



Awaiting cataloguing at the Bodleian:

Erupting volcano : 15-piece erupting volcano kit.

“Fact file, instruction book, volcano mould and more to impress your friends! ... Activity requires chemicals which present a hazard to health ... Do not allow chemicals to come into contact with any part of the body ... Paint may stain – we recommend precautions are taken to protect skin, clothing and furnishings.”

Hug in a box.

“Mini hardback book and cute hugging pandas!”

The potty song.

“Have fun with your Little Baby Bum Nursery Rhyme Friends! Press the button and sing along to this much-loved song.”

The book of runes : interpreting the ancient stones.

“Includes 25 rose-quartz rune stones, drawstring pouch, 120-page instructional book.”

My little pony read and make play case.

“Inside! Tail-rific twilight sparkle case. Play book, packed with activities and facts about your favourite characters. Pots of air-dry clay and tool plus press-out pieces to make 3 super-fun models!”

Beep beep beep : time for sleep.

“Includes 5m of reusable road tape! And 2 construction vehicles.”

Make a turtle : complete ninja hero kit.

“Inside : felt fabric, thread, stuffing, instruction book, epic activities.”

Mickey Mouse Clubhouse sweet dreams library : musical carousel and 5-book collection.

“Gently turning musical carousel ... enchanting night-light projector.”



Why do we have these intriguing things? Because the Bodleian is a Legal Deposit Library and has the right to claim, and the responsibility to care for, a copy of almost any book published in the British Isles. As these examples show, manufacturers can be quite free in their interpretation of what counts as a 'book', perhaps partly because books are not liable to VAT.

Resources received on Legal Deposit which need individual attention because of their shape(s) and materials are known as 'toy books'. Not all of them are actually toys: some are 'ordinary' children's books but with problematic decorations such as glitter or fluorescent materials; others are adult resources, such as guidebooks in PVC covers (which tend to stick to other resources and/or degrade quickly) and 'artistic' publications featuring anything from feathers to glass. I particularly remember one enormous artistic book which came in a thick and heavy case of poor-quality glass with very sharp edges – it had to be wrapped immediately, shelved with warning labels and rushed through cataloguing so that we could get it out of our room.

Most of the materials which we receive on Legal Deposit can be processed by 'streamlined' workflows which get them ingested, provided with high-quality bibliographic records, and sent to their final destinations, whether reading room shelves or our remote Book Storage Facility, with the minimum of individual attention. The Legal Deposit Agency supplies a bibliographic record for every resource it sends us, and item and holding records are added automatically on ingest. If the bibliographic record is from the British National Bibliography (which we help to create through the Shared Cataloguing Programme), the resource can go straight to our Book Storage Facility after a very brief inspection to make sure that it really matches the record and does not fall into any special categories. If the record is not already full-level, it should be automatically upgraded when the BNB record is upgraded, so it need never visit the cataloguing room. In the Book Storage Facility it will live in a standard tray with other resources of similar size, to make best use of space.

Toy books, however, require individual treatment at every stage. Although most of them are picked out at ingest, there have to be further inspections of the sorted material to make sure that nothing has been missed – even one volcano in the wrong place would be too many. Then their automatically-created item and holding records have to be cancelled, because they will not be circulated using ordinary barcodes stuck on the resources themselves. Instead they will nestle in acid-free, slow-burning and sometimes custom-made conservation boxes or envelopes and will be circulated by the barcodes on the boxes. If they share a box, users will have to order the whole box to the Special Collections reading room.

There are a lot of extra tasks for the cataloguers responsible. First they pull out any resources which pose no particular conservation risk but would be destroyed by use, such as colouring books or diaries with no significant text. These have their individual records suppressed and are loaded into boxes which are attached to a single bibliographic record for each broad type, e.g. '[Miscellaneous publications : diaries]' or '[Miscellaneous publications : colouring books, painting books, drawing books, magic picture books, dot-to-dot books]'. The latter has been quite a growth area, particularly because of the recent popularity of adult colouring books and similar. Fifteen years ago there would have been a couple of boxfuls per year, but nowadays there may be five boxfuls in a single month. The boxes are given a special circulation code so that they too can only be ordered to the Special Collections reading room 'for improved invigilation', in case a user cannot resist the temptation to join the dots.

The remaining toy books are then shelved in the cataloguing room with *great* care. Because of their varied shapes and sizes it is tricky to arrange them really firmly on shelves or trolleys, and some of them could cause injury if they slipped, because of their weight and/or sharp edges. We have a special risk assessment for toy books covering issues such as the maximum height at which heavy or sharp items may be shelved and whether they need to be wrapped before shelving. Any components which present an immediate hazard such as chemicals (e.g. slime putty or chemistry sets) must be disposed of safely before shelving. Fortunately it turned out that the erupting volcano set did not actually contain hazardous chemicals – it was just a kit for making a volcano shape inside which mild household acids and alkalis could be mixed to make a fizz.

Toy books may stay on the shelves for some time, because they are in very low demand and not a priority for full cataloguing. (We can be sure that they are in low demand because the brief bibliographic records supplied by the Legal Deposit Agency are visible to users and so they could be ordered to a reading room if wanted.) The cataloguing team responsible for toy books is also responsible for our weekly contributions to the British National Bibliography and naturally has to prioritise that work. On the other hand, toy books are awkward things to keep in the cataloguing room, because they require a lot of space on easily accessible shelves and cannot be shifted quickly if the room's shelving is being reorganised, so some colleagues from another team have recently learned to share the work.

Packing the toy books for long-term storage is an art in itself. The team has a long list, based on advice from our conservation experts, of the different materials and how to treat them, and if anything turns up which is not on the list they will ask for further advice. Elastic and rubber bands are replaced with conservation tape and sellotape is removed. Any batteries are removed from their childproof housing and discarded – the team has a set of fine-bladed screwdrivers to deal with this. Books or kits with pens are stored separately. Anything liable to degrade or stick, e.g. silicon or PVC, must have an *individual* envelope or box. Some items are too big for standard boxes, in which case the team has to order custom-fitting boxes, and they have a special box-measuring tool to help them get this right. Other items share boxes if possible, which means that at any given time there will probably be several partly-filled boxes waiting for suitably-sized items to fill the gaps. The box (or envelope) is barcoded and becomes the 'item' for circulation purposes, so all the bibliographic records for its contents must be carefully linked to the item record for the box. Once the box departs for our Book Storage Facility there can be no more checking of contents and anything not properly linked to it would probably be lost for ever.

Naturally, the bibliographic records often feature striking physical descriptions:

“25 pages : colour illustrations, colour map ; 20 cm + 1 plastic rabbit figure + 1 plastic okapi figure”
[*Tina the rabbit*, from a 60-part *My zoo animals* series]

“1 volume, 1 kneeling mat, 1 pair of gardening gloves, 1 mini trowel, 1 mini fork ; box 28 x 42 x 7 cm”
[*Garden tools and book set*, part of the *Helping Mummy* series]

As the first example shows, we catalogue mixed sets as books with accompanying material if we can reasonably do so; but, as the second example shows, sometimes the non-book components are just too important to be deemed accompanying material, which means that the set has to be catalogued as a kit, in the (rather unsatisfactory) VM format. Whichever approach is taken, varied contents and carriers will mean extra fixed fields (006 for contents, 007 for carriers), extra 33X fields, and, for audio, video and/or digital components, 34X fields as well.

It can be quite tricky to convey all the physical complexities, so the team have devised a list of useful phrases to use in notes for the sake of speed and consistency:

“In case with plastic handle and velcro fastenings.”

“Board book with plastic rattle and rubber teether attached to spine.”

“Centre pages open out to form a track.”

One other complication is that not all the books we receive on Legal Deposit are in English. This is no problem for mainstream material, because the National Libraries of Wales and Scotland and Trinity College Dublin supply records for most Welsh, Gaelic and Cornish materials to the British National Bibliography, from where we can copy them; but most kinds of toy book are excluded from BNB. The majority of non-English toy books are in Welsh, so systems staff have kindly set up a Z39.50 connection to the National Library of Wales for the benefit of the toy books cataloguers, so that they can copy Welsh toy book records too.

When all is done, the boxes go to our Book Storage Facility in Swindon, to be kept permanently in an ideal environment which will minimise the risk of deterioration.

You might wonder whether it is a good use of resources to give so much individual attention to relatively low-use materials. Legal Deposit does not allow us to select and preserve just the materials which we perceive as immediately valuable and important or as convenient and trouble-free, but that can be a good thing in at least two ways. If we were allowed to choose what to keep, we would inevitably reject as trivial some resources which will in future be perceived as design classics or cultural icons. And even resources which individually are of slight value become a rich source of cultural or technical history when a large and representative collection is assembled over a long period. Legal Deposit frees us from the risks of short-termism and limited viewpoints.

Finally, the most beguiling question of all: will anyone ever get to play with them? Although we may joke about letting in a bunch of lively toddlers, of course we have to be serious and remember that these are heritage resources entrusted to us for safekeeping. But libraries are places of continual change, re-evaluation and re-imagining. Fifty years ago, who would have dreamt that a Christmas sales advertisement from an 1890s Brixton department store, held in the Bodleian’s John Johnson Collection of Printed Ephemera,¹ might be studied minutely from the other side of the world? Who knows how our cupcake trays and light sabers will be viewed and utilised in fifty years’ time?

Meanwhile, if you really want a volcanic eruption, you can easily make one for yourself by mixing vinegar, colouring and washing-up liquid in a small jar, then adding bicarbonate of soda. But please do not try this out in the library.

Written with lots of help from Caroline Waddup and Julie Groom (the SCP/Toy books team)

¹ <http://johnjohnson.chadwyck.co.uk/search/displayItemImage.do?&shelfNumber=1&FormatType=fulltextimages&ResultsID=15F6F8311D0&ItemNumber=4&ItemID=20080717121200em&PageNumber=1&defaultview=jpeg>