the methodology that was employed in this research will be summarized.

Methodology

There has been much debate over the years as to whether qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods research is best or 'more scientific'. (Dawson, 2006, p.14) Many including Dawson have concluded that each method has its merits and pitfalls and which one to be used depends on what needs to be measured. Creswell and Clark (2007, p.28) note that in qualitative research 'the intent is to learn participants' views about a particular phenomenon whereas for quantitative research 'the intent is to see how data provided by participants fits an existing theory'. They point out that combining these methods can provide 'a more complete picture by noting trends and generalizations as well as in-depth knowledge of participants' perspectives'. (Creswell & Clark 2007, p.28)

In the case of this research focus is given to the opinion of participants on the definition of a rare book and the impact of digitisation on rare books. In addition to gathering data on the personal opinions of rare book librarians, details of 'hidden collections' and cataloguing backlogs have been gathered to get an overview of cataloguing in Irish institutions. Additionally, both opinions and statistics of current practices in relation to digitisation of rare books provide insight into the importance of the physical rare book as opposed to its digital counterpart and their intrinsic cultural value.

The variety of data being gathered is aimed at understanding participants' views, comparing them to international experiences and gaining an understanding of the status of rare book cataloguing in Irish libraries. Therefore, this thesis will employ both opinions and statistical results to tackle the research questions. For these reasons the methodology will be to maintain a pragmatic worldview using practical steps to explore the main concepts. The pragmatic branch of philosophy facilitates the extraction of theory from practice so it can be reapplied to the original practice. This allows conclusions to be developed over time and amended based on new findings. The ontology (which deals with questions concerning what exists and how such things can be grouped) of this philosophy as described by Creswell and Clark (2007) allows the researcher to provide multiple perspectives on the reality of rare book library collections in Irish libraries. The epistemological relationship (nature, limitations and scope of the relationship) between the researcher and what is being researched will be practical with the focus on collecting data by 'what works' to address the research questions. (Creswell & Clark 2007, p.24) Creswell and Clarke (2007) note that this philosophy

facilitates multiple perspectives, both biased and non-biased allowing the varying experience of participants to be reflected.

The strategy of inquiry used in this worldview is the concurrent mixed methods approach, which incorporates qualitative and quantitative research. This method of research will allow both statistical and opinion based data to be collected at the same time. As this research is focused on an overview of the world of rare book librarianship in Ireland this approach will support the various librarians' perspectives as well as statistical data on the state of rare book collections. As the data is collected concurrently the qualitative and quantitative samples will be independent and can be used to validate each other.

Thus far this section has outlined the key concepts that are explored in the research. It has outlined the methodology employed in exploring the philosophical worldview and the strategy of enquiry used. One reason outlined for choosing the pragmatic approach to the research is that a large proportion of the required results will be opinion based and therefore will require interpretation and an ability to revisit and re-evaluate findings based on new information. Also, as statistical results will be used to support the interpretation of qualitative data an iterative approach, which is central to a pragmatic philosophy, will be required to develop an overview over time. The next section will outline the practical steps used to gather the data. It will focus on the design of the research and the methods applied to gather the data and summarise the steps involved.

Ethical Research

One of the first things to consider when designing research methods is that the research is ethical. Creswell (2009) outlines ways to avoid ethical issues that can occur at the data collection stage. The key points that he notes are identification of the researcher and sponsoring institution, selection criteria for the participants, purpose of the research, benefits for the participants, degree of confidentiality and provision of contact details of the researcher. These points were all adhered to in this thesis. For example, in the email sent to participants the institution and course of the researcher were defined. The scope of the participants, Irish libraries with rare book collections, was also noted and the purpose of the research was outlined. Participants were assured of the strictest confidentiality, that their data would not be shared with a third party and that although their responses may be quoted the

source of the information would not be disclosed. Finally, participants were invited to contact the researcher directly with any queries or if they would like to receive a copy of the thesis.

Scope

The next area for consideration was the scope of the participants to be included in the research. To get a comprehensive list of institutions to contact, libraries with rare book collections in Ireland were extracted from the book: *The libraries directory 1998-2000: a guide to the libraries and archives of the United Kingdom and Ireland.* (Walker 2001) To ensure that this list was comprehensive a second book, *A directory of rare books and special collections in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland* (Bloomfield 1997) was also consulted to obtain the necessary institutions. Finally, www.rascal.ie was used to further validate the results. RASCAL (Research And Special Collections Available Locally) is an electronic gateway to research resources in Ireland. Originally developed for Northern Irish institutions it was expanded to include the whole of Ireland in 2008. Using these three resources a list of twenty-four institutions was compiled and contact details were then sourced from the institutions website.

Questionnaire

Once the scope had been decided upon the next area to be considered was the method employed to gather the data. This was done using a questionnaire that contained both quantitative and qualitative questions helping to provide an overview of rare book libraries. Survey monkey (www.surveymonkey.com) was used to design the questionnaire and email used to distribute it, which proved an expedient and efficient method of connection with many institutions in a short space of time. This method was chosen for many reasons including the fact that it was practical from a geographical perspective as the libraries contacted were from various parts of the country. This method was also efficient with regard to time constraints and provided relatively easy access to many participants. It had an added benefit of the ease of analysis as the data was collected in one place in a user friendly, electronic format.

The questionnaire was composed of 18 open- and closed-ended questions. Using survey monkey allowed the questionnaire to add features such as multiple-choice responses, a matrix

of choices or open-ended text responses. It also facilitated a skip question option based on the answer provided to a particular question meaning only questions relevant to the participant were posed. A proviso was added in the email and at the start of the survey to ensure confidentiality and the personal details of *current position* and *institution name* requested at the end of the questionnaire were not mandatory. The survey began with three closed-ended questions, which as noted by Dawson (2006), encourages the participant to continue filling out the questionnaire. As proposed by Dawson (2006), the questionnaire broadly consisted of three sections making it easier to understand and follow with the first section focusing on quantitative details of collections held and cataloguing backlogs. The second section focused on personal opinions of rare book librarians on topics such as how to define a rare book, the status of rare book collecting in Ireland and views on 'hidden collections' and cataloguing backlogs. The third section focused on digitisation from both a quantitative and qualitative perspective providing details of digitisation policies as well as attitudes towards digitisation.

Interviews

In addition to the questionnaire there was a follow-up interview with two of the participants. The first interview was with a participant who is widely acknowledged as one of the leading rare book librarians in Ireland. The second interview was with a participant who had spent seven years working on finalising an extensive cataloguing project of 100,000 rare books and manuscripts and who had just published the final pamphlet on the project in the previous weeks. One of the main goals of the interviews was to further develop an understanding of key issues facing rare book librarians.

They were conducted in a private, semi-structured and informal format. Dunne, Pryor and Yates note the key areas to understand when conducting interviews are 'issues of access, location, timing, communication, recording and exit'. (2005, p.28) In the case of these interviews access to the former participant was achieved when he presented on the topic of rare books during a module of the course and I requested to meet at a later stage when the thesis was being conducted. Access to the latter participant was made when visiting the exhibition of the cataloguing project and discussing both the cataloguing project and my research at the end of the tour. This was followed up by several emails and a phone call to arrange location and timing and provide details of the discussion. The meeting took place after the participants had completed the questionnaire, which helped to provide context for

the interview. The interviews were recorded using a Dictaphone and consisted of open-ended questions that, as noted by Creswell, were 'intended to elicit views and opinions from the participants'. (2009, p.181)

Sequence & Weighting

Morgan describes the sequence or timing of data collection as the 'order in which the researchers use the data within the study'. (1998, p. 363) Using a mixed methods questionnaire and interviews involves collecting and analysing both the quantitative and qualitative data concurrently. Other criteria to be considered in the methods section are the weighting and mixing of the data. Creswell and Clark (2007) note that for research based on a pragmatic worldview the weighting should be either equal or unequal depending on the goal of the questions. As has been identified previously in this chapter the areas being explored in the questionnaire and interviews require both quantitative and qualitative results. In the case of this research the weighting of the qualitative and quantitative data will therefore be equal with one set of data used to validate the other.

Thus far this chapter has addressed the methodological approach and the research design focusing on both the theoretical and practical steps involved in conducting the study. These have mainly established the approach to producing results that will tackle the key issues being explored by this research. The next area of focus will be an examination of the process involved in analysing the results produced by the questionnaire and interviews.

Data Analysis

Creswell and Clark identify that analysing data 'consists of examining the database to address the research questions'. (2007, p.130) To achieve this there are many types of data analysis approaches identified by Creswell (2009) to choose from for mixed methods studies. The analysis method that is employed is based on the research strategy employed, which in the case of this thesis is a mixed methods approach. One such method is *Data Transformation.* This is where one set of data such as themes in qualitative results are coded and used to validate the quantitative results. Another method involves *Exploring Outliers* found in quantitative results by following up with qualitative interviews. These are exceptional results that are not inline with other findings allowing the analysis to provide insight into unexpected

and inconsistent outcomes. A further method known as *Instrument Development* involves using the themes from qualitative interviews to design a quantitative questionnaire. Another common method called *Examining Multiple levels* involves collecting data from multiple sources such as a family or individual at the same time to get group and individual experience.

The data analysis that is most suitable for this research is *Creating a Matrix*. (Creswell 2009, p.218) This method is used for quantitative and qualitative data collected concurrently as is the case with this study. Both types of data are combined in a matrix and used to support and validate each other. The *Creating a Matrix* also allows for convergence of data representing both sets of data with equal weight. (Creswell & Clark 2007) A further benefit of this method is that common themes from the questionnaire, interviews and literature can be extrapolated and compared in a format that supports analysis and interpretation.

Although both sets of data are collected concurrently the *Creating a Matrix* technique of data analysis involves initially analysing both sets of data independently. For the qualitative data from the questionnaire and interview this involves identifying and comparing common themes based on the results and presenting them in summary form. For the quantitative data this involves descriptive or differential analysis of the questionnaire results. Once analysed independently the two data sets are merged using what Creswell and Clark (2007) call the Triangulation Design, which aims to develop a complete picture from both datasets. The aim of this method is to identify to what extent the qualitative and quantitative data converge and to what extent the same types of data confirm each other. The Triangulation Design also aims to identify the extent to which open-ended themes are supported by the quantitative data, exploring the similarities and differences that exist between the quantitative and qualitative data. (Creswell & Clark 2007)

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the methodological decisions that were taken in this research. It initially outlined the key concepts to be researched and how these could be measured. These entail the definition of a rare book and how these compare with international findings, the impact of digitisation on rare books and the question of 'hidden collections' and cataloguing backlogs. It has outlined the reasons for the pragmatic worldview approach to the research,

which was based on developing an overview of rare book collecting in Ireland. The strategy of inquiry employed was the concurrent mixed methods approach as it provides a more complete picture by identifying themes and in-depth knowledge of participant views. (Creswell & Clark 2007) The next section focused on the methods that were used to collect data. It described how the issue of confidentiality was tackled to ensure participants were aware of how the data they provided would be used and that their rights were protected. This section also described the scope of the research, rare book libraries in Ireland, and how the relevant information was gathered. The chapter went on to explore the mixed methods employed to gather data outlining why the qualitative and quantitative data would be gathered concurrently and have equal weight. The next topic examined was the reasons for using a questionnaire and follow-up interview and how these tools were designed and implemented in order to support the research. The final section of this chapter centred on how the data that was collected in the questionnaire and interviews was analysed and presented. It explored the reasons for using the Triangulation technique for data analysis for mixed methods, equal weighting data collection. The section outlined the presentation model, *Creating a Matrix* that is used to present the findings of the research as will be seen in the next chapter.

The focus of this chapter has been the theoretical and practical tools employed in the research to sufficiently explore the key concepts. It has outlined how the research was carried out and what it was aiming to achieve. The next chapter will summarise the results of the questionnaire and interviews interpreting the data gathered and presenting common themes that are identified.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

Chapter Summary

The following literature review will examine the findings from the research on the three themes identified in the introduction: 1. Defining rare books and understanding their cultural value: 2. Exploring the Impact of digitisation on rare books: 3. Examining the topics of 'hidden collections' and cataloguing backlogs. The first section will examine the existing definitions of rare books. This will be followed by an investigation of international research on the impact of digitisation on rare books and the cultural heritage they represent. The third section will examine the question of 'hidden collections' and cataloguing backlogs to identify the ability of current practices to preserve the Irish cultural heritage for current and future generations. The final section will provide an overview of the findings of the current research and provide conclusions and recommendations.

Definition of Rare Books

As Stephens (2009 p. 173) notes 'there is a general perception that as Librarians we know what constitutes and defines a rare book, that our heritage book collections are well-documented and their future survival is planned for and secure'. He does not claim to define where the concept of rare books or book heritage start or end because he maintains that all citizens need to have a say in what is of cultural value to the nation. The definition of what constitutes a rare book has been somewhat elusive in the world of librarians but a concerted effort by the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) Task Force to research the issues associated with special collections produced the following definition:

'The entire range of textual, graphic and artefact primary source materials in analogue and digital formats, including printed books, manuscripts, photographs, maps, artworks, audio-visual material and realia'. (ACRL 2003, p. 1)

Rinaldo (2007, p.38) notes the 'intentionally broad' nature of this definition and highlights this sense of broadness further when she provides the following twelve differing responses from librarians for the definition of special collections in art research libraries.

- Books kept in the cage; Archival materials

- We consider our rare books to be a special collection

- Rare, expensive, and physically fragile material

- Rare or unique materials, by age, and by subject

- We have a separate climate-controlled room for special collections although the collection is really much larger than that. Many books, especially oversized and folio books that are in our main stacks, should by definition be in Special Collections. Since we are in a temporary space, however, we cannot place them all there due to space constraints.

- Includes catalogues raisonnés, most books published before 1850, early journals, artists books, illuminated manuscript facsimiles, books over a certain value (which changes but generally $300), some photography books with erotic content, materials with parts (such as the Andy Warhol box). Thus, we have no "firm" definition but location in our special 'cage' area is a work in progress.

- Original research material

- Rare books, architectural drawings, maps, prints, rare photographs, study photographs, archival collections, ephemera, etc.

- Rare Books and Illustrated Books are the two designations which define special collections

- Rare books, papers of the founding museum director, artist files, institutional exhibition catalogs

- There are two categories of special bibliographic collections: those that are held in the library as rare books (usually either fragile artist books or highly-valued books, monetarily) and very rare and pristine material that is kept physically in photography collection storage.

- Special collections would be rare books. We also have

  items which are in restricted storage because of fragility,

  or other attributes (like portfolios of loose plates) which

  should not be shelved in the general stacks.

(Rinaldo 2007, p. 39)

As is evident from Rinaldo's (2007) research the criteria for defining what is in a special collection varies from institution to institution. For the purpose of this research the emphasis is on the criteria that define a rare book. Her research identified that the criteria used to describe what is rare differs in each institution using a variety of terms such as monetary value, fragility, subject, age, content and research material. Many of these terms are ambiguous and are defined subjectively based on institutional gaols and the collections they hold. For example monetary value as a criterion is dependent on the institutional budget, which may vary substantially depending on resources. Age is another example of an ambiguous term which is described by Simpson (2004, p. 6) as being 'arbitrary' with examples 'such as 1501 for incunabula and 1800 for hand-press books although many institutions now have moved the latter date back to 1825'.

Such varying definitions highlight the differing perceptions of librarians regarding rare books. Van Wingen (2006, p. 1) subscribes to this proposition when he notes that 'there are no easy formulas for determining rarity'. Dobreva (2009, p. 3) suggested that 'collection description is itself a question which can be debated interminably'. Simpson (2004, p. 6) proposed that 'there is no single definition to which one can point' and that 'it is up to the individual institution to define the term when creating its collection development and cataloguing policies'. Stephens (2009, p. 175) notes there is an impediment to examine this further as librarians are in an age of digitisation and focusing resources and energy on 'exciting new ways of providing information', which may 'hamper reflection' and prove costly for some of Australia's cultural heritage. To consider this further the following sections will explore the impact of digitisation on rare books.

Impact of Digitisation on Rare Books

Peter Hirtle is currently the 'Intellectual Property Officer for the Cornell University Library. He also serves as the bibliographer for United States and General History and is the

Technology Strategist for the Library's Instruction, Research, and Information Services Division. Previously, he served as Director of the Cornell Institute for Digital Collections where he explored the use of emerging technologies to expand access to cultural and scientific sources through the development and management of distinctive digital collections'. (Section 108 Study Group, 2011)

In his paper *The Impact of Digitization on Special Collections in Libraries* Hirtle (2002, p. 45) notes that 'the physical manifestation of a book or manuscript can also carry information about its date, process of creation, and previous use, none of which can be determined from a digital scan'. In his review of *Celebrating Research: Rare and Special Collections from the Membership of the Association of Research Libraries* Koda (2008, p. 474) echoes the value of the physical manifestation of a book over its digital counterpart noting that 'the survival of past records is the only means by which scholarship can move forward'. He proceeds to point out that the 'raison d'etre' for special collections is that their fundamental collections are 'primary holdings'. Smith (2006, p. 7) agrees with this assertion when she notes that 'the unique holdings of special collections have always provided libraries with a distinct, unique identity; they define what makes a particular library "special"'.

In the 1987 edition of *Library Trends* Cloonan described changes in the world of rare book collections since 1957 as a 'tsunami'. (Cloonan and Berger 2003) This is reiterated in a 2003 edition of Library trends where Cloonan and Berger (2003, p. 13) note 'the present wave-the coming of the electronic age-is still upon us and shows no sign of receding'. The challenge as outlined by Cloonan and Berger (2003, p. 13) is 'to marshal this recent attention into new resources and to anticipate the next stage of our development as a field' noting that 'the only constant in the field is change'. This challenge of technology on rare books is not a new one but the extent of the challenge of digitisation is greater. Smith (2006, p. 12) echoes this view when she notes that 'in addition to deciding what should be digitized, special collections librarians face the challenge of choosing among multiple digital formats in an environment of rapidly changing technology'. Graham (1996) also subscribes to this view when he suggests that librarians cannot control technological developments, and therefore must remain actively engaged in responding to change.

With the recognition that the age of digitisation is merely a new manifestation of a previously existing challenge, and the importance of the physical manifestation of the book already

outlined, the next step will be an examination of the relevance of rare books in the age of digitisation.

Hirtle (2002, p. 42) in his paper *The Impact of Digitisation on Special Collections* acknowledges the 'tremendous impact on society of technological innovation' and outlines three main benefits of digitisation for rare book collections. Firstly due to increased accessibility there is a rise in the use of rare books. Hirtle (2002) provides the example of the University of Michigan's Making of America collection that circulated a few hundred copies each year pre digitisation but in 2002 was being viewed by 5000 people per day. Secondly, this increased access has created an envoirnment for users to carry out further research at a greater pace and thirdly people of differing disciplines can now carry out new types of research without visiting research libraries. For example 'at Tufts researchers are combining 18th century texts, images and geographic information to build an interactive atlas of 18th century London' (Hirtle 2002, p. 44) and in Kentucky 'scientists have been scanning extant manuscripts of *Beowulf* and then using imaging techniques to highlight elements of text that could not otherwise be seen'. (Hirtle 2002, p. 44)

In addition to this Hirtle (2002, pp. 45-48) maintains there are at least 5 inevitable developments as the pace of digitisation increases.

- Electronic access will replace most uses of printed, paper copies.
- The use of paper originals will decrease.
- The number of books available as digital facsimiles will increase.
- Special collections print holdings will become less special.
- Special collections librarianship will change.

In 1991 Belanger gave a lecture on the topic of "the future of rare book libraries" in which he supported the views of Hirtle (2002). In an interview with Belanger in (2005) Stillman quotes from this lecture reflecting Belanger's viewpoint:

"I am convinced that rare book libraries both in the United States and worldwide are in fact at the beginning of a succession of cataclysmic transformations. The most important of these changes will be caused by the increasing disinclination of most

general research libraries over the next several decades to continue to maintain large, permanent collections of paper-based books of any sort, rare or non-rare."

(Stillman 2005)

In the 2005 interview Belanger stated that 'we have no business handing posterity photographs or photostats or microfilms or CDs or computer files of the complete run of, say, the New York Times, with the explanation that any of these formats has relieved us of the burden of preserving original copies'. (Stillman 2005) This seemed a less robust stance than his previous view that research library holdings would decline but he did go on to suggest that not all copies need to be preserved.

"I'm not sure we need to preserve as physical artefacts all of the several hundred runs of the George Smith/Thackeray Cornhill Magazine that currently exist in American libraries. We need to work out a national plan for the long-term survival of a reasonable number of original copies in their original format."

(Stillman 2005)

These assertions envisage a changing world of librarianship with a diminishing value being associated with each individual copy of a rare book and its unique provenance.

In contrast to Hirtle (2002) and Belanger's (Stillman 2005) approach to digitisation Stephens (2009, p. 178) focuses on the importance of the cultural heritage value of special collections and notes that 'we cannot sit back and allow Google Book Search's accidental scans of Australian content, with non-Australian provenances, to represent the history of Australian engagement with the printed word over the last two centuries'. He maintains that special collection librarians have a duty in the 'preservation and survival of significant material' and aspects of the current digitisation policy may 'threaten the future of our historically significant book collections'. (Stephens 2009, p. 179) Potter (2010, p. 14) reiterates this view when she notes that 'the best photography or digitisation cannot adequately present the awesomeness of some cultural treasures'. Jones (2003, p. 105) notes that 'the cost to scholarship and society of having so much of our cultural record sitting on shelves, inaccessible to the public, represents an urgent need of the highest order to be addressed by ARL and other libraries'. The response of the ARL in tackling these issues and the question of access will be explored further in the next section.

In summary the research highlights the difficulties surrounding the definition of rare books. It has explored the impact of digitisation on rare books outlining the positive and negative effects. Whether you subscribe to Hirtle's (2002) view of the end of special collections in their current format or Stephens (2009) idea that they are more important than ever due to the danger of losing cultural heritage both philosophies agree on the necessity to define rare books effectively to ensure access to the information. The next section will outline the research on rare books carried out by the ARL and examine the issues surrounding cataloguing of rare books.

Hidden Collections & Cataloguing Backlogs

There is a mounting body of research on rare book collections that have focused on many important areas. The subject matter is broad including such topics as the impact of digitisation on special collections (Hirtle 2002), the continuing development of special collections (Cloonan & Berger 2003), special collections in art libraries (Rinaldo 2007), the review; Celebrating research (Koda 2008) heritage collections in Australian Libraries (Stephens 2009) and the rare printed collections of the State Library of New South Wales (Patton 2009) but the most comprehensive modern research was carried out by the ARL Task Force. To understand the scope and impact of this research the first area to explore is the origins of the ARL study as outlined by Hewitt and Panitch (2003) in *The ARL Special Collections Initiative*.

The 1997 Research Collections Committee (RCC) meeting looked at the core issues of special collections and paved the way for an ARL Taskforce on Special Collections to be formed in 2001. Their aim was to address the issues within the field of special collections identified by the ARL board and membership. This resulted in a survey being conducted in 1998 aimed at 110 ARL libraries with a 90% completion rate reflecting the level of interest on the topic. It consisted of 45 principally quantitative questions focusing on rare book materials with one of the principle issues noted being the 'definition of special collections'. (Hewitt & Panitch 2003, p. 158) Large portions of collections did not provide intellectual access with significant backlogs existing. This raised a further concern regarding the vulnerability of rare books to budget cuts. There was a realisation of the need to reinforce the necessity of rare books within libraries and a commitment to building an ARL agenda for special collections. This in turn led to the symposium called *Building on Strength:*

Developing an ARL Agenda for Special Collections held at Brown University Rhode Island in 2001. The outcome of this symposium was the creation of the ARL Task force and a seven-point plan of action.

1. Enhance access to collections and backlogs, surface "hidden collections."
   Advocate for and administer funding for projects, and collaborate with
   RBMS [Rare Books and Manuscripts Section] to develop and endorse guidelines for what constitutes adequate access.
2. Coordinate planning for collecting nineteenth- and twentieth-century materials and those in new formats.
3. Coordinate information sharing regarding digitisation efforts.
4. Define core competencies among special collection librarians and create training opportunities.
5. Promote special collections as fundamental to the mission of the research library.
6. Gather data on special collections operations.
7. Incorporate some of these issues into agendas of RBMS, SAA [Society of American Archivists], and other ARL standing committees.

(Hewitt & Panitch 2003, p. 167)

This seven-point plan provided an action plan for further investigation and formed the basis for future research such. It was used 'as the basis for discussion at a September 2003 conference entitled *Exposing Hidden Collections* 'which led to the publication of *Exposing Hidden Collections* by Jones & Panitch in 2004. The first point in relation to surfacing 'hidden collections' is crucial for research libraries to be aware of what exists so they can provide access and make informed decisions on collection development perspective. The fifth point in relation to the promotion of special collections as fundamental to libraries and supports the findings identified previously by Stephens (2009), Koda (2008) and Smith (2006). The sixth point promotes gathering data on special collections, which is core to this research as one of the aims of this study is to gain insight into rare book collections in Irish institutions.

Thus far this section has outlined the origins of the research of the ARL Taskforce and the extent to which the research was carried out. This raises many interesting points regarding the

preservation of rare books including the issue of 'hidden collections', (Hewitt & Panitch 2003, p. 167) which will be examined next.

A white paper published by the ARL Task Force in 2003 explores the issue of 'hidden collections' in the research libraries of North America. It was revealed that 'for printed volumes, about 15 percent of collections on average remained unprocessed or un-cataloged'. (Brodsky 2003, p. 3)

Patton (2009, p. 142) in her research of the collections of the State Library of New South Wales provides more specific research on the issue noting that 'many of [the] older printed collections do not have electronic records,' 'access points for provenance or associations in the old card catalogues are inconsistent' and 'the only way to locate these items is to painstakingly search the shelves'. Her research uncovers many rare books, that have limited or sometimes no electronic record and are inconsistently catalogued, whose future would be left to chance but for her project. Whether this is down to rare book collection policy or limited resources is unclear but, as noted earlier, the access so crucial to rare book survival had not been available. The impact of this is highlighted by Jones (2002, p. 89) when she notes that 'un-catalogued or under processed collections are at a greater risk of being lost or stolen' and that 'unique and rare materials are particularly vulnerable'.

Stephens' (2009) research of Heritage book collections of Australian libraries focuses on whether the definitions of heritage material might be too narrow. He notes that 'a quick tour of the collection management policies of many of our libraries reveals considerable variation in the criteria used to identify 'rare', 'special' and 'heritage' printed material,' (Stephens 2009, p. 176) pointing to the inconsistency of criteria to define rare books. This would go some way to explaining why items in the State Library of New South Wales have not been catalogued which as noted by Stephens (2009, p. 179) puts at risk 'the survival of a significant part of Australia's cultural heritage'. He outlines the issue further when noting 'not only are we being challenged to come up with a definition of what might belong in a heritage book collection, but we are also facing the difficulty of identifying where this material actually resides'. (Stephens 2009, p. 177)

Thus far this literature review has examined various research papers on rare books and in this section focuses on the important contribution of the ARL. This paved the way for a more focused discussion on the issue of criteria for defining rare books and how Patton (2009), the Hewitt and Panitch (2003) and Stephens (2009) have tackled it. This issue has been outlined many times by librarians but as no clear-cut solution has been presented, still further research is necessary. The next section will focus on the impact of this assertion, analyzing how it will affect the future of rare books.

Further Research

Rinaldo (2007, p. 46) poses the question 'are we actively trying to identify current materials that will be of some value several generations down the line?' followed by the swift response 'it does not seem so'. In this case her research has identified the issue surrounding the definition of a rare book but she 'hope[s] that further and more extensive study of how special collections identification criteria are used in art libraries will be conducted'. This acknowledgement of the need for further research is also noted by Hewitt and Panitch (2003, p. 158) in their paper *The ARL Special Collections Initiative* when it stated 'that at some point the committee would need to discuss the definition of special collections'. The current ARL definition as outlined earlier includes all primary sources but is impractical from a budget and storage point of view. In addition to this Stephens (2009, p. 181) notes that digitisation should drive us to 'consider what other early book material may be considered valuable as Australian cultural heritage'. While recognising the importance of the issue of defining rare books the previous research has not tackled the issue itself and as we will see in the following section this will impact the future of special collections if not addressed.

In contrast to the previous section Hirtle (2002, p. 47) notes that 'special collections print holdings will become less special'. He counters the notion of the intrinsic value of the physical manifestation of rare books posing the question 'is it necessary to maintain a middling collection of rare books when access is no longer tied to physical possession, let alone ownership?' (Hirtle 2002 p. 47) He goes on to propose that print copies may 'sell for large amounts of money to private collectors, but few libraries can or should participate in the market if most research needs can be met with digital copies'. (Hirtle 2002, p. 47)

Such a line of reasoning overlooks the cultural value of books outlined by Stephens (2009). Koda (2008, p. 476) reiterates this view when she notes that 'no two printed books or written manuscripts are the same, differing in countless (…) features'. For both Koda (2008) and Stephens (2009) the physical item is an intricate part of a book and will remain part of the remit of rare book librarians. According to Stephens (2009, p. 187) there is a need to 'manage the future of our book collections' by 'pooling the extensive expertise' available, keeping in mind the 'responsibility for heritage material' bestowed on rare book librarians. He notes that 'it is the decisions we make every day, big and small, which affect what material is available to pass on to the next generation'. (Stephens 2009, p. 187)

Conclusion

This literature review initially explored the difficulties surrounding defining rare books. It has also examined the impact of the current wave of Cloonan's *tsunami*, (Cloonan & Berger 2003) digitisation, and the impact it has had on rare books. It has considered the question of hidden collections and cataloguing backlogs in American and Australian libraries. Finally it outlines some of the consequences proposed in the research for the future of rare books based on these findings. Therefore based on the research above the current study will examine the selection criteria employed by a representative sample of Irish institutions to define rare books determining the level of consistency being used. It will investigate the views of Irish librarians on the impact of digitisation and will explore the question of hidden collections and cataloguing backlogs in Irish institutions to determine if the findings in Ireland are similar to those in America and Australia.

Chapter 4: Results

Chapter Summary

This chapter will outline the results from the questionnaire and interviews based on the main research questions to be explored in this thesis; What is the definition of a rare book as seen by rare book librarians of Ireland? How do Irish librarians view the impact of digitisation on rare book collections? What is the status of hidden collections and cataloguing backlogs in Irish institutions? Oliver (2004) proposes various criteria for the selection of data in the results section of a thesis. They include themes that are raised by many of the participants, themes that concur with the findings from previous literature and subjects that arise in both the questionnaire and interview process. The first results presented in this thesis are the findings on the definition of rare books. The responses from these questions will be compared to the findings from the literature in the discussion chapter. The second area to be presented is the impact of digitisation on rare books. This theme was identified in the literature review as one of the key areas impacting rare book collections today and was mentioned frequently in both the questionnaire and the interview. The third section will focus on cataloguing backlogs and hidden collections identified in the literature, which is core to the research question as it provides the opinions of rare book librarians on the adequacy of current collection policies and cataloguing processes.

Cultural Heritage

As previously identified the definition of rare books employed in Irish institutions is central to the questions posed by this research. This section will aim to present the findings on the research question of what the definition of a rare book is as seen by rare book librarians of Ireland? Before this question can be answered it must first be determined how important this definition is to Irish librarians and why?

The topic of the importance of preserving rare books was discussed in the literature review where Stephens (2009) noted that it was the cultural value that they represent that makes rare books so important for current and future generations. Understanding the importance of rare books to Irish society will serve to highlight the importance of adequately defining what

should be preserved as part of our cultural heritage. To understand the perception of this role in Irish institutions the following question was posed in the survey.

On a scale of 1 to 5 how important do you feel adequate cataloguing and storage of Rare Books is in preserving the cultural heritage of Ireland? (1 being the least and 5 the most Important)
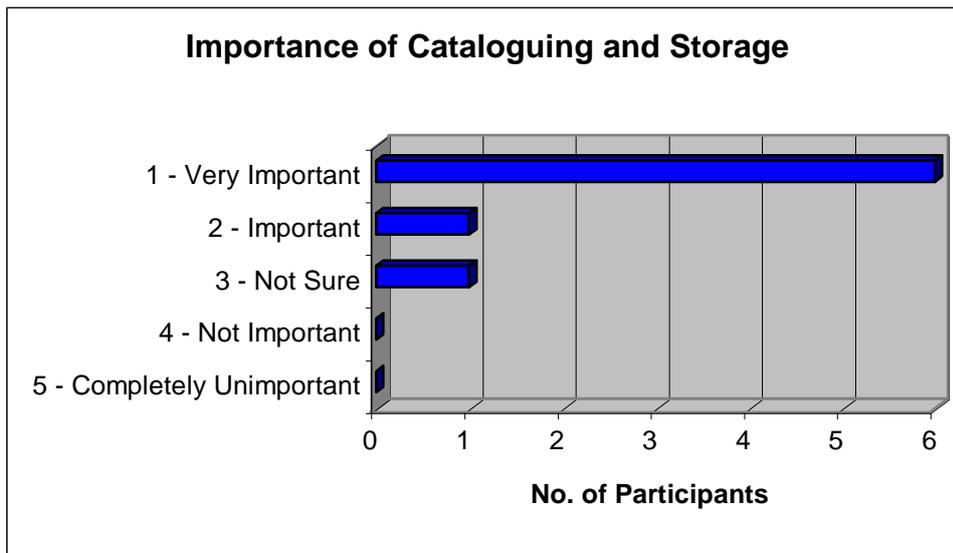
Importance of Cataloguing and Storage

Figure 1.1

Figure 1.1 highlights the importance of cataloguing and storage of rare books in relation to cultural heritage with six of the eight participants deeming it very important. The value of rare books as cultural heritage was explored further in both interviews. The first participant noted that rare books help 'preserve the history of who we are'. The second participant also noted that rare books provide a history of Irish culture. As with so many nations with long and complex colonial histories this question is important to the Irish in understanding their identity. The second participant highlighted this fact with an example from the Irish civil war (1922-23). This war followed a treaty with the British to establish a twenty-six county Irish Free State in southern Ireland and was contested by Irish citizens in favour and against this treaty. During the Irish civil war many important records were destroyed when the National Army bombarded the Four Courts building in 1922 destroying records of several centuries of government in Ireland. This example highlights the importance of preserving rare books for Irish society.

Definition of Rare Books

As is clear from the previous section there is no ambiguity over the importance of the role of rare book librarians in preserving the cultural heritage of Ireland. However there are varying opinions when it comes to the definition of a rare book as will be seen in this section. The following question was posed in the questionnaire to determine this and the results will be analysed based on the findings in the literature review in the next chapter. The results in table 1.2 are from the 10 participants who completed the question.

In your opinion, what criteria are used to define a rare book?
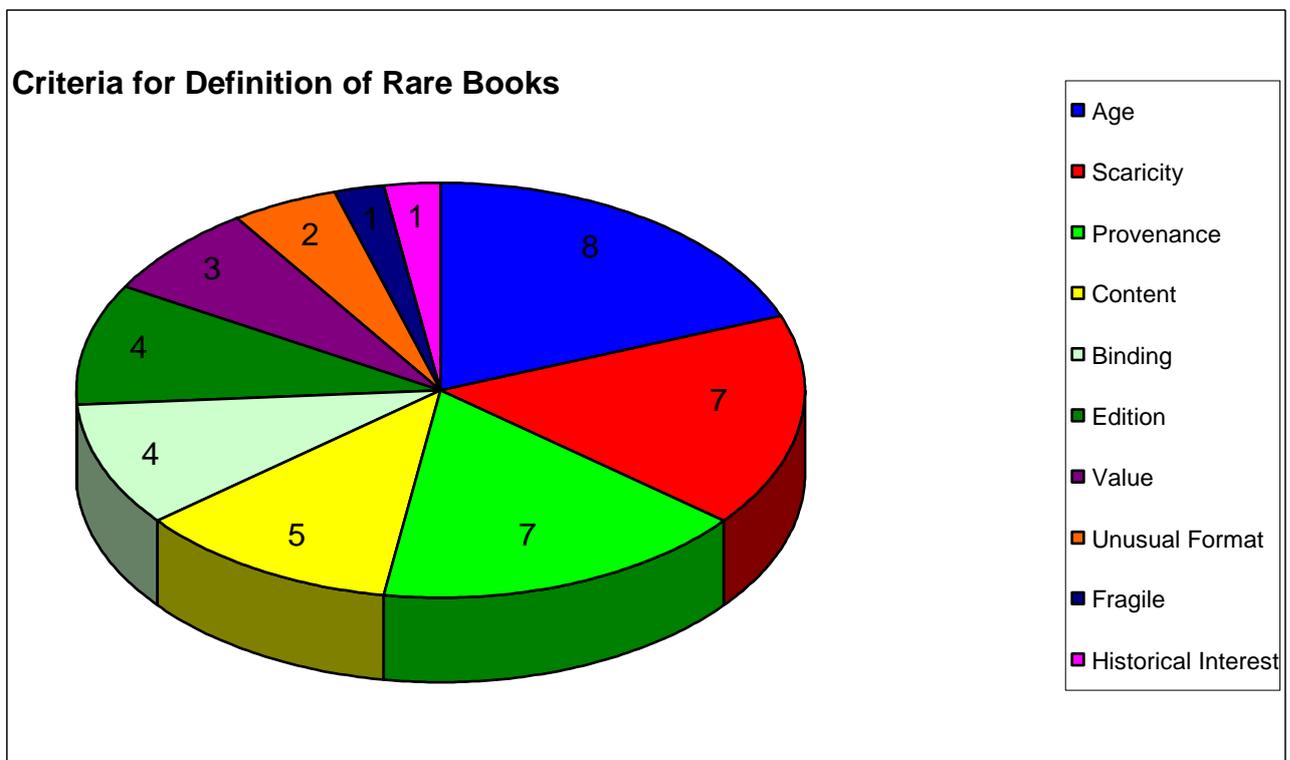
Figure 1.2

Figure 1.2 shows the different criterion identified to define a rare book and the number of times each one was stated in the results of the questionnaire. It clearly shows that many attributes are used to define a rare book with some more widely used than others. To investigate these criteria further this question was followed up in both interviews. The first interviewee stated that the definition of a rare book 'can't be entirely consistent' and that it varies from one institution to the next. He noted that as 'attitudes, needs and use change' this

should be reflected in collection policies in some way. He identified that the broad aim of an institution's collection policy should be 'strength in depth' and that age, provenance and other criteria were dependent on the interests of the individual institution. He explained that it is each institutions collection policies that determine what books are captured and preserved. The example provided was the National Library whose cultural mission is preserving the history of Irish texts. The opinion that the definition was dependant on the institutions goals was again reiterated in the second interview. This theme of the definition of a rare book will be analysed further and compared to findings from the literature review in the discussion chapter. One area that was also highlighted in the literature review impacting on the preservation of rare books is the challenge of technology and digitisation that will be explored in the next section.

Impact of Digitisation on Rare Books

This section will explore the research question of how Irish librarians view the impact of digitisation on rare book collections? As per the literature review chapter Hirtle (2002) proposes that digital copies can replace physical copies of rare books in libraries. To gain an understanding of how rare book librarians in Ireland feel in relation to holding print or digitised books the following question was posed in the questionnaire.

On a scale of 1 to 5, please state whether you agree or disagree with the following statement. (1 being completely disagree and 5 completely agree)

Hirtle states that it is not 'necessary to maintain a middling collection of rare books when access is no longer tied to physical possession, let alone ownership?' He goes on to propose that print copies may 'sell for large amounts of money to private collectors, but few libraries can or should participate in the market if most research needs can be met with digital copies'. (Hirtle 2002, p. 47)
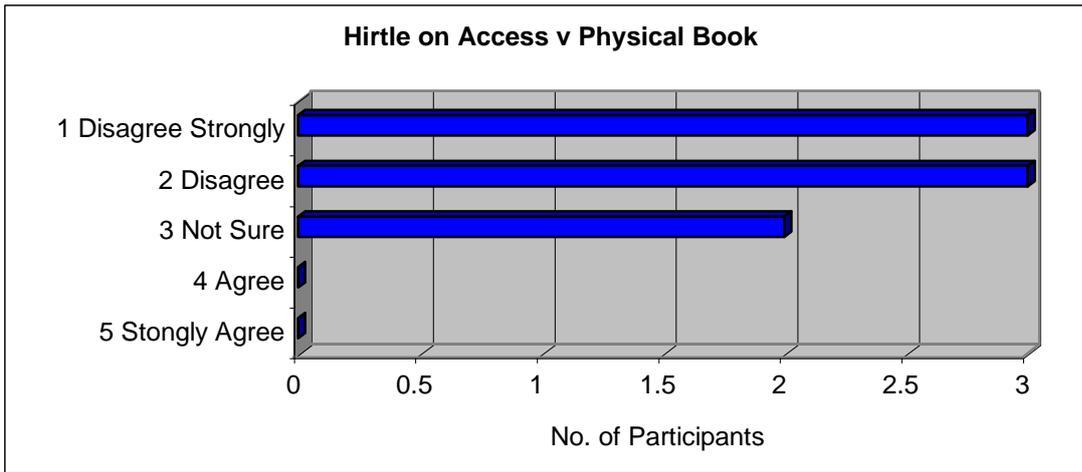
Figure 2.1

As is clear from the results in figure 2.1 there is no agreement with Hirtle's assertion on the digital versus the physical coy of a rare book with six of the eight respondents either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. To understand the broader view in relation to this topic the following question was posed.

On a scale of 1 to 5 how important is it for your institution to have a physical book rather than access to a digitised version of a Rare Book for a special collection? (1 being unimportant and 5 very important).
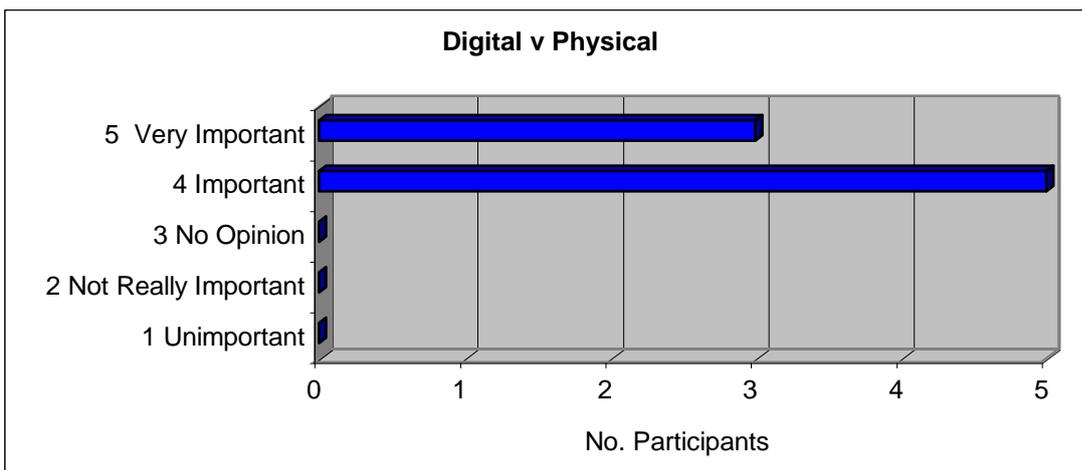
Figure 2.2

The results in figure 2.2 clearly indicate that possession of the physical copy is important for all eight respondents reiterating the result from figure 2.1. To understand the justification for these views participants were asked to provide reasons for their answers as outlined in figures 2.3 and 2.4.

Advantage of Physical Book	No. of Participants
Value as artefact	6
See and touch material	3
Ability to examine binding	2
Researchers should use physical copy	2
Proven stable platform	1
Often only one copy digitised but no two copies are the same	1

Figure 2.3

Advantage of Digital Copy	No. of Participants
Sometimes easier to see illuminations	1
Digital copies help preserve original item	1

Figure 2.4

Figure 2.3 indicates the advantages of the physical over the digital copy of a rare book from the perspective of Irish librarians with the most common answer being due to their value as artefacts. This suggests that in addition to their content the books themselves hold a historic value. This suggests that in the view of rare book librarians in Ireland the cultural value of rare books is not entirely in relation to their content but also to the physical aspects of the book. As figure 2.4 shows there are some advantages to the digital copy over the physical

copy but it is clear that there are many more advantages according to the rare book librarians of Ireland in having the physical book.

The first interviewee reiterated the value of the physical copy when he noted that developing a physical collection of rare books helps to distinguish the institution as a research centre. He also maintained that although digital copies were okay for undergraduates, scholars should use the original texts. He noted that there have been cases where the digitised texts have been poorly digitised and the information cannot be deciphered. In many cases microfilm copies of rare books and manuscripts are being digitised to a poor standard. One example mentioned by the interviewee was a project to digitise the population statistics for the house-of-commons, which were undecipherable in many cases rendering them useless. The second interviewee supported to some degree the beliefs of Hirtle (2002) highlighting the importance of access over ownership based on the fact that it would encourage research.

To further explore the extent of digitisation in Irish institutions the following questions were included in the questionnaire.

Does your institution have a policy to digitise rare books? If yes what criteria do you use to decide what to digitise?

Of the eight respondents three have a policy to digitise rare books.

Criteria for Digitisation	No. of Participants
Usage by large group	2
Fragility of item	1
For exhibition purposes	1
Collaboration with international projects	1
To encourage research	1

Figure 2.5

Figure 2.5 shows some of the reasons for digitisation with usage being identified by two of the participants. Usage, fragility and exhibition purposes again point to the importance of the preservation of the physical copy identified by Stephens (2009), Koda (2008) and Smith (2006) in the literature review. The point in relation to encouraging research was also identified by the first interviewee as reason for digitising rare books. Finally the advantage in relation to collaboration has a broad impact on rare books and could potentially facilitate the sharing of resources and provide more access to rare books As will be seen later in the chapter this point is again highlighted as a solution to the main challenges facing rare book collections in Ireland. In addition to the impact of digitisation the literature review also identified broader impacts of technology on rare books.

Impact of Technology

As noted in the literature review by Cloonan and Berger (2003) advances in technology have been impacting rare book libraries for a long time and are showing no sign of slowing down. This was reiterated by the first interviewee who noted that technology has not been tested in the long term to ensure the preservation of information for future generations. It was also highlighted that in some cases there can be a conflict between the institutional goals of providing immediate access and the development of a collection. On the one hand providing immediate access through digitising can have many benefits including enhancing the awareness of what is available, increasing usage, preserving the original text and promoting the institution. On the other hand this can often use resources from collection development so in the long term the library does not develop collections to the same extent and may lose some of its value as a research centre.

Another impact of technology identified by two survey participants as a main challenge for rare book collection was the reliance on Google by undergraduates as a research tool which presents information that can often be difficult to verify and not necessarily suitable for scholarly research. One survey participant also highlighted 'rapidly changing technology' as one of the key challenges facing rare book collections in Ireland. The solution proposed in this case was 'the need to keep abreast of new developments in online availability of digital texts'.

Thus far this section has presented findings from the survey and interviews on the advantages of digital and physical copies of rare books and other technological impacts. These results will be compared to the findings of international research from the literature review in the next chapter. The next section in this chapter will examine the results of the questionnaire and interviews in relation to hidden collections and cataloguing backlogs being employed by Irish institutions providing statistics and librarian opinions.

Collection Policies

This section will examine the third research question on what the status of hidden collections and cataloguing backlogs is in Irish institutions? To achieve this the section will focus on the data collected from the questionnaires and interviews in relation to collection policies, cataloguing issues and budget constraints in Irish institutions. These areas will help to provide an overview of rare book collections in Ireland that will be compared to international studies identified in the literature review in the analysis chapter. This section will also provide information on the consistency of collection policies, which is a key topic in this research. To gain an understanding of the status of collection polices in Irish institutions the following question was posed.

In your opinion, on a scale of 1 to 5 are current Rare Book collection policies sufficient to capture and maintain Rare Books for current and future generations? (1 being the least and 5 the most sufficient)
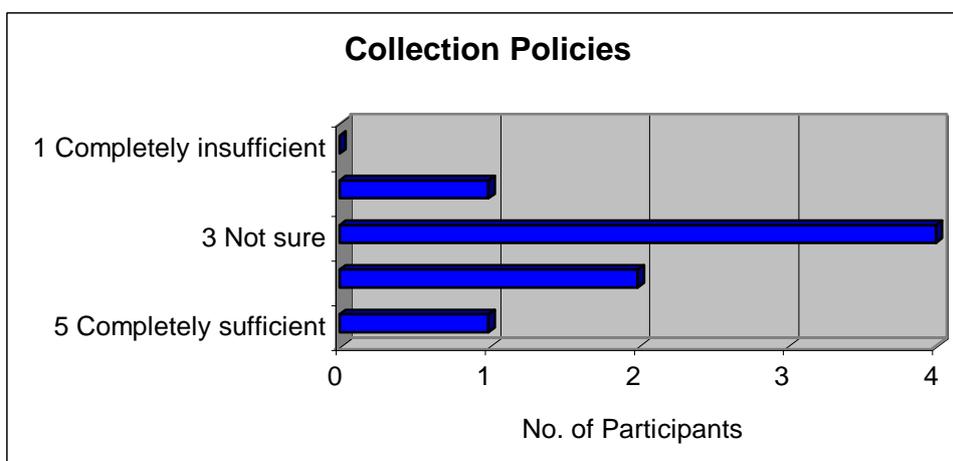

Figure 3.1

As per the results in figure 3.1 there are mixed feelings in relation to the status of collection policies in Irish institutions. Three of the eight participants deem the policies to be *generally* or *completely sufficient* and only one considers them *not entirely sufficient*. The majority of four however have responded with *not sure* which, although not a ringing endorsement for collection policies, is not entirely supportive of them. The question of collection policies was raised in both interviews and it was identified that most institutions have different collection goals so it is difficult to develop national collaborative approaches to rare book collection. Therefore it is problematic to rate the effectiveness of collection policies in a generic way as they are based on the objectives of each institution so can only be judged against those policies. It may be the case that the current policy of independent collection policies may be the best solution, raising questions around the possibility of collaboration between institutional collection policies which will be explored further later in this chapter.

Hidden Collections & Cataloguing Backlogs

The next set of results to be explored is the cataloguing of rare books in Irish institutions. An understanding of what is being catalogued, and to what extent, will help provide an insight into what is being captured as part of Irish cultural heritage. This section will focus on cataloguing from two perspectives, cataloguing backlogs and issues surrounding the quality of cataloguing. To gain an understanding of the level of cataloguing backlogs the following two questions were posed in the questionnaire.

Are there cataloguing backlogs for rare books in your institution?
Approximately how big is the backlog?

Of the ten respondents to these questions all said that their institutions had cataloguing backlogs. The results varied dramatically with approximate numbers ranging from 100 to 100,000 items. This point was reiterated in the following results, which question the opinion of the participants in relation to backlogs and errors in cataloguing in institutions generally.

In your opinion what is the frequency of incorrect cataloguing and cataloguing backlogs for rare books in Irish libraries?

	Universal	Common	Unusual	Doesn't Occur
Incorrect cataloguing	0	6	2	0
Cataloguing backlog	4	4	0	0

Figure 3.2

Figure 3.2 provides additional clear evidence that cataloguing backlogs are at least common in Irish institutions. The implications of this evidence will be analysed further in the next chapter in relation to the findings in other countries and the impacts it has on the preservation of rare book collections for current and future generations. The other area that figure 3.2 examines is the frequency of incorrect cataloguing, which is deemed common by six of the eight participants. However, the results from question 5 in the survey seem to contradict this view.

In your experience do you feel rare books are being catalogued correctly?

Of the ten respondents eight replied *yes* to this question contradicting the previous results where six of the eight respondents said it was common. This contradiction was explained by one of the questionnaire participants and also reinforced by both interviewees. It was clarified that generally speaking the information recorded in a catalogue is correct but the depth of the detail of cataloguing in many cases is insufficient. For example information on provenance, one of the main criteria for defining a rare book, may not have been added which could be beneficial in directing scholars and book historians to relevant material. The first interviewee noted that good cataloguing can be expensive but in the long run it saves time for researchers by accurately and quickly directing scholars to quality information. The results therefore indicate that although the information that is being added for cataloguing is generally accurate the level of cataloguing is not sufficient in some cases to direct researchers to the material they require. The reason proffered in the interview for this lack of depth is low staff numbers due to budget constraints.

Budgets

The previous section presented the data gathered in relation to the consistency of collection policies, the accuracy and depth of cataloguing and the extent of backlogs. The issue of budgets has been highlighted in relation to cataloguing and is central to preserving rare books and therefore the cultural heritage they represent. To understand this issue the following question was posed in the questionnaire.

In your opinion, has there been any change in the percentage of the yearly budget for Rare Books collection and management within the context of the overall institutions budget in the past 10 years.

	Decreased	Remained Unchanged	Increased
Change in Budget in over 10 years	4	3	1

Figure 3.3

From the results in figure 3.3 we can see that in the respondents opinion 50% of budgets have decreased in the past ten years. This issue was also discussed in both interviews with the first interviewee stating that their budget had gone from a high of approximately €250,000 each for manuscripts and rare books to the current amount of €25,000 each. Another issue in relation to budgets that was highlighted in both interviews was the question of unpaid interns. It was noted that knowledge of a collection is accumulated over time, which can be difficult to achieve with short-term contracts. This can have an effect on the consistency of the overall collection policy in the long term as regular changes in staff make it difficult for knowledge of a collection to be built up over time and a lot of time can be spent on repeat cataloguing training. It is clear from these results that budget constraints exist and are a challenge on rare book collections. In fact these constraints are seen as one of the main challenges facing rare book collections in Ireland.

Main Challenges

The next section will present the findings on the main challenges facing rare book collections in Ireland identified by Irish librarians. The following question was posed in the questionnaire with eight participants responding.

Please outline 2 to 3 of the main challenges you feel are currently facing rare book collections?
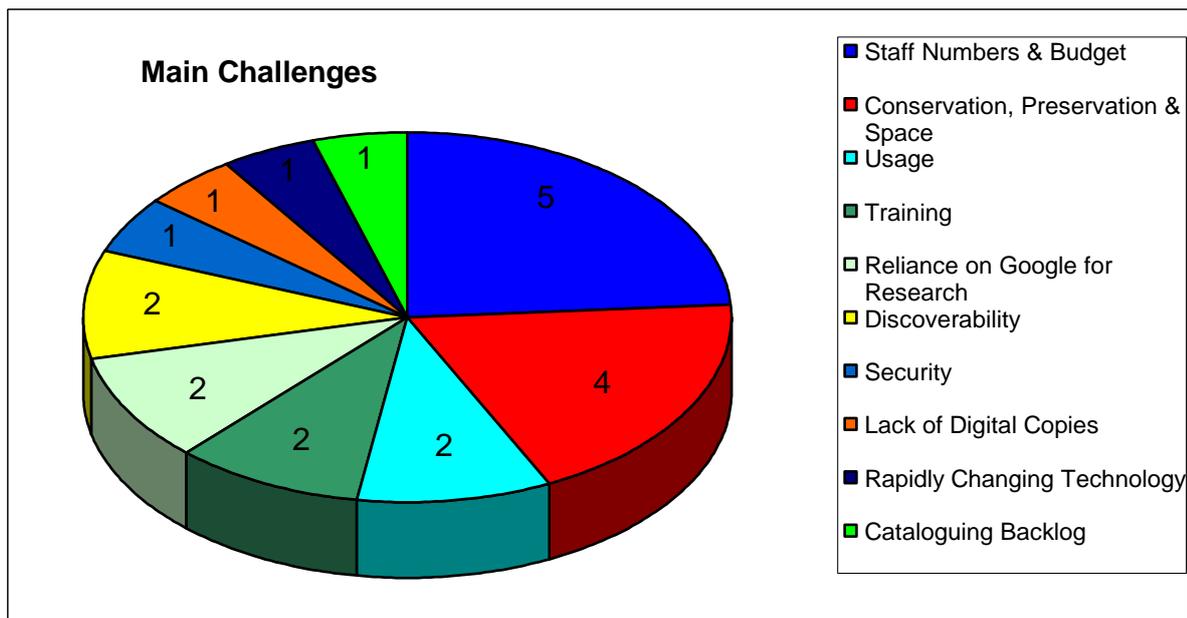
Figure 3.4

Figure 3.4 shows the main challenges identified by Irish librarians facing rare books and the number of times each point was stated. The key challenge facing rare book collections that was identified by five of the eight respondents is the challenge of staff numbers and budgets. As noted above one institution's budget dropped by 90% which the interviewee suggested had a lot to do with the current economic climate. This strain on budgets can only increase the cataloguing issues of backlogs and comprehensive cataloguing, as they are both budget dependent. This raises the possibility of rushing through backlogs, which may hamper the quality of cataloguing. Seven other challenges facing rare book collections in Ireland were identified. The next most common challenge was conservation, preservation and space. This supports the view identified earlier in relation to the value of preserving the physical copy of a rare book. Challenges such as rapidly changing technology and cataloguing backlogs were also identified and have been discussed in this chapter. Other challenges include usage,

training, reliance on Google for research, discoverability, security and a lack of digital copies. These challenges will be examined further in the next chapter and compared to the findings in the literature review.

Proposed Solutions

The final results to be summarised in this chapter are the views on the solutions to the main challenges identified in figure 3.3. To understand these solutions the following question was posed in the questionnaire.

In your opinion, what are the solutions to these challenges?

Proposed Solutions	No. of Participants
More Funding	4
National and international collaboration	4
Support maintenance programs	2
Improve education in field	2
Digitise rare books where costs allow	1
Give books same priority as digital material on OPAC	1

Figure 3.5

As per the findings in figure 3.5 of the eight respondents four highlighted more funding as one of the key solutions supporting the earlier findings in relation to budgets. The other top answer of further national and international collaboration was also identified as one of the key reasons for digitisation in figure 2.5. The question of collaboration was also addressed in the interviews. It was noted by the first participant that although there is some collaboration between institutions, in most cases institutions have different collection goals so it is difficult to develop a consistent approach to collections. A suggestion was made to divide intellectual arena among institutions and pool staff to provide cross institution support and develop knowledge. This would involve each institution having collection policies based on subjects such as geography and science with little or no duplication of collections. One example of collaboration identified by the second interviewee was RASCAL (Research and Special

Collections Availability Locally, www.rascal.ie), which provides a collaborated approach to accessing rare books in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. These results will be compared to international findings in the analysis chapter.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the results of the surveys and interviews based on the three research questions. The first section explored the definition of rare books in Irish institutions, which is a key topic in this research. It presented the views of Irish librarians on the question of rare books as cultural heritage. The second topic covered was the impact of technology on rare book collections with particular emphasis on the advantages of physical and digital copies of rare books. This section also explored the views of Irish librarians on the impact of technology on rare books. The third section summarized the results on collection policies, hidden collections and cataloguing backlogs, which are key questions in this research. This chapter also explored the issue of budgets, which have an impact on what is preserved for current and future generations. The final section outlined the main challenges and solutions to these challenges facing rare book collections in Ireland as identified by Irish librarians. The next chapter will compare and contrast the results outlined in this chapter to the findings in the literature review and analyse the core questions that are being examined in this research.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Chapter Summary

At this point the research has examined the literature on the subject of rare book collection, outlined the methodology employed to collect data and presented the results of this data. This chapter will examine the themes that have been identified in the previous chapter based on the results from Irish institutions comparing them to the findings from the literature review. It will summarise the key concepts outlining the debates identified in this research. It will aim to tackle the three questions that are central to this thesis identified in the methodology chapter: What is the definition of a rare book as seen by rare book librarians of Ireland? How do Irish librarians view the impact of digitisation on rare book collections? What is the status of hidden collections and cataloguing backlogs in Irish institutions? To achieve this, firstly it will compare the definition of a rare book in Irish institutions based on the results chapter to the findings from Rinaldo (2007), Hewitt and Panitch (2003) and Van Wingen (2006) in the literature review. It will examine the importance of rare books as cultural heritage and their importance for research facilities. The chapter will then examine the impact of digitisation from the perspective of Irish librarians and the literature review, exploring the role of the librarian in preserving the physical copy of a rare book. The final section will compare the findings in Irish institutions on cataloguing backlogs and hidden collections with those from the literature review findings of Stephens (2009), Patton (2009) and Hewitt and Panitch (2003) and explore some of the causes for these cataloguing issues.

Matrix

As identified in the methodology chapter the method of analysis to be employed for this research is *Creating a Matrix*. This method is used for quantitative and qualitative results collected concurrently and supports the convergence of data representing both sets with equal weight. This method also allows common themes from the questionnaire, interviews and literature to be extrapolated and compared in a format that supports analysis and interpretation. The first column of figure 4.1 has themes that have been identified in the research. The next column shows the findings from the questionnaire relating to these themes. The third column shows the findings from the interviews and the fourth column

represents the findings from the literature review on these themes. This matrix is used to analyse the various themes in the thesis and as a basis for the discussion in this chapter.

Definition of Rare Books

As highlighted in the literature review Stephens notes 'there is a general perception that as Librarians we know what constitutes and defines a rare book, that our heritage book collections are well-documented and their future survival is planned for and secure'. (2009, p. 173) Van Wingen (2006) supports this view when he notes that 'there are no easy formulas for determining rarity'. Rinaldo (2007) also subscribes to this view as noted in the literature review with the twelve varying definitions of a rare book identified in her research. The ARL (ACRL 2003) definition described by Rinaldo as 'intentionally broad' (2007, p. 38) also highlights the elusiveness thus far of a comprehensive definition of rare books. This broad definition was also identified in this research in relation to Irish institutions (figure 1.1) where the institutions surveyed identified ten different criteria so in this case the Irish findings are similar to those found internationally. Below are four examples from the ten responses to the question: *In your opinion, what criteria are used to define a rare book?*

- No. of copies printed, no. of copies available, provenance, binding, illustration, maps, engravings, value. (University Library)
- All publications printed on or before 1850. Special or limited editions of modern books. Special bindings, books with interesting provenances, important illustrations, manuscripts, posters and other ephemera. Any special or unique feature. (Public Library)
- Our current definition is pre-1850, with occasional exceptions for more recent works of special value through association or unusual format. (Private Library)
- Older material - of particular historical interest - part of a special collection (Unknown Institution)

These examples from public, private and university libraries highlight the differing views taken by institutions on what defines a rare book reflecting the individual goal of the institution. Age, the most common criteria in both researches is of itself not easy to define with one institution defining a book rare if it is pre 1900, others if it is pre 1850 and some not providing a specific year. What is important for one institution such as 'limited edition

Figure 4.1

Themes	Survey Results	Interviews	What the Research says
Definition of Rare Books	Q 4 Rare book Definition - Scarcity and size of print run, Age (depending in inst eg. pre-1850, 1851-1900), edition, fine binding, content, provenance, format, Q 4 Rare book Definition - historical significance, part of special collection, value, connected to Institution. Private Press publications, condition (fragile items), suitability for exhibition, author, size of print run	Hard to tie down comprehensive definition - holds its price, content and physical content, limited editions, cut-off date varies. Post 1850 wood pulp paper was used which doesn't preserve as well as previous materials. Dependant on the institutional priorities and the collections that are held.	ARL Definition - 'The entire range of textual, graphic and artefact primary source materials in analogue and digital formats, including printed books, manuscripts, photographs, maps, artworks, audio-visual material and realia.' (ACRL 2003) Rinaldo (2006) notes the 'intentionally broad' nature of the ARL definition (Rinaldo 2007, p. 38). Van Wingen states that 'there are no easy formulas for determining rarity.'
Rare Books as Cultural Heritage	Q 10 Importance of adequate cataloguing for preserving cultural heritage 75% really important, 12.5% Important, 12.5% not sure. Q2 11 out of 14 institutions have a policy to add to their collections	Rare books preserve the history of who we are. Driven by collection policies eg. National Libraries cultural mission is preserving the history of Irish texts. Also rare books help in researching and understaning the human condition from their past. Many records destroyed in the civil war highlight the importance of protecting what we have.	Stephens notes that librarians are in an age of digitisation and focusing resources and energy on 'exciting new ways of providing information', which may 'hamper reflection' and prove costly for some of Australia's cultural heritage. (Stephens 2009, p.175)
Digital v Physical copy	Q17 Main challenges facing rare books - Security of books protected using digital copies; Improves access and discoverability; As budgets decrease for physical rare books maintenance, preservation and conservation more important. Q 15 37.5% Disagree Strongly with Hirtle, 37.5% Disagree and 25% have no opinion Q12 Reasons for importance of physical/digital copy Materials, binding; Can be easier to see illuminations on digital copy; Artefactual significance; Research needs eg. archaeology and book history; Proven format to maintain information; provenance, no two books from the hand press period are identical, only one tends to get digitised; Use in exhibitions; Get overall sense of book. Q 11 62.5% say Physical rather than digital copy important, 37.5% say very important Q14 Reasons for digitisation If used by large groups; Too fragile; Exhibitions; Collaboration with international projects; No digital copies available elsewhere; Encourage research. Q13 37.5% of institutions have digitisation policies	Developing a physical collection of Rare books helps to distinguish the institution as a research centre. Scholars should use the original texts, digital copies suitable for undergraduates. Several cases where digitised text was not readible. The second participant highlighted the importance of access over ownership based on the fact that ithe institution was a research facility	Koda maintains that the 'raison d'etre' for special collections is that their fundamental collections are 'primary holdings.' (2008, p. 474) Hirtle (2002) outlines three main benefits of digitisation. Firstly due to increased accessibility there is a rise in the use of special collections. Secondly, increased access facilitates further research at a greater pace and thirdly people of differing disciplines can now carry out new types of research without visiting research libraries. Hirtle also believes that electronic access will replace most uses of printed, paper copies. koda's (2008, p. 474) states that 'no two printed books or written manuscripts are the same, differing in countless (...) features.'
Challenge of technology	Q 17 Main challenges facing Rare Books - Reliance on Google for research; Lack of availability of digital copies; Rapidly changing technology Q18 Proposed Solutions - Collaboration of catalogues nationally and internationally; Development of national policies, including collection development policies; Collaboration with educators and digital information providers	A digitised copy can leave you at one remove from the physical item and in some cases, such as digitisng of micro film, it can be two removes. Technology has not been tested in the long term. In some cases there can be a conflict between the institutional goal of providing imediate access and the development of a collection. Providing online access can cause security issues as the location and value of an item are feeely available.	The challenge of technology as identified by Cloonan & Berger in 1957 as reiterated in 2003 when they noted that 'the present wave-the coming of the electronic age-is still upon us and shows no sign of receding.' (Cloonan and Berger) The challenge as outlined by Cloonan and Berger is 'to marshal this recent attention into new resources and to anticipate the next stage of our development as a field'.(Cloonan & Berger 2003) Stephans (2009) notes that 'we cannot sit back and allow Google Book Search's accidental scans of Australian content, with non-Australian provenances, to represent the history of Australian engagement with the printed word over the last two centuries.'
Collection Policies	Q 9 Adequacy of current collection policies - 12.5% Not really sufficient; 50% not sure; 25% sufficient; 12.5% completely sufficient. Q18 Suggested improvements development of national policies, including collection development policies;	In most cases institutions have different collection goals so it is difficult to develop national policies and collaborated approach to collection.	Stephans (2009, p. 176) notes that 'a quick tour of the collection management policies of many of [Australia's] libraries reveals considerable variation in the criteria used to identify 'rare', 'special' and 'heritage' printed material.'
Cataloguing Issues	Q6 & Q7 Cataloguing backlogs - 100% of institutions have cataloguing backlogs ranging from 100-100,000 items. Q8 I low common are backlogs - 50% said common; 50% said universal Q8 75% believe incorrect cataloguing is carried out incorrectly; 25% believe it is done correctly. Q5 72.7% believe cataloguing is carried out correctly 27.3% believe it is not being done correctly Q17 Main Challenges facing Rare Books - Due to recruitment embargo the number of professional librarians employed has been reduced by 75% therefore the cataloguing backlog has increased. Also, there is a misguided perception that 'everything' is available online or digitised, for rare Irish material this is not the case.	In both interviews this topic was discussed. The conclusion was that although the information entered for cataloguing was generally correct the level of detail was often not complete in many cases due to a lack of time and staff available. This opinion was corobrated in a comment added to the questionnaire. Good cataloguing can be expensivve but in the long run it saves time and directs scholars to quality research.	ARL 7 point plan: Point 1 Enhance access to collections and backlogs, surface "hidden collections." Advocate for and administer funding for projects, and collaborate with RBMS [Rare Books and Manuscripts Section] to develop and endorse guidelines for what constitutes adequate access. (Hewitt & Panitch 2003) Patton (2009, p. 142) in her research of the collections of the State Library of New South Wales notes that 'many of [the] older printed collections do not have electronic records,' 'access points for provenance or associations in the old card catalogues are inconsistent' and 'the only way to locate these items is to painstakingly search the shelves.' Stephans (2009, p. 177) also ponts out that 'not only are we being challenged to come up with a definition of what might belong in a heritage book collection, but we are also facing the difficulty of identifying where this material actually resides.'
Budgets	Q16 Buget changes in past 10 years 50% Decreased; 37.5% Remained unchanged; 12.5% Increased. Q 17 Main challenges facing Rare Books - "In an era of reduced staff numbers and smaller budgets the case for preservation and conservation has to be made more strongly than heretofore."	The issue of budgets was discussed in both interviews. One budget had gone from a high of approx €250,000 each for manuscripts and rare books to the current amount of €25,000 each. Issue of unpaid interns highlighted in both interviews and in the main catllenges questionnaire - Knowledge of a collection needs to be accumulated over time which is difficult with short term contracts.	ARL Survey - Large portions of collections did not provide intellectual access with significant backlogs existing. This raised a concern regarding the vulnerability of special collections budget cuts and highlighted the need to reinforce the necessity of special collections within libraries. (Research Collections Committee, 1997)
Coordination & Collaboration	Q18 Suggested improvements - More collaboration, development of national policies, including collection development policies, improve eduction, more interaction with UK and EU. Q14 Criteria for digitisation Collaboration with large international projects	Although there is some collaboaration between institutions. in most cases institutions have different collection goals so it is difficult to develop a collaborated approach to collection. A suggestion was made to divide intellectual arena among institutions and pool staff to provide cross institution support and develop knowledge. RASCAL provides a collaborated approach to discoveribility in the Republic and Northern Ireland	ARL 7 point plan: Point 3 Coordinate information sharing regarding digitization efforts. (Hewitt & Panitch 2003)
Education and Training	Q 17 Main challenges facing Rare Books - academic training in Ireland in rare books curatorship inadequate.	Both participants identified issues with staffing budgets which meant high turnover of interns in many cases. This lead to limited long term understanding of collections.	ARL 7 point plan: Point 4 - Define core competencies among special collection librarians and create training opportunities. (Hewitt & Panitch 2003)
Promotion of special collections	Q 17 Main challenges facing Rare Books - Outreach, Maintaining the collection and marketing the uniqueness of certain items will bring in scholars.	Developing a physical collection of Rare books promotes the institution as a research centre distinguishing it from other centres. As well as providing a collaborated approach RASCAL promotes the discoverability of collections.	ARL 7 point plan: Point 5 - Promote special collections as fundamental to the mission of the research library. (Hewitt & Panitch 2003)

modern books' or 'more recent works of special value', may not be part of the collection policy of other institutions who focus on 'older material – of particular historical interest'. It is clear from these definitions that the classification of a rare book is on an institution-by-institution basis. These findings from Irish institutions correspond with Rinaldo's (2007) results insofar as the breadth and inconsistency of definitions across institutions is common to both sets of results.

The pragmatic approach to this thesis outlined in the methodology chapter facilitates the development of an overall view of the definition of rare book collecting in Ireland. Incorporating the follow-up interviews in the research methods is particularly useful in understanding the definition of rare books and provides greater insight on the topic. It was noted by both interviewees that the definition of a rare book is dependent on the goal of the institution so unless the collection development goals of all Irish institutions are similar it would be very difficult to have one consistent definition for rare books. The first interviewee noted that it is 'hard to tie down a comprehensive definition' and that the cut-off date varies depending on the institution. He reiterated the point that the definition is dependent on the institutional priorities and the collections that are held.

Interestingly he also pointed out that post 1850 wood pulp paper was used for printing books and this does not preserve as well as previous materials such as papyrus, velum, linen rags and straw. In 1843 in Germany ground wood pulp began to be used in papermaking instead of linen rags. The acid used for bleaching wood pulp eventually became a leading cause of the deterioration of lower quality paper over time. (Normans 2004) This highlights and exacerbates the need for the preservation and storage of rare books.

So in answer to the research question of what the definition of rare books as seen by rare book librarians in Ireland is, the answer is that the findings are in accord with the findings in the literature review. The criteria used are dependent on the goals of the organisation and their current collections and are not co-ordinated with other institution's policies. This concurs with Stephens' findings when he notes that 'a quick tour of the collection management policies of many of our libraries reveals considerable variation in the criteria used to identify 'rare', 'special' and 'heritage' printed material,' (Stephens 2009, p. 176)

As has been identified current collection policies are on an institution-by-institution basis so there is no overview of what is being collected and no integrated approach in deciding what

institutions should collect, meaning some areas or subjects are in danger of being overlooked. For this reason it may be beneficial for a more collaborative approach to collections as it would help provide a consistent approach to rare book collection and, as much as budgets allow, help in preserving the cultural heritage of Ireland for current and future generations.

This section has compared the findings from the survey, literature review and interviews in relation to the definition of rare books. It is clear that findings from Irish institutions are consistent with the lack of a clear definition identified in the literature review. This leads to the questions of the value of rare books as cultural heritage and the dangers that inconsistent definitions may pose to their preservation.

Cultural Heritage

The new Oxford dictionary defines cultural as 'of or relating to the arts and to intellectual achievements' and heritage as 'denoting or relating to things of special architectural, historical or natural value that are protected and preserved for the nation'. (Pearsall, 1999) Based on this definition, rare books can clearly be identified as cultural heritage as they represent 'things of special historical value,' and relate 'to the arts and intellectual achievements' that are 'protected and preserved for the nation'. (Pearsall, 1999)

As outlined in the literature review Stephens (2009, p. 175) maintains that libraries are in an age of digitisation and focusing resources and energy on 'exciting new ways of providing information', which may 'hamper reflection' and prove costly for some of Australia's cultural heritage. He identifies rare books as part of the cultural heritage of Australia, which is in accord with the dictionary definition above and identifies digitisation as a risk to preserving this cultural heritage. In this research seven out of eight survey respondents believed that adequate cataloguing and storage of Rare Books is important or very important in preserving the cultural heritage of Ireland with one participant unsure. This finding is in agreement with Stephens (2009) view that rare books are important to cultural heritage in Australia. However, Hirtle (2002) raises a question about the role of librarians in this regard. He challenges the assertion that librarians are custodians of cultural heritage with the suggestion that the primary role of librarians should be providing access to rare books and not deciding what to keep.

Hirtle (2002, p. 47) states that it is not 'necessary to maintain a middling collection of rare books when access is no longer tied to physical possession, let alone ownership?' He goes on to propose that print copies may 'sell for large amounts of money to private collectors, but few libraries can or should participate in the market if most research needs can be met with digital copies'. (Hirtle 2002, p. 47) He suggests that librarians should focus on providing digital access to rare books and that maintaining and preserving the physical copy of a rare book is not necessarily the role of the librarian. Asked in the survey whether they agree or disagree with Hirtle's (2002) view, six of the eight respondents either disagree or strongly disagree with two respondents unsure. These results reiterate that the view of Irish institutions in relation to the ownership and preservation of the physical copy of a rare book is contrary to Hirtle's (2002) assertions. The findings from Irish institutions correspond to the opposing view proposed by Smith (2006), Koda (2008) and Stephens (2009) in the literature review. They promote the value of the physical copy of rare books and the role of the librarian in preserving them.

The counter argument that Stephens proposes is that part of the duty of librarians is the 'preservation and survival of significant material' and that aspects of the current digitisation policy may 'threaten the future of our historically significant book collections'. (2009, p.179) This argument seems to resonate with the results from Irish institutions with 100% of respondents indicating that it is either important or very important to have a physical book rather than access to a digitized version of a rare book. koda also reiterates this noting that 'no two printed books or written manuscripts are the same'. (koda 2008, p. 474) Koda emphasizes this further, maintaining that the 'raison d'etre' for special collections is that their fundamental collections are 'primary holdings'. (2008, p. 474)

There were mixed views from both interviewees in this area. The first interviewee agreed strongly with Stephens (2009) and Koda (2008). He also suggested that developing a physical collection of rare books helps to distinguish the institution as a research center citing the example of Harvard, a world famous institution, as having a budget of approximately £3 million in 2008/2009 for collection development. He believed that such a policy is essential to distinguish a university as a research facility. Contrary to this view the second interviewee was more inclined towards the argument that access is more important than ownership based on the fact that the institution is primarily a research facility, which is in accord with Hirtle's (2002) view.

On the one hand there is the argument that rare book collection should be left to book collectors, that libraries should be more focused on providing access, digital or physical, to information and that budgets should be allocated based on this view. The counter argument suggests that librarians are not just the gateway to information but the custodians of cultural heritage for current and future generations and that a reduction in budgets for the acquisition and preservation of rare books could jeopardize this role. This question of the role of librarians in an age of ever changing technology is not a new one. In fact as noted in the literature review, in 1957 Cloonan claimed that technology was a *tsunami* changing the world of rare book collection and that, in an ever-changing landscape the current manifestation of this *tsunami* is digitization. (Cloonan & Berger, 2003)

It seems from the evidence thus far that the importance of rare books as cultural heritage is in no doubt but the question that is still to be tackled is, whether digital copies can replace physical copies of rare books and others such as book collectors can be entrusted to preserve the cultural heritage of Ireland.

Impact of Digitisation on Rare Books

To understand the role of rare book librarians in the preservation of cultural heritage we must first understand the role of digitisation in modern libraries. Hirtle (2002) proposed five impacts of digitisation on rare book librarianship outlined in the literature review that predict the demise of the use of printed, or paper copies which would be replaced by electronic copies. He suggests that print holdings will become less special and that the use of paper originals will decrease. Although librarians will have a key role in adding meta data, organizing and cataloguing digital copies of rare books, Hirtle's (2002) view seems to negate the responsibility of librarians as custodians of cultural heritage and is contrary to the view proposed by Stephens (2009, p. 179) earlier that the duty of librarians is the 'preservation and survival of significant material'.

Stephens argues that 'we cannot sit back and allow Google Book Search's accidental scans of Australian content, to represent the history of Australian engagement with the printed word over the last two centuries'. (2009, p. 178) This point suggests that digital projects by private companies are fine but librarians should make decisions on what is important to Australian heritage, as has been the case for millennia. He further suggests that 'aspects of the current

digitisation policy' may 'threaten the future of our historically significant book collections'. (Stephens 2009, p. 179) It is clear that Stephens (2009) does not agree with the suggestion by Hirtle (2002) that rare books will become less special. The role of librarians as custodians of cultural heritage was also highlighted by the ARL in these two points from their seven-point plan outlined in the literature review.

- Coordinate planning for collecting nineteenth- and twentieth-century materials and those in new formats.
- Promote special collections as fundamental to the mission of the research library.

(Hewitt and Panitch 2003)

Stephens suggests that 'as we try to keep up with technological innovation and change in our libraries, we need to remind ourselves that we are still responsible for heritage material' and 'we cannot presume to fully understand what significance this material may hold for future generations'. (2009, p. 187) An example of where significant material was in jeopardy occurred in 1968 when a major university library dispatched its early volumes of the *Transactions of the Zoological Society of London* as an interlibrary loan. This 1860s rare book was not returned and lay forgotten on the shelves of the borrowing library until its recent rediscovery. It is bound in olive-stained morocco and cloth containing pristine hand-colored zoological plates. The attached bookplate reveals a provenance to the library of Dr George Bennett, the first curator of the Australian Museum.

The results from the questionnaire support the assertions made by Stephens (2009), Hewitt and Panitch (2003) in relation to the role of rare book librarians. When asked to provide reasons for choosing the physical over the digital copy, the advantages of the physical book far out weighted those of the digital copy (figure 2.3). This was contrary to Belanger's assertion that the most important change in rare book libraries will be an 'increasing disinclination of most general research libraries over the next several decades to continue to maintain large, permanent collections of paper-based books of any sort, rare or non-rare." (Stillman Interview 2005) The main advantage for Irish librarians is the books value as an artefact reiterating the intrinsic value of the physical copy over its digital counterpart. The other most cited answers include the ability to see and touch the material and get a sense of the book, the ability to examine binding and the fact that researchers should use the original.

The point in relation to using the original for research was reiterated by the first interviewee as being fundamental in serious research.

The second interviewee also raised the point that technology has not been tested in the long term in the preservation of cultural heritage and this point was reiterated by one survey participant when asked why it was so important to have the physical book rather than access to a digital copy. 'A printed book is a proven stable platform from which your institution can provide scholarly access to historical text'. One notable example of where technology has been unsuccessful in the preservation of cultural heritage described by Rob Blackhurst (2007) was the BBC's attempt to create a Doomsday book.

> 'The Domesday book, written in 1086 on pages of stretched sheepskin, has lasted more than 900 years but the BBC's attempts to create a new Domesday book chronicling British life in 1986 - capturing fleeting historical records such as adolescent diaries and a video tour of a council house - was more problematic. The £2.5m project, stored on huge laser discs and readable only by a brick-like, mid-1980s vintage BBC microcomputer, became obsolete within a decade. Both the laser- disc player and the software it relied on have long since been abandoned. A specialist team from the national archives had to spend more than a year rewriting the software to rescue it from oblivion'.

(Blackhurst 2007)

This example highlights the point that technology has not yet been tested in the long run to preserve digital information and that there is a risk involved in the reliance on digital copies to preserve information in the long term.

This section has outlined the arguments in relation to the impact of digitisation on rare books tackling the question of how Irish librarians view the impact of digitisation on rare book collections and if this is in accord with the findings in the literature. It is clear from the literature that there are opposing views on the impact of digitisation but the results from this research indicate resounding support for the continued role of librarians as custodians of the physical copy of rare books and that maintenance of digital copies is secondary to the primary goal of preserving rare books. Although contrary to the views of Belanger (Stillman 2005) and Hirtle (2002), the views of Irish librarians support the opinions of many others

including Stephens (2002), Simpson (2004) and Koda (2008) that physical copies of rare books are the 'raison d'etre' of rare book collections. (Koda 2008, p. 474) The next area to be analysed is the question of the status of hidden collections and cataloguing backlogs in Irish institutions? This question will be tackled by comparing the results from this research on cataloguing issues in Irish libraries and the findings from the literature review.

Hidden Collections & Cataloguing Backlogs

To understand the necessity of a collaborative approach to rare book collection in Ireland the first step will be to explore what is currently being catalogued. As noted in the literature review the ARL identified that for printed volumes 15% on average of collections remained unprocessed or un-catalogued. (Brodsky 2007) The first point in the ARL seven-point plan is to 'enhance access to collections and backlogs' and 'surface hidden collections'. (Hewitt and Panitch 2003)

The findings in Irish institutions identified that all of the ten respondents had cataloguing backlogs ranging from 100 to 100,000 items in size. Only one respondent in the questionnaire provided the percentage of the backlogs, which was 20%. It is clear in retrospect that this question could have been phrased better to elicit the percentages in all cases where possible but the findings that there are backlogs in all Irish institutions at least are consistent with those of the literature. The one institution that did provide a percentage of 20% was broadly in agreement with the 15% average identified by the ARL in American research libraries. The point was reiterated when four of the eight respondents said cataloguing backlogs are common with the remaining four suggesting they are universal. The impact of this is highlighted by Jones when she notes that 'un-catalogued or under processed collections are at a greater risk of being lost or stolen' and that 'unique and rare materials are particularly vulnerable'. (2002, p. 89) One survey respondent indicated that this problem is actually increasing due to budget constraints; 'Due to the recruitment embargo the number of professional librarians employed has been reduced by 75% therefore the cataloguing backlog has increased'. The issue of budget constraints is particularly relevant in Ireland in recent years due to the recession and government cut backs and will be explored further later in the section.

Stephens (2009, p. 177) identifies the challenge this presents when he notes that 'not only are we being challenged to come up with a definition of what might belong in a heritage book collection, but we are also facing the difficulty of identifying where this material actually resides'. Research by Patton (2009, p. 142) provides a specific case in the State Library of New South Wales in which she notes that 'many of [the] older printed collections do not have electronic records,' 'access points for provenance or associations in the old card catalogues are inconsistent' and 'the only way to locate these items is to painstakingly search the shelves'. This example highlights the vulnerability of important items that have no electronic record or are poorly catalogued and may be difficult to find as a result. Hidden items are not stored in the correct preservation conditions and if fragile can be subject to excessive use or damage.

The question of inconsistent cataloguing identified by Patton (2009) was also tackled in the questionnaire. Eight of the ten respondents feel that rare books are being catalogued accurately with two respondents replying that they are not. However when asked about the frequency of incorrect cataloguing eight respondents said it is common and two said it is unusual which seems to contradict the previous results. The question posed in the questionnaire in this case may have been misleading to some extent but the pragmatic approach to the research and the use of interviews allowed this inconsistency to be resolved. As outlined in the results chapter this apparent contradiction was due to the fact that although cataloguing is generally accurate the depth of cataloguing is not always sufficient due to low staff numbers and budget constraints.

Budgets

As is clear from the literature review and this thesis the underlying problems that result in cataloguing issues are rooted in the common theme of staff numbers and budgets. This was identified by five of the eight respondents as the most common challenge facing rare book collection in Ireland (figure 2.3). In addition to this four out of the eight respondents replied that their budgets had decreased in the past ten years with three saying it had remained unchanged and one budget had increased. The challenge this presents to rare book librarians was highlighted by one survey respondent who noted that "in an era of reduced staff numbers and smaller budgets the case for preservation and conservation has to be made more strongly than heretofore." This challenge was also identified in a 1997 ARL survey, which found that

large portions of collections did not provide intellectual access with significant backlogs existing. The RCC maintained that this raised a concern regarding the vulnerability of special collections budget cuts and highlighted the need to reinforce the necessity of special collections within libraries. (Research Collections Committee, 1997)

The issue of budgets was also discussed in both interviews. The first interviewee noted that the budget for developing collections had been decreased by 90%. The second interviewee noted that although good cataloguing can be expensive in the long run it saves time and helps directs scholars to relevant research. The staffing issue was also highlighted in both interviews with particular emphasis on unpaid interns. It was suggested that knowledge of a collection is accumulated over time, which is difficult with short-term contracts. This point was also noted in the survey as one of the solutions to the main challenges facing rare book collection in Ireland where one respondent proposed 'joint catalogues' where all libraries provide access to resources through collectively owned catalogues and 'proper paid internships for post-graduates'. The suggestions of information sharing and training were also highlighted by the ARL seven-point plan proposed by Hewitt & Panitch (2003, p. 167) in the literature review. Point three is to 'coordinate information sharing regarding digitisation efforts' and point four is to 'define core competencies among special collection librarians and create training opportunities'.

This section has addressed the research question of what the status of hidden collections and cataloguing backlogs is in Irish institutions comparing the findings to the research. The evidence presented shows that backlogs and hidden collections are at least common if not universal in Irish institutions, which supports the findings in the literature review. The depth of cataloguing was also identified as an issue in both Ireland and internationally and the evidence suggests that this issue is due to limited staff numbers and resources. It is clear from the points raised in this section that rare books are vulnerable due to cataloguing issues derived from these underlying budget constraints. As institutions budgets are increasingly strained due to digitisation projects this issue will only increase unless addressed. It seems that the immediate challenges that face rare books is the promotion of their value within institutions and to define a clearer understanding of the role of librarians in preserving them.

Conclusion

This chapter attempts to outline the main arguments identified by Irish librarians and those identified in the literature review in relation to the research questions. The key concepts discussed are the definition of a rare book, the impact of digitisation on rare book collections and the status of hidden collections and cataloguing backlogs in libraries. The chapter has identified that rare book definitions in Irish institutions are on an institution-by-institution basis, concurring with the findings in the literature review and reflect the independent goal of the institution. For this reason it may not currently be practically possible to develop a more concise definition than that proposed by the ARL. The impact of digitisation raises the question of the role of the librarian in maintaining and preserving physical and digital copies of rare books. There are conflicting views on this in the literature with Irish librarians firmly supporting the role of librarians continuing to maintain and preserve the cultural heritage of Ireland where access, although important is secondary to this role. The final topic discussed is the issue of cataloguing backlogs and depth of cataloguing. It was clearly identified that these issues identified in the literature also occur in Irish libraries. Furthermore, it seems that a portion at least of the underlying causes of these issues are budget constraints and training.

One suggestion to tackle these issues that has become evident in this research is collaboration between institutions. This would help by sharing staff and resources and help develop a common goal for institutions avoiding competition for rare books. This common goal may help in developing a more concise definition of rare books for Irish institutions based on common aims but in my opinion this would be a longer term goal. This suggestion will be explored further in the next chapter as one of the recommendations identified in this research.

Chapter 6: Conclusion & Recommendations

Chapter Summary

This chapter will outline the main conclusions from the research based on the questions addressed in this thesis. It will summarise the main arguments in relation to the definition of rare books, the impact of digitisation and issues surrounding hidden collections and cataloguing backlogs. It will also propose some recommendations based on the findings in the research.

Definition of Rare Books

The first question to tackle is how Irish libraries define rare books and whether this definition concurs with the findings in the literature review. As has been outlined in the literature review results based on the research from the Hewitt and Panitch (2003), Rinaldo (2007) and others indicate that only a broad definition of what constitutes a rare book is currently available. The current ACRL (2003) definition covers all primary material with no age or material limits, which in practical terms can cause resource issues due to its vastness. This broadness results from ambiguity over the varying criteria employed to identify what is deemed as rare which varies from institution to institution.

This finding was mirrored in this study of Irish libraries that have rare book collections, where it clearly demonstrates that the definition of rare books is on an institution-by-institution basis and is dependent on the goals of individual organizations. The most commonly criterion identified in this research for defining a rare book is age. This term is ambiguous to say the least as dates for rarity vary from institution to institution. In fact, many modern books are considered rare based on criteria such as association or number of publications highlighting the difficulty of having a concise definition of rare books that can be used by all institutions. The ad hoc nature of collection policies can lead to institutions competing for resources and acquiring items that already exist in other institutions. This of itself is not an issue as each book has its own value as an artefact with unique provenance but when resources are limited a more collaborative approach may be beneficial in the long-term to capture the cultural heritage of Ireland. This point is suggested by Hewitt and Panitch

(2003, p. 167) in point two of their seven-point plan: 'coordinate planning for collecting nineteenth and twentieth-century materials and those in new formats'.

It is clear from these findings that the definition of a rare book in Irish institutions is similarly ad hoc and broad in nature to those identified in the literature. As identified both in this thesis and in the literature review rare books are important to cultural heritage and the inconsistent nature of the current definitions of rare books jeopardises what is preserved for current and future generations. However a consistent definition would be problematic to develop because, as already identified, the current definitions of a rare book are on an institution-by-institution basis and are driven by the goals of the organisation. With each institution having its own aims the independent definitions they currently have are developed from and tied to these aims. For example the question of age is more important to one institution than another if it only collects books pre 1850 as opposed to books with limited publications. Another example is scarcity, which is again subjective and is driven by experience of rare book collecting rather than a strict set of guidelines.

Before a consistent definition could be decided upon an increasingly collaborative approach would need to be adopted to align the institutional goals and provide a more coordinated approach to rare book collection in Ireland. Along with more funding this was the most common solution identified to tackle the challenges facing rare books today (figure 3.4). One survey respondent suggested as a solution 'more collaboration, development of national policies, including collection development policies'. A suggestion on how to approach this was identified in the first interview, which was to divide intellectual arena among institutions and pool staff to provide cross institution support and develop knowledge. This would ensure a combined approach to collections and that all arenas such as travel, science, medicine etc. were being captured. The pooling of staff would help tackle the short-term intern contracts issue identified earlier by providing longer-term contracts for a pool of staff that would work in different institutions based on need. This would also tackle the training issues identified and help improve knowledge of rare book collections.

Impact of Digitisation on Rare Books

The second question posed in this research is, how Irish librarians view the impact of digitisation on rare book collections. To answer this question there must first be an understanding of the role of librarian's in preserving the physical copy of rare books. It is evident from the literature review that rare books are a part of the cultural heritage of a nation as identified by Stephens (2009). They represent both the intellectual and artistic history of a nation and are invaluable artefacts for professions such as book historians and archaeologists. Hirtle (2002), however, raises a question in relation to the role of librarians as custodians of the cultural heritage aspect of rare books. He predicts the demise of the use of printed or paper copies, which would be replaced by electronic copies. He suggests that the primary goal of librarians is providing access to information and that the collection of rare books should be left to private collectors. This question is particularly relevant in the age of digitisation where the allocation of resources is under review. If the role of the librarian is purely a matter of access then the obvious direction for libraries is to increase spending on providing digital access by subscribing to online catalogues, as this would be cheaper than acquiring individual copies of rare books. It would also provide the possibility for collaboration between institutions and increase access by sharing digital copies of rare books.

The counter argument suggested by Koda (2008, p. 474) is that the 'raison d'etre' for special collections is that their collections are 'primary holdings'. The findings in this research indicate that the librarians surveyed in Irish institutions see as part of their role the collection and preservation of the physical copy of rare books. Contrary to Hirtle's (2002) view, they feel they are custodians of the cultural heritage of Ireland providing access and preserving rare books for current and future generations. This is clear from the fact that the most common advantage identified in this research for having a physical book over access to its digital counterpart is its value as an artefact (figure 2.3). Stephens (2009, p. 159) reiterates this point and identifies rare books as 'physical artefacts of Australia's cultural heritage'. In addition to their value as artefacts one survey participant noted that 'a printed book is a proven stable platform'. This is highlighted by the attempt by the BBC to create a Doomsday book chronicling British life in 1986. The original Doomsday book written in 1086 has lasted more than 990 years whereas a specialist team from the national archives had to spend more than a year rewriting the software to rescue the BBC version from oblivion as the software had become outdated. (Blackhurst 2007) This emphasises the fact that preservation of

information using technology has not been tested fully and to replace a format that has been relied upon for thousands of years has many risks associated with it and needs to be examined further.

Another reason for storing the physical copy rather than its digital counterpart is that no two books are the same and each has its own provenance so one digital copy cannot represent the variety of physical copies available. (koda 2008) Finally, if this role is not the responsibility of librarians, then with whom does it lie? Stephens (2009, p. 178) questions whether society should rely on 'Google book search's accidental scans of Australian content (…) to represent the history of Australian engagement with the printed word over the last two centuries'. He further suggests that 'aspects of the current digitisation policy' may 'threaten the future of our historically significant book collections'. (Stephens 2009, p. 179) The point that technology has not been tested in the long term in the preservation of cultural heritage was raised in one interview and reiterated in the questionnaire when a participant noted that 'a printed book is a proven stable platform from which your institution can provide scholarly access to historical text'.

Although contrary to the views of Belanger (Stillman 2005) and Hirtle, (2002) the views of Irish librarians support the opinions of many others including Stephens (2002), Simpson (2004) and Koda (2008) that physical copies of rare books are the 'raison d'etre' of rare book collections. (Koda 2008, p. 474) It is clear from the research that, in the view of Irish librarians, the advantages of the physical book far outweigh those of its digital counterpart and that they feel that the role of custodian is within their remit and is, in fact, central to their role.

Hidden Collections & Cataloguing Backlogs

The final question addressed in this thesis is the status of hidden collections and cataloguing backlogs in Irish institutions. As identified by an ARL survey (Brodsky 2007) approximately 15% of rare books in all institutions surveyed have not been catalogued. Patton (2009) in her research identified that some items that have been catalogued do not have sufficient metadata to identify the item. Jones (2002, p. 89) suggests that 'un-catalogued or under processed collections are at a greater risk of being lost or stolen' and that 'unique and rare materials are particularly vulnerable'. As discussed in the previous

chapter, only one questionnaire respondent provided the percentage of backlogs in Irish institutions, which was 20%. It is clear in retrospect that this question could have been phrased better to elicit the percentages in all cases where possible but the findings that there are backlogs in 100% of Irish institutions at least are consistent with those of the literature. The question of inadequate cataloguing was also teased out and this study established that although the information being catalogued in Irish institutions is generally correct the depth of cataloguing required to support scholarly research is often not possible due to staff numbers and insufficient budgets.

Findings from the questionnaire and interviews indicate that Irish librarians are in accord with the views of Jones (2002) and Patton (2009). In fact it was suggested that due to the recruitment embargo the number of professional librarians employed has been reduced and therefore the cataloguing backlog is increasing. One survey participant notes that 'in an era of reduced staff numbers and smaller budgets the case for preservation and conservation has to be made more strongly than heretofore'. It is clear that current resources are not sufficient to adequately capture and provide access to rare books in special collections and as more and more resources are channelled into digital projects and online resources the greater the issue will become. In my opinion, based on this research, the question of a more consistent definition is secondary to the more immediate challenge of identifying and providing access to what is currently held.

Recommendations

In my opinion, based on the research carried out, a more concise definition of rare books would be useful in determining what should be preserved for current and future generations. However, there is more immediate work in my view that would need to be carried out before this can occur such as working on backlogs and developing a more collaborative approach to rare book collection. The underlying budget issues would also need to be addressed. Some suggestions for addressing these issues were observed in the course of the research. In addition to more collaboration and the pooling of resources already suggested, the Hewitt and Panitch (2003) propose that the value of rare books to an institution needs to be promoted. Point five of the ARL (Hewitt and Panitch 2003, p. 167) seven-point plan is to 'promote special collections as fundamental to the mission of the research library'. One survey respondent also highlighted this point noting that 'marketing the uniqueness of certain items

will bring in scholars'. The suggestion in the first interview in relation to this was that developing a physical collection of rare books promotes the institution as a research centre distinguishing it from other centres. This distinction can also be used to encourage international students to choose an institution.

This can be achieved by exhibiting the rare material to create greater awareness of its existence and promote the institution as a centre of research. This can additionally serve as a revenue stream for the college such as the example of the permanent exhibition at Trinity College. The other two areas for promotion of the value of rare books are to internal management and scholars carrying out research. Promotion to management is vital as it is an opportunity to present the value that rare books can bring to the institution in terms of prestige and scholarly interest and can support applications for increased budgets and staff. Promotion to scholars by publishing articles on the importance of rare books to an institution increases awareness of the value they bring and assists in distinguishing the institution as a research centre thus encouraging further research.

Conclusion

Patton (2009, p. 138) maintains that 'the library's vast collections of printed books are in many ways the most tangible witness to the library's past and the rarest of these books its very soul'. The focus on the preservation of these books is more important than ever due to the changing world of librarians. If rare books, as suggested by Patton (2009), are indeed the soul of the library then librarians need to identify and tackle the challenges that hidden collections, technology, and particularly digitisation, present to their preservation to ensure they are protected for current and future generations.

Reflections on Learning & Skill Development

Chapter Summary

This section of the thesis will outline my personal experiences during the process of writing, outlining the background of some of the decisions made and skills developed in the course of the research. The first section will summarize the steps involved in choosing the topic. The next section will outline the experience I feel I have gained and summarise some of the challenges I faced during the process. The final section will explore the next steps in my career as a librarian.

Learning From Experience

Kolb (1974) identifies a four stage learning cycle that involves having an experience, reviewing that experience, concluding from it and planning how to use the learning gained during the experience. The experience in this case is the research carried out for this thesis. Writing the thesis involves reviewing and concluding from the research experience. The final step in this cycle is to identify the skills and knowledge gained through this experience so they can be used in the future. For this reason a reflective section of a thesis allows the researcher examine the experiences that have taken place and reflect on what has been learned. In addition to this Pedlar, Burgoyne and Boydell (1986) suggest that reflection on learning should also include feelings, thoughts, ideas and behaviour. This section will attempt to examine the learning achieved in the course of this research based on these suggestions.

First Steps

I began thinking about the topic for my thesis during the research methods module of the course in 2010. The aim of the module was to provide the skills to analyse and collect data and involved completing the first draft of the literature review and giving a power point presentation on the topic. Although at first I was a little confused with regards to the timing of the module, a year before I would be beginning the thesis, in the end I found the experience extremely useful as it allowed me to begin thinking about the topic I wanted to research. After some initial research on various subjects such as information literacy and IT I settled on the topic of rare books, as it was the topic I found most interesting. I have always

enjoyed old and particularly rare books, as I believe they represent a historic gateway, which is crucial in understanding the mistakes and achievements of our ancestors and learning from them.

During my research I identified some of the challenges facing rare books and that unless tackled we may not be in a position to pass on parts of our cultural heritage to the next generation. As Newton famously proclaimed; 'if I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants'. Without an accurate record of our past to learn from we would be doing a disservice to future generations who would have to relearn the lessons of the past. For this reason I felt it was necessary to understand the issues involved in rare book collecting. Having done some preliminary research I identified that there was very little research carried out on Irish rare book libraries. For example, Benson (2005) noted that 'in the early 1950's [Trinity College Dublin] had begun to emerge (…) from a long torpor to begin to function as a twentieth century research library'. He describes the college since 1801 as being 'desperately short of storage' and 'chronically understaffed'. (Benson 2005) Things have changed a lot since then with Benson (2005) noting that 'Trinity had been one of the earliest libraries in the British Isles to use computers for cataloguing'.

The research that was available focused on libraries in other countries especially Australia and America. It identified many issues in relation to rare book collection including issues surrounding the definition of rare books, the impact of digitisation and cataloguing issues. At this point I decided that I wanted to carry out similar research in Ireland to gauge the extent of these issues, which could impede the preservation of our cultural heritage for current and future generations.

The first step in tackling the thesis was to decide on the methodology. To determine the best approach I examined what was done in previous research. I emailed Dr. Hubbard who forwarded the questionnaire used in her research: *Bringing Rare Books to Light: The State of the Profession* (2010). This was useful as a starting point to create a suitable questionnaire for my research. The intention was to identify the libraries in Ireland with rare book collections and ask open and closed ended questions based on issues identified from the literature review. I used www.surveymonkey.com to design and distribute the questionnaire. After some investigation on using the website I found it really beneficial as the results were collected in electronic format in one place. I had decided to take a pragmatic approach to the

research as I had little knowledge of how rare books were being handled in Irish institutions and as noted had found little research. This approach allowed me to develop an understanding of the issues surrounding rare book librarianship in Ireland as I progressed in my research helping to provide a good overview of the topic.

I decided to include two interviews to support this approach as I felt they would help to get a sense of the topic and help with any confusion I had on the subject. I had met Dr. Benson when he did a presentation on Trinity's rare books in a module in first year and had briefly discussed my thesis topic and he agreed to help if needed. A year later I followed up with Dr. Benson and arranged a meeting. After some communication we met for over an hour and had a really informative discussion on the many areas discussed in this thesis. In addition to this I had visited the Royal Irish Academy, Trinity and the National Library on culture nights in 2010 and 2011 and had discussions with the various librarians on my thesis. Sophie Evans, an assistant librarian was part of a team that had just completed a major cataloguing project and agreed to meet me for my second interview. We met for an hour and again had a discussion that I found really insightful on the topics of rare book cataloguing particularly and rare books in Irish institutions generally.

Experience & Challenges

One of the initial challenges I faced was in relation to the enormity of the task. I had never written more than a five thousand-word assignment and I found the thought of a twenty thousand word thesis intimidating. The first year module and the supervisor support were excellent in helping me with this challenge, explaining that taking it section-by-section would assist in overcoming this. I found this extremely helpful and would be confident in taking on another challenge of the same size in future. The other area I feel I developed was my ability to critically analyse a subject. This initially involved turning a vague idea into a research proposal. My initial idea was to examine how rare books were categorized by various institutions but as my research continued I needed to further define the aims of the thesis. This involved critically analysing the literature available and identifying the main arguments relevant to my proposal. Initially I found this challenging but with support from my supervisor I was able to develop the skills required. This involved developing an overall view of what I wanted to achieve which was flexible enough to change if I came across new or contradictory evidence.

For example when I commenced the thesis the findings from Patton's (2009) research in the State Library of New South Wales suggested that not only was there a backlog issue in relation to cataloguing but there were also question marks over the quality of cataloguing. My initial impression was that incorrect information was being added to catalogues and that there was an issue with quality control of what was being entered. However, after further investigation, based on the pragmatic approach to the research, I discovered that the issue was not that the information being added was incorrect but that the depth of the information was insufficient.

Another area where my worldview changed in the course of the research was in relation to the possibility of a consistent and concise definition for rare books. My initial view was that it should be possible to derive a consistent, all encompassing definition of a rare book as the number of variables was limited and the goal by rare book librarians was clear. However, as I progressed in my analysis of the literature and my research results I began to understand further that this issue is quite complex and requires approval and support from many parties. To some extent the definition of rare books would not be an issue if there were unlimited resources as in this case potentially all books could be catalogued, digitised and accessed. As this would not be possible choices have to be made on where resources are best allocated and ultimately, which areas are of a lesser priority? As identified in the research thus far the role of digitisation, although a welcome technological advance in relation to access and ability to search documents, exacerbates the problem as there is now even more strain on resources. These findings have challenged my ability to analyse various aspects of a debate and come to a conclusion based on the evidence available. This was interesting as it facilitated the development of critical analysis skills in a supportive envoirnment that will be of benefit to me in future roles.

In the course of the two-year Masters I feel my essay writing skills have also developed. The challenge I encountered was the ability to express an idea in literary format. Quite often I would have a clear understanding of what I wanted to say but by the time I structured and developed it some parts may be lost. I developed a useful technique of working through most ideas I wanted to add to a section using brainstorming techniques followed by an outline of the logical progression of the arguments. I found this technique particularly useful for tackling a dissertation of this scale.

What Next?

The research has indicated that there are dangers associated with the preservation of rare books due to insufficient budgets and that training needs to be provided to enhance institutional knowledge in the area. One of the key suggestions identified in the research and the literature review was that of a collaborative approach to rare book collection in Ireland. This would involve discussing such topics as ways to share resources, a coordinated approach in deciding what each institution collects and exploring options to tackle cataloguing backlogs. During this research I had the privilege of joining the *Rare Books Group* of the *library Association of Ireland.* One of their main aims is cultivating an awareness of the importance of rare books. This would be an ideal forum for such discussions as its members are the rare book librarians of Ireland so it is well placed to consider these possibilities with its members.

Conclusion

From a personal perspective my intention is to search for a role in an Irish library, preferably one that has a rare book collection, and try to develop the knowledge and skills required to maintain and develop a special collection. I will continue my subscription with the *Rare Books Group* and will keep up to date on the latest information available through their quarterly publication; *An Leabharlann: The Irish Library*. Overall I have found this a worthwhile and rewarding experience, which will help me in my future career as a librarian.

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Appendix: Questionnaire

1. Does your institution have a Rare Books Collection?

2. Is there a policy to add to the number of Rare Books held? Yes/No

3. If 'Yes' to question 2 what is the estimated number of catalogued volumes in the Rare Books collection?

4. In your opinion, what criteria are used to define a rare book?

5. In your experience do you feel rare books are being catalogued correctly? Yes/No

6. Are there cataloguing backlogs for rare books in your institution? Yes/No

7. If Yes to question 6 approximately how big is the backlog?

8. In your opinion what is the frequency of cataloguing backlogs for rare books in Irish libraries? Universal/Common/Unusual/Doesn't Occur

9. In your opinion what is the frequency of incorrect cataloguing for rare books in Irish libraries? Universal/Common/Unusual/Doesn't Occur

10. In your opinion, on a scale of 1 to 5 are current Rare Book collection policies sufficient to capture and maintain Rare Books for current and future generations? (1 being the least and 5 the most sufficient)

11. On a scale of 1 to 5 how important do you feel adequate cataloguing and storage of Rare Books is in preserving the cultural heritage of Ireland? (1 being the least and 5 the most Important)

12. On a scale of 1 to 5 how important is it for your institution to have a physical book rather than access to a digitised version of a Rare Book for a special collection? (1 being unimportant and 5 very important).

13. Please provide reasons for your answer.

14. Does your institution have a policy to digitise rare books? Yes/No

15. If Yes to question 14 what criteria do you use to decide what to digitise?

16. On a scale of 1 to 5, please state whether you agree or disagree with the following statement. (1 being completely disagree and 5 completely agree)   *Hirtle states that it is not 'necessary to maintain a middling collection of rare books when access is no longer tied to physical possession, let alone ownership?' He goes on to propose that print copies may 'sell for large amounts of money to private collectors, but few libraries can or should participate in the market if most research needs can be met with digital copies'.* (Hirtle 2002)

17. In your opinion, has there been any change in the percentage of the yearly budget for Rare Books collection and management within the context of the overall institutions budget in the past 10 years. (Please choose one from the following choices) Remained Unchanged/Increased/Decreased

18. Please outline 2 to 3 of the main challenges you feel are currently facing rare book collections.

19. In your opinion, what are the solutions to these challenges?