

The preservation of archival sound recordings

Antony Gordon

British Library Sound Archive

Preservation is the highest priority

“In the context of this code of practice, preservation takes precedence over exploitation” *British Library Sound Archive general code of practice on the storage, handling and playback of audio-visual recordings*

What do we need to preserve?

There are two aspects:

- Carriers — in other word, physical objects
- Recordings — can exist only on carriers

Carrier types

- Cylinders
- Discs (shellac, 'acetate', vinyl)
- Steel wire
- Magnetic tape (reels, audio cassettes, video cassettes, DAT)
- MiniDisc
- CD/DVD
- CD-R/DVD-R



Collection management

- Security
- Storage conditions
- Usage management (cleaning, handling, playback restrictions)
- Duplication (off site)

Carrier-specific problems

- Discs (breakage, scratching, warping, dishing, dirt)
- 'Acetate' discs (breakage, delamination, dirt)
- Tape (proximity to magnets, sticky binder, brittle tape, coating loss, tape curl, print-through, tape stretch, [edits: broken or adhesive bleed])
- CD/DVD (scratching, chemical degradation (bronzing))
- CD-R/DVD-R (scratching, chemical degradation with age)

Recordings

- Insubstantial — can only exist on a carrier
- Priority given to fragile carriers or those approaching end of technological life — 'acetate discs', Betamax tape cassettes
- Use best original if more than one available
- One copy always taken straight — described as 'warts and all' — no equalization or correction applied, no noise reduction
- Further copies can then be enhanced
- Digital has its own problems
- Digital Object Management Systems