

THE AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND EARLY IMPRINTS PROJECT: THE BACKGROUND

IN THE WORDS OF THE PREAMBLE to its Instruction Manual, the Australia and New Zealand Early Imprints Project (EIP) is 'concerned with printed materials

- held in institutional or private collections in Australia and New Zealand
- published before 1801, and
- containing some letterpress, no matter how small.'

EIP is concerned with what is actually held in the collections of the two countries — i.e. it will constitute a union catalogue of pre-1801 holdings. In this respect it differs from recently-launched projects in other countries devoted to early printed books in that *they* are concerned with the output of a nation's presses — and perhaps with the output in the national language, whatever the country of origin.

The year 1800 has been generally accepted in Western countries as a convenient terminus in producing catalogues of early printed books, though the framers of the second edition of the *Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules* — with some justification — regard 1820 as a more appropriate watershed: 1800 marks not only the end of the century but the perfection of his iron press by the 3rd Earl of Stanhope. Conventionally, too, catalogues of early printed books have restricted themselves to works containing letterpress — i.e. they have omitted materials printed by other processes (for convenience sake 'engraved' matter). EIP has accepted this convention, so that engraved music (for which in Australia the Musicological Society of Australia is producing a catalogue), maps and separate illustrative matter are excluded. Nonetheless, an exception has been made in favour of that small group of books, epitomized by Pine's *Horace*, which are entirely engraved but in which the text is paramount: they are to be included. Within the limitations of date and process of printing, EIP aims to be comprehensive. Other (national) projects have had to decide what to do with the 'ragged fringe', in order to keep the undertaking within manageable bounds. For example, what should be done with legal and commercial forms, parliamentary papers and periodicals? — not to mention the vast unknown of ephemera, which may range from bottle labels to bookplates, from theatre tickets to advertising fliers. Since in this part of the world there was little printing of any kind before 1801, there is practically nothing that might be regarded as belonging to an indigeneous 'ragged fringe', and little of it printed overseas appears to have been introduced here subsequently. Consequently EIP's espousal of the policy of comprehensiveness is 'safe', in that the vast bulk of what will be included comprises formal publications rather than jobbing work. It might be observed here that some other projects may have been able to limit their scope because of the existence of, or proposals for, specialized catalogues, e.g. of periodicals or parliamentary papers.

From the outset EIP has sought to include the holdings of private collectors, particularly since in this part of the world (where total holdings are comparatively meagre) certain private collections constitute major resources — within their subject limitations — not matched by institutional. This consideration has been regarded as outweighing the objection that private collections are much less stable and therefore, in the course of time, likely to produce inaccuracies in the record of locations. Of course only those private holdings will be recorded which their owners are willing to allow access to, under conditions that they themselves will determine, and their identity will not be made public — the Secretary of EIP will act as intermediary. (The same provision for anonymity is available also to institutions which for one reason or another would not wish to deal with enquirers direct.) One frustrating aspect of catalogues of early printed books such as the 'English' STCs of Pollard & Redgrave (1475–1640) and Wing (1641–1700) is that their record of locations is so limited: essentially they are union catalogues of about a dozen major libraries, supplemented by reference to the holdings of scores of other libraries — often specialized ones — and very occasionally by reference to private collections. The published list of locations is in theory limited to 10 in both Pollard & Redgrave and Wing (it is often exceeded in Wing), and though additional locations will willingly be supplied by the editorial offices at Harvard and Yale respectively, it is inconvenient not to have a full published list. EIP, on the other hand, will include as part of the record all known locations (with the proviso about anonymity), to the advantage of the user who wishes merely to consult the most conveniently located copy as well as the user who wishes to see and compare all, or a large number. It may be noted, incidentally, that a surprisingly high proportion of the early printed books in Australian and New Zealand collections are duplicated within the two countries; and — not unexpectedly — the narratives of exploration are often to be found in large numbers.

With no literature of their own of any consequence prior to 1801, people in Australia and New Zealand interested in early printed books have of course been in a different position from their counterparts in, say, Britain, France or Germany. Activities and plans in the Northern Hemisphere suggested that local activity might be channelled into cooperating with other ventures by supplementing the record with otherwise-unknown items and providing additional locations for those known. The most obvious candidate for cooperation was the Eighteenth Century Short Title Catalogue (ESTC), which was launched in 1976 at the British Library and which is now reaching the publication stage of its first phase, the re-cataloguing of the eighteenth-century holdings of the British Library itself.¹ Indeed there *has* been close cooperation between EIP and ESTC, for probably more than half of the estimated 150,000-odd pre-1801 items in Australian and New Zealand collections are eighteenth-century 'English' imprints. But, in Australia at least, it could be claimed that there was already stronger interest in Continental imprints than in British, as evidenced by the publication of John Fletcher's *Short-title Catalogue of German Imprints in Australia from 1501–1800* (Department of German, Monash University, 1970) and by the concern for early printed books

exhibited by the *Australian Journal of French Studies*. Previous activity in the provision of lists and catalogues of early printed books had also been based on language or place of publication, so that without the stimulus of EIP a number of similar lists and catalogues might have appeared — a possibility which is in fact not precluded in the planning of EIP.

Apart from the consideration that local interest was not confined to the output of a particular nation or to publications in a particular language, two other considerations suggested that it was desirable to be comprehensive, at least in the *recording* stage. One was that many libraries had already segregated their pre-1801 holdings, making it *convenient* to record at the one time everything found there. The other was that it was clearly more *economical* to record all the early imprints in one sweep — particularly in smaller libraries — than to record them piecemeal according to language and/or place of publication. EIP is committed to comprehensiveness in recording all letterpress materials printed before 1801, but this comprehensiveness does not imply that the end-product will be a (multi-volume, printed) union catalogue of early printed books in Australia and New Zealand. Indeed, the 'umbrella' title was specifically chosen for the present venture since it did not imply publication in any particular form. The mere fact of converting the file of records to machine-readable form will in itself create a 'potential' union catalogue — i.e. capable of being published in its entirety. But publication — in the accepted sense — could well take the form of regional union catalogues, catalogues of individual libraries, catalogues based on place of origin, or catalogues created 'on demand' according to various criteria (including date and bookseller). Given the size of the eventual file — at least 50% more entries than in Wing, and each one on average perhaps twice as long, even without 'copy-specific' notes — the most likely form of any publication of the complete file seems at this stage to be computer-output microform (fiche or film).

Discounting catalogues of incunabula, in this part of the world a concern for publicising holdings of early printed books is quite recent, and as far as I can determine goes back only to the period 1959–1961, when there was a flurry of activity in New Zealand, the most visible evidence of which was the lists of Pollard & Redgrave (STC) and Wing numbers which appeared in *New Zealand Libraries*. This activity culminated in a 'New Zealand Short-Title Catalogue of English Books Printed before 1700', compiled by W.J. Cameron, D.G. Esplin and T.H. Howard-Hill, which was at an advanced stage when Esplin (the general editor) departed for California; the fate of the manuscript is not known. A number of other lists were produced in the ensuing years, the most important being W.J. Cameron, *A Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in Britain and British Books Printed Abroad 1641–1700 held in Australian Libraries* (Sydney, Wentworth Press, 1962),³ and W.J. Cameron and D.J. Carroll, *Short Title Catalogue of Books Printed in the British Isles, the British Colonies and the United States of America and of English Books Printed Elsewhere 1701–1800 held in the Libraries of the Australian Capital Territory* (2 vols., National Library of Australia, 1966).⁴ Both these Australian STCs are limited. The first contains only the 2000 +

items that its compiler was able to see in the space of two months; even at the time it was acknowledged to contain not much more than half the Wing items held in Australia (the present known Wing holdings — as reported by Trevor Mills in *BSANZ Broadsheet* no. 23 (October 1982) — amount to 5000). The second is limited in the sense that it is confined to the holdings of libraries in the A.C.T., though it should be noted that the original intention had been to produce ‘a short title catalogue . . . [of] eighteenth century English books in the libraries of Australia and New Zealand’ (p.i), an intention which had to be abandoned once the magnitude of the task was realised (and given the need to have the catalogue produced in time for the first David Nichol Smith Memorial Seminar in Eighteenth Century Studies, held in Canberra, 15–19 August 1966).

By the mid-1970s various projects were under way. In New Zealand a union catalogue of pre-1801 imprints in New Zealand libraries had been created (on cards) and was maintained by the Turnbull Library in Wellington. In New South Wales John Fletcher and Rose Smith were at work on their *A Short-Title Catalogue of Sixteenth Century Printed Books held in Libraries and Private Collections in New South Wales, with a List of Provenances* (Sydney, Library Council of New South Wales, 1979). A catalogue of French books in Australian libraries had been in progress for some years. And some libraries were sending entries to the HPB (Hand Printed Book) project, under the direction of W.J. Cameron, now at the School of Library and Information Science, the University of Western Ontario. The effect of the launching of EIP has been — it is assumed — to divert energies to the project, though at one stage it did seem that if considerable funding were not secured the surest way of progressing would be to give EIP blessing to existing ventures and to encourage other bibliographers to fill in the gaps, such as (in Australia) Italian and Low Countries imprints in general, Pollard & Redgrave books, and eighteenth-century English in places other than the A.C.T. This *Bulletin* has provided interim publicity for STC (Pollard & Redgrave) and Wing holdings by including lists, arranged by catalogue number, from time to time since November 1977. Further lists are expected as EIP progresses, and lists could well be produced for other categories of material which have similar numbering systems.

In the birth of EIP the critical even was the holding in Adelaide in May 1976 of the Fourth Biennial Conference of Australasian Historians of Medieval and Early Modern Europe. The historians were concerned with Australian holdings of Pollard & Redgrave books, and they passed a motion urging ‘the desirability of providing such a list as an invaluable aid to research and scholarship’; they also considered that ‘the funding and coordination of the project could most efficiently be managed by an institution such as the Humanities Research Centre [of the Australian National University]’.⁵ The immediate outcome was a meeting of interested parties — historians, librarians and others involved in various projects concerned with early printed books — at the Humanities Research Centre in August 1976. At that meeting Professor G.K.W. Johnston, who was about to take up his appointment as deputy director of the Centre, agreed to act as editor-

in-chief of what was provisionally dubbed the Union Catalogue of Early Printed Books in Australia. Already it had been agreed — for the reasons referred to above — that the scope of the venture be widened to take in *all* pre-1801 printed materials. And at this stage — in view of the initial interest in pre-1641 books — it was envisaged that publication would be in chronological slabs. An announcement of the project was made to AACOBS (the Australian Advisory Council on Bibliographical Services), which was meeting in Canberra at the same time: the librarians present, though not opposed to the scheme, tempered their approval by a warning that they would not be able to devote any of their own resources to it. Professor Johnston's death in December 1976 and the decision not to appoint a new deputy director of the Centre produced a period of uncertainty, but the project was revived at the annual meeting of the Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand, held in Melbourne in September 1977, which led to a further meeting in November at the Humanities Research Centre. EIP was thus born, now embracing New Zealand and abandoning the previous commitment to chronological catalogues.

In the next three and a half years (until May 1981) the Humanities Research Centre was to provide considerable material support for the project by bringing people to Canberra periodically to discuss organisation and progress and by printing record cards and the Instruction Manual. Having served that 'seeding' function the Humanities Research Centre has now bowed out, and future general meetings are likely to be held once a year, probably coinciding with the annual conference of the Bibliographical Society. In addition to the sponsorship of the Humanities Research Centre and the Bibliographical Society the project has received the blessing of the National Library of New Zealand and the National Library of Australia. This support has been valuable in approaches to funding bodies in indicating to them the measure of support for the project that exists within the library and scholarly community.

The organisation of EIP has evolved to accommodate the varied interests of users of early printed books by having a general committee — of fluctuating composition and unlimited numbers — made up of academics in various disciplines, librarians, research assistants and private collectors. Formal direction is in the hands of an executive committee, whose membership is now: Chairman, Associate Professor Wallace Kirsop (Department of French, Monash University); Deputy Chairmen, Mr. John Fletcher (Department of Germanic Studies, Sydney University) and Dr. B.J. McMullin (Graduate School of Librarianship, Monash University); Secretary, Mrs. Margaret Clark (Rare Books Librarian, National Library of Australia); Mr. D.H. Borchardt (formerly Chief Librarian, LaTrobe University), Dr. Alan Brissenden (Department of English, Adelaide University), Dr. J.C. Eade (Humanities Research Centre, Australian National University) and Professor D.F. McKenzie (Department of English, Victoria University of Wellington). Day-to-day control is exercised by local committees, whose responsibility it is to organize the recording process in their particular area — present chairmen are:

New Zealand: Professor D.F. McKenzie

A.C.T.: Professor J.P. Hardy (Professor of English, The Faculties, Australian National University)

New South Wales: Mr. John Fletcher

Queensland: Miss Christine Tilley (Rare Books Librarian, State Library of Queensland)

South Australia: Dr. Alan Brissenden

Tasmania: Mrs. Jan Rees (Librarian, Christ College, University of Tasmania)

Victoria: Associate Professor Wallace Kirsop

Western Australia: Mrs. Annemie Gilbert (Technical Services Coordinator, The Library, Western Australian Institute of Technology).

(Information or enquiries about local holdings should be directed to the appropriate chairman).

Having decided on the criteria for inclusion, the committee spent the first year or so deliberating on what information should be recorded and the form that the record card should take. The first proposal was for a traditional short-title record approximating most closely to the HPB format — i.e. in essence author/short title/imprint/format/location, with provision for notes and bibliographic references. To its advocates the great virtue of such a proposal was its simplicity and the consequent speed with which cards could be filled in — perhaps at the rate of about 20,000 per man-year. A catalogue constructed along these lines might be relatively unsophisticated in discriminating between very similar items; but proponents of such a catalogue would claim that nice distinctions ought not to be the concern of a union catalogue, but rather of *bibliographies* of one kind or another, and would introduce in support of their case the progress of the revised Pollard & Redgrave. This first proposal met with the objection that it was not full enough. On the one hand there was no provision for indicating the extent of an item — i.e. how long it was, either in terms of a statement of pagination or in terms of a collation formula. On the other it did not cater for the expressed interests of members of the committee in features such as illustrations and provenance. A revised proposal attempted to accommodate these objections: extent was to be indicated by the practice of recording the last page number in every sequence; illustrations were merely to be indicated as present or not, and, if present, as plates or in text; and provenance and binding notes were to be recorded — if it were not too troublesome to do so — in the knowledge that there was little prospect of making them available via indexing in any systematic way. Having increased the amount of detail to be recorded, the project was in a quandary. All along it had been assumed that the file would be computerised and that access would be available from such elements in the record as location, date, place of publication, bookseller, etc. (and various combinations). Advice on computerisation was sought from Mrs. Doreen Parker, now Principal Librarian (Technical Services), University of Melbourne Library. Her (unpublished) report emphasised the time and expense likely to be incurred in developing a computer system peculiar to EIP, drew attention to the limitations on the exchange of records that

a unique system imposed, and strongly urged that the project conform to a currently-available computer cataloguing system from the outset and alter its rules accordingly. There was some reluctance to accept this urging, based on the belief that transcriptional fidelity would be sacrificed in accepting a set of rules designed for library cataloguing purposes. The issue was settled, however, by the fact that the New Zealand bibliographers involved in the project were strongly of the view that EIP should conform to one particular existing system — that designed for the ESTC, which was based on the newly revised *Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules* and UKMARC (i.e. that form of MACHine Readable Cataloguing adopted as the U.K. standard).

The ESTC rules had initially been rejected as being in general too detailed in their requirements; the acceptance of machine-generated punctuation was thought to be incompatible with the objective of transcriptional fidelity; the truncated imprints were regarded as being totally unacceptable; and the demands for elaborate statements of pagination were seen to be both time-consuming and perhaps difficult to apply consistently. In the event, however, the EIP committee was now persuaded to accept the ESTC rules with only minor variations: the actual punctuation is recorded in certain positions, thus resulting in double punctuation when the record is computer-produced, and full imprints are recorded, a practice which now appears to have been adopted by ESTC itself. Even the ESTC rules for pagination have been accepted, on the argument that without a statement of pagination in the form prescribed by ESTC EIP records for eighteenth-century 'English' books would otherwise be accepted by ESTC as 'unverified' locations, since exact matches could not be made. It must be said that the 'about face' was not received without misgivings in some quarters, not least because the decision on pagination in particular has resulted in a considerable increase in the time needed to complete the record card: trained research assistants working full time on the project have not been able to reach 5,000 cards per year. In terms of time, labour and (ultimately) finance, the implications for the project are immense, and it would be galling if the project were to founder through having set out to emulate the ESTC without a guarantee of that project's substantial resources. The present record card is reproduced here (back and front) — it measures 150 x 210 mm.

The project is estimated to need for its completion something of the order of 35 man-years. Some private collectors have recorded their own books, some volunteers have completed a small number of cards, and a handful of small libraries have been able to devote staff to the task of recording their own holdings. But overwhelmingly the work is being done by research assistants paid from whatever funds the local organisations have been able to secure for the project. In New Zealand the major source of funding has been the Trustees of the National Library, in Australia the Australian Research Grants Committee (now the Australian Research Grants Scheme). The ARGS has supported — for varying periods — South Australia, Victoria, Western Australia and New South Wales, but it is clear that it is beyond its resources to fund the entire operations of

Title

Author

Place

RI

008 \$a s

\$b en

\$1 eng

049 \$a

090 \$a

Acc. no.

245

--	--

\$a

240

--	--

\$a

260 \$a

\$b

\$c

300 \$a

\$b

\$c

500 \$a

100

--

\$a

110

\$h

\$f

700	\$a
710	\$a

\$h

\$z
\$z

956 \$b

\$z

Bibli. refs 503 \$a

Notes

Contrib. name/date

EIP in Australia. Additional supplementary funding has been obtained from Adelaide University, the University of Western Australia, Monash University and the Library Council of Victoria.

By mid-1982 some 50,000 entries had been produced — i.e. about a third of the estimated total. Recording in New Zealand, South Australia and Western Australia was substantially complete, in Victoria was approaching the half-way mark, and in New South Wales had just got under way. The holdings of early printed books in Queensland and Tasmania are relatively small and therefore do not constitute a 'problem' — indeed Tasmania will probably be covered by volunteers. But it is of some concern that as yet no start has been made in the A.C.T., where the National Library alone contains about 50,000 items.

In terms of the project as a whole the recording stage clearly has some years to go, and once it is complete it is expected that there will be another two man-years required to edit the records — i.e. to match the contributions from various sources, to establish headings, to resolve outstanding problems and to prepare the file for keyboarding. The prevailing view is that keyboarding should await the completion of the recording stage so that editorial decisions can be applied consistently, and therefore that a decision about the particular computer system to be used need not be made for some time (there is probably an advantage in delaying the decision as long as possible in order to benefit from whatever is on offer at the particular time). Funding of the editing and processing stages will have to be sought separately from the recording stage, and it is difficult to estimate the costs involved, not only because the technology may change radically (becoming cheaper?) but also because it may well be that not all the costs will be borne directly by the project. For example individual libraries or state library authorities may be willing to accept the processing costs (as opposed to the recording costs) as part of their own retrospective conversion procedures — i.e. in converting from card catalogues to computer output microform or on-line catalogues. The South Australian committee has been able to get records processed by the ESTC in London and thence incorporated into the Australian Bibliographic Network (ABN), but it is doubtful whether the entire records of the project could be processed in this way. Eventually (it is hoped) the records from both countries will be incorporated in the recently established networks, ABN and NZBN — but by what channels is unclear.

Given the vast differences of scale in the seven regional holdings, the various committees will be completing their recording at different times over a period of several years; indeed, some are essentially complete already — as noted above. In 1976 the aim had been to complete the project by 1988, to coincide with the bicentenary, but that target must now be seen to depend on securing sufficient funding to cope with the A.C.T. and to complete Victoria and New South Wales. Pending the completion of the recording stage for the project as a whole the committees of at least three of the five regions with relatively small holdings have decided to publish interim catalogues derived from the EIP record cards. Such

interim catalogues may be full, as a South Australian catalogue produced via ESTC would be, or abbreviated, as the projected (manually produced) New Zealand regional catalogues will be.

It is axiomatic that any scholarly activity presupposes (or ought to) a knowledge of what exists and of where it can be found. In recording all pre-1801 items in Australian and New Zealand collections, local activity is contributing substantively to the retrospective national bibliographies of a number of countries, for the unpredictabilities of distribution and the hazards of time have ensured that the products of any nation's presses are now scattered across the globe and may no longer be found in the collections of the home country.⁶ In this respect EIP is performing a valuable 'international' function. In recording local holdings it is both contributing to a similar wide endeavour (in that it may be important for scholars overseas to know of them) and revealing to local scholars — in individual instances for the first time — their exact nature, thereby facilitating and encouraging study and research undertaken locally, and ultimately making the whole process of study and research that much more effective because based on an informed knowledge of where the appropriate materials are to be found. For these reasons it is vital that the project be seen through to completion.

B.J. McMullin,
Monash University.

NOTES

¹ See R.C. Alston and M.J. Jannetta, *Bibliography, Machine Readable Cataloguing and the ESTC* (London, British Library, 1978) and the irregular newsletter of the ESTC, *Factotum*.

² Listed in V.G. Elliott, 'ESTC and EIP: the New Zealand Contribution', *New Zealand Libraries* 42(1), June 1979, 24-7.

³ Two supplements appeared in the *Australian Library Journal*, 11(1962), 153-62 and 12(1963), 209-16.

⁴ Supplements were published in 1970 (ed. Ivan Page) and 1980 (ed. Margaret Clark).

⁵ Letter from Dr. A.T. Brissenden to Professor G.K.W. Johnston, 24 May 1976.

⁶ For a recent list of items not otherwise known see the 14 'Items not in Wing' appended to Trevor Mills, 'Wing items in the State Library of Victoria: addenda; with a note on some recent discoveries', *Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand Bulletin* 5(1981), 115-19.

Copyright of Full Text rests with the original copyright owner and, except as permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, copying this copyright material is prohibited without the permission of the owner or its exclusive licensee or agent or by way of a license from Copyright Agency Limited. For information about such licences contact Copyright Agency Limited on (02) 93947600 (ph) or (02) 93947601 (fax)