

USING THE LINDSTRAND COMPARATOR

Monash University Library has recently acquired a mechanical comparator designed by Dr. G. Lindstrand and marketed by Comparator Research Associates of Columbia, South Carolina.

The Lindstrand Comparator is refreshingly simple and easy to operate. It works by reflecting the images of two copies of a page, bound or loose, through a pair of lenses so that each eye receives one image. Any discrepancy between the images is immediately apparent, standing out in three dimensions and, where marks on the pages overlap, blurred.

I have recently completed the collation of five photocopies of a seventy-page quarto text with a control text, very badly bound, from the State Library of Victoria. Despite the variation in the quality of the photocopies and the distortion of the inner margin of the bound copy, I was able to collate all copies within two days. This is a marked improvement upon the five days it took me to collate one copy without the aid of a comparator.

Using the Lindstrand Comparator, I found that I was able to collate one copy within two-and-a-half to three-and-a-half hours and, in view of the fact that the text for collation was clear, easily read and, as it turned out, almost entirely uncorrected and well-printed, I would say two and a half hours represents a minimum time. However, more importantly, the comparator revealed some very small press variants I had missed in the unassisted collation which enabled me to be far more confident about my findings without the tedium of working letter-by-letter, line-by-line.

The simplicity of the comparator's design makes it virtually impossible for it to malfunction. The only moveable parts are the text-mounts and these are moved directly by hand and not through knobs, levers or gears. There is no need for a power supply while there is daylight available, and the lightness and sturdiness of the machine makes it easy to move.

What few shortcomings there are to the comparator are minor. Firstly, the operator must lean over the lenses which have a tendency to mist over. It is best to have a tissue or soft-cloth handy. Secondly, the operator may find himself seeing double, especially if he has been working for more than two hours. It seems that, if he takes too long to align the images by moving the text-mounts, his brain will attempt to force them into agreement which results in his eyes being put out of alignment. To remedy this, he should simply look away for a few seconds and then look again and try to adjust the images quickly. Of course, this does put a strain on his eyes, and so it is wise not to attempt too much without allowing time for recovery.

The greatest limitation of the Lindstrand Comparator is that it is not possible to read bound pages consecutively. The text is in a fixed position and one must read the page facing upwards or go to the trouble of mounting the text page by page. However this is also the case with the Hinman instrument. It must also be remembered that the Comparator can only be used by those with effective sight in both eyes, which is not the case with the Hinman.

There is not the least doubt in my mind, however, that the advantages of the Lindstrand Comparator far exceed its limitations.

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