

## REVIEW ARTICLE

### THE NEW STC

THE AIM OF THE STC is a magnificent one, no less than to provide a complete list of English books from the commencement of English printing by Caxton in 1473/74 until just before the outbreak of the English civil war. The publication of volume 1 of the new edition completes the alphabetical sequence (volume 2 was published in 1976) and provides a remarkable picture of the growth and spread of English printing over more than a century and a half. A third volume is in the course of preparation and will contain addenda and detailed indexes of printers and booksellers together with other supplementary material.

The original STC was first published in January 1927. The need for such a catalogue had been recognised for many years. There are countless occasions when it is necessary to refer to a book in such a way as to identify it unambiguously so that one recognises whether another similar book is the same or different. Thus the idea of a work of reference which gave a short means of identifying books together with a list of the primary locations where those books may be found gained currency. The approach adopted by the original editors of the STC was based on the realisation that one could, as it were, finger print a book by providing the following information: author, short title, short imprint and date. This technique proved to be extremely powerful. One of its first fruits appeared during the course of preparation of STC 1 itself, namely, that many books which had hitherto been thought to be the same were shown to be different so that many new editions and issues were revealed.

Thus STC 1 was from the outset much more comprehensive than earlier bibliographies relating to the period. Furthermore, it was prepared with such care that it quickly became accepted not merely as another bibliography but as the standard means for identifying English books of the period. Libraries maintained annotated copies of STC 1 listing their own holdings and used STC 1 to identify important gaps in their collections. It thus became a major tool in assisting institutional collecting during the middle years of this century.

The strengths and weaknesses of STC 1 both have their origin in the choice of primary information which was used during the course of its compilation, and it is necessary to understand this in order to see the significance of its subsequent history.

To be manageable at all, a project of this sort should start with a large well catalogued library which can serve as a basis for comparison with the

holdings of other libraries. STC 1 was in fact based to a large extent on four large libraries, the British Museum, Bodleian, Cambridge University Library and Huntington. Lists of short title entries from these were then supplemented by comparison with other libraries. More than 26,000 distinct editions or issues were identified.

However, once a small number of locations had been found for any particular book, little attempt was made to search for more. Thus, many relatively common books have entries in which the only locations are the four principal libraries mentioned above. The editors stressed in their preface that the work was not intended to be a census, but a small number of locations in STC 1 for any particular title was apt to give the uninitiated reader an altogether false impression of scarcity.

Another important limitation of STC 1 arose from the short title technique itself. It was a technique which provided finger prints; it did not provide a detailed bibliographical description of individual items. It was always possible that two or more items might have a common finger print and hence not be distinguished in the catalogue. This indeed proved to be the case. Thus in the last analysis STC 1 was a catalogue of finger prints, not an exhaustive catalogue of English books.

STC 1 stopped at 1640. There were important practical reasons for this. The volume of English printing had been growing steadily throughout the STC period. However, the use of the printed word to spread news and propaganda increased enormously during the 1640's with the dispute between King and Parliament, the civil wars and the further disputes between the various victorious factions. Much of the literature of the time was as ephemeral in character as a modern newspaper, but a great deal of it has nevertheless survived. In particular, George Thomason, a London Bookseller, preserved a copy of every printed item that he could obtain during the years 1640 to 1660. The result was that the Thomason collection, now in the British Library, contains some 22,000 items, and thus its listing would require almost as many short title entries as the whole STC. Not surprisingly, 1640 was regarded as a suitable date for ending several bibliographical enterprises. The British Museum Catalogue of English books, published in three volumes in 1884, ended at 1640. Falconer Madan concluded his study *The Early Oxford Press 1468 to 1640* (1894) on the same date, explaining: "The year 1640 has been chosen as the inferior limit of this bibliography, partly because both the British Museum Catalogue of Early English Books and Arber's Transcript of the Registers of the Stationers' Company stop at that point, partly because the interest in the products of the press as such was found to be rapidly diminishing, and partly in consequence of the break-up of all quiet progress during the convulsions of the Rebellion, combined with the dismal prospect of that trackless wilderness - the literature of the Civil War."

Several tracks have since that time been carved through the wilderness, notably by Madan himself in the second volume of his *Oxford*

*Books* (1931). However, the year 1640 still marks an important break in the methods that have been brought to bear on enumerative bibliography.

STC 1 contained within itself the seeds of a second edition. It was a relatively easy task when any book of the period came to hand to check to see whether its short title corresponded to an entry in STC 1. If it did not, then a new book had been identified. In this way, almost immediately after the publication of STC 1 a large number of further books came to hand. Pollard himself, one of the original editors of STC 1, maintained an annotated copy and many institutions annotated copies with their own holdings. Systematic work was commenced by W A Jackson, Librarian of the Houghton Library at Harvard, and F S Ferguson, Managing Director of Quaritch in London. With the support of the Bibliographical Society and of many other persons and institutions the project continued from shortly after the end of the Second World War until the deaths of Jackson and Ferguson in the mid-1960's. General editorship was then taken over by Miss K F Pantzer who has now seen the first two volumes of STC 2 through the press. She has been assisted by reports from a very large number of librarians and private individuals throughout the world. One indication of the progress that has been made is that STC 2 now contains approximately 10,000 more entries than STC 1.

In embarking on a new edition, a crucial decision had to be taken whether to preserve STC as simply a list of finger prints or whether to publish additional information which had come to light allowing one to distinguish different editions or issues sharing a common finger print. There are, no doubt, respectable reasons for adopting either approach. In favour of maintaining a pure short title approach, it can be said that the techniques used by the editors for gathering information lend themselves particularly well to a short title approach, since this allows one to work without the need for direct physical comparison of multiple copies of individual items. Furthermore, it could be said that, once one goes beyond this, the short title technique is stretched to breaking point. In favour of publishing additional information it can be said that much valuable information is lost by denying the flexibility needed to distinguish many examples of what are, after all, different books. Furthermore, nothing is lost. If someone wishes to restrict himself to the information contained in short title entries, he is free to do so. The further and more refined information is an added bonus.

While, as I have said, both points of view are arguable, there can be no doubt at all that the second provides a much more valuable work of reference. STC 2 has adopted this second approach and with it the required flexibility in describing individual items.

This second approach required important changes in the bibliographical methods brought to bear on the project. In the first place, the gathering of information was made vastly more complex. It was necessary to compare, wherever possible, multiple copies of individual titles in order to identify and describe different editions or issues sharing a common short title

finger print. In this work, the editors were assisted by contributions from all over the world.

For over 20 years, Harvard has been a clearing house for bibliographical information about STC books and anyone who has corresponded with the editors retains a lasting impression of meticulous attention to detail and a willingness to track down all bibliographical points however great the effort involved.

The new approach has also required much greater flexibility in presenting information in the catalogue itself. In this it has, I think, been completely successful. Most of the entries remain relatively short, but where more explanation is needed it is presented in clear precise terms so that one never feels that any word has been wasted. Many authors or titles which present special difficulties have introductory notes which again make it much easier to use the catalogue. Furthermore, such really difficult cases as Bibles and Liturgies have charts of editions with collations and other helpful material and these again I have found very easy to use. Inevitably, there have been some pathological cases in which the editors have candidly admitted that they have given up or, at least, fallen a little short of the meticulous standard that they have set themselves in other parts of the work. However, these cases are few and I am inclined to think that the editors err rather on the side of excessive caution in their introductory notes than in a tendency to take any short cuts at all.

Now that volume 1 is available, much of the thinking behind the project, which was occasionally a little puzzling for users of volume 2, is made clear. There is an excellent introduction which is both interesting and necessary to read as a whole but which is also divided under headings for easy subsequent reference. The introduction makes clear the care with which the project has been carried out and also gives illuminating information about the way in which the thinking of the editors and the standard that they set themselves varied during the course of the project. There is a painstaking emphasis on the precise limits set for various types of information, although one may well doubt whether every reader will be as conscientious in using STC 2 as the editors have been in compiling it.

Now that the whole alphabetical sequence is available, STC 2 makes an interesting contrast with the comparable project dealing with English books from 1641 to 1700. Work on this project was commenced by Donald Wing in the years before the Second World War and his *Short Title Catalogue* was published in three volumes in 1945 - 51. It adopted a similar approach to STC 1 and it, too, became a standard work of reference. Once again, work on a new edition began almost as soon as the first edition had been published. Two volumes of Wing 2 have now been published, taking the work up to letter O. However, whereas STC was the work of a team, Wing's bibliography was until 1972 the heroic labour of one man. Furthermore, the number of entries required was approximately four times that in the STC. For these reasons

and, perhaps, also because of a contrasting academic temperament behind the two projects, Wing 2 has retained a pure short title approach whereas STC 2 has not. The result is that Wing 2 is, in truth, the second edition of Wing 1 whereas STC 2 is a new type of short title bibliography. This distinction comes out clearly in the course of even a few hours use of either catalogue. In using Wing 2, one is constantly coming across uncertainties in identification. For example, it is quite impossible to identify the various editions of John Milton's *Pro Populo Anglicano Defensio* 1651 without reference to extrinsic information from other bibliographies. Similar difficulties abound with such often reprinted books as the *Bible* or *Eikon Basilike*. In this respect, STC 2 is vastly superior. A spot check of some entries which had given me difficulty in STC 1 has revealed that in every case STC 2 provides an easy method of identification.

But of course STC 2 is much more than a mere means for identifying and listing books. It can also be used to provide a vast amount of information about the pattern of publication as a whole and also about publication of works of special classes or works of particular authors. Furthermore, the notes on the bibliographical distinctions between multiple issues or editions of books sharing a common short title finger print gives countless valuable insights into publishing practices throughout the period under study. No doubt STC 2 is less comprehensive as a catalogue of bibliographical variants than it is as a catalogue of short titles. However, it is by far the most comprehensive survey we have relating to the first century and a half of English printing and it is an essential guide to anyone working in this area.

Two features taken over from STC 1 are perhaps less satisfactory. The first was inescapable. In preserving the old numbering (as, of course, it was necessary to do) STC 2 has continued substantially the same order of entries as STC 1. This was based on Panizzi's rules for the British Museum Library. While for the most part this works well, there are some general headings which still make the heart sink. The worst of these is "England" which extends to well over 100 pages. Miss Pantzer has provided a great deal of assistance by way of a index to this section and notes on individual parts of it. There are also many useful cross references. However, I think that it will still prove to be difficult in cases where one fails to find an entry to be sure that one has a truly unrecorded book rather than that one has simply become lost in the catalogue.

Secondly, STC 2 has taken over from STC 1 its method of listing locations. These are given in two groups, the first for England and the second for the rest of the world. Where more than five locations are known within either geographical division, the five believed to be most useful have been chosen for listing and the existence of the rest merely indicated by a plus sign. I think that the listing of locations was the least successful feature of STC 1. The intention was that if one wanted to find a book one could choose the most convenient of available locations by reference to the list. However, in practice only a tiny proportion of the use of STC 1 was directed to tracking down far

flung copies of individual books. Furthermore, if one is trying to track down a copy of a book one naturally goes first to the library which is most readily accessible. Unless this happens to be one of the libraries that is invariably mentioned, like the British Library or Bodleian, the system leaves the list of its holdings incomplete. Even for the major libraries, it has been entirely unsafe for many years to rely on STC 1 as a comprehensive list of their early English holdings. Thus in using the most readily accessible library the scholar has necessarily been driven to using locally annotated copies of STC 1 rather than the printed text itself.

The result has been that the major use of lists of locations in both STC 1 and Wing 1 has not been to locate individual copies but rather to obtain a crude estimate of rarity. This has proved to be a most unfortunate development. The original editors of STC 1 pointed out that it was not a census of copies, merely a convenient finding list. However, this warning was all too often ignored and assertions such as "only three copies known to STC" became one of the more lamentable features of the booksellers' art.

The warning that the STC is not a census is repeated by the editors of STC 2 but this time, I think, with less justification. It must be stressed that the reason why STC 1 should not be used as a guide to rarity is that the data from which it was compiled were so limited that it was substantially useless for this purpose. It was not that a guide to rarity is inherently undesirable. On the contrary, this an important and largely unexplored aspect of the study of the history of the book. A study of comparative scarcities could give countless insights into the way in which books were distributed and used by their readers. To take a relatively easy example, many works of practical piety were clearly enormously popular in the early part of the 17th century and in their day probably amongst the commonest books in print. Yet in many instances they seem to have all but disappeared. Louis Bayly's *Practise of Pietie*, first published in about 1612, has 49 editions in STC 2, Christopher Sutton's *Learne to Die*, first published in 1600 has 10 editions and Arthur Dent's *Plaine Mans Path-way to Heaven*, first published in 1601, has 24. Practically all of these have less than five locations in STC 2. It would be interesting to know whether the survival rate of these little books is really as poor as it seems. If so, the question arises as to why. One possible explanation is that they tended to reach a lower class of the community than other books. It will be recalled that when John Bunyan married, his wife brought with her AS A GIFT from her father *Plaine Mans Path-way to Heaven* and *Practise of Pietie* and that he and his wife sat and read them together. Yet it is not obvious that such people would be more likely to ill treat books than those who were better educated. In any event, these books were by no means confined to the lower classes. The Fountaine travelling library, for example, contains a copy of *Practise of Pietie* (STC 1616) exquisitely bound in dark brown turkey with coloured onlays in red and yellow. Furthermore, these books were so commonly reprinted that it is difficult to imagine that they were all read to tatters. One can think of many examples of works of piety which were popular in their day and were constantly reprinted and which have survived in

embarrassingly large numbers to the discomfiture of the antiquarian book market. Perhaps the determining feature was format. The books that I have mentioned are all small. Perhaps the comparison should be with such works as John Earle's delightful character book *Micro-cosmographie*, of which the first three editions were all published in duodecimo in 1628 (STC 7439 to 7441). This is likely to have reached a much more literate audience than the works of piety mentioned above. However, if one can treat STC 2 as a census, these early editions are about equally rare. However, in the absence of reliable data, the relative importance of format, class of reader, subject matter and frequency of reprinting is difficult to determine with any confidence. What is really required is a general survey of the survival rates of books printed in small format in the early years of the 17th century. This should not be restricted to examples, such as those already referred to, which appear to be pathological. One also needs to know about cases in which larger numbers of books have survived so that a reasonably soundly based statistical enquiry can be undertaken and the relative importance of the various factors that I have mentioned can be identified. No doubt the purist may object that the factual basis for any such enquiry can never be adequately established. However, almost any enquiry based on reasonably well thought out principles would be better than some of the wild guesses that are published at present.

Similar problems arise in connection with books issued in the form of slim tracts. One special class is that of almanacks, a very important staple of publishing throughout the 17th century. In most cases these have a very small number of recorded locations. They were, of course, intended for temporary use only, but (at least late in the century) some people, such as Anthony Wood, had them bound interleaved and used them rather in the manner of a modern diary. The pattern of binding and preservation of these ephemeral works would itself be an interesting study. Once again, a useful start could be made if one had information for a large number of different items giving actual, as distinct from reputed, comparative rarity.

Furthermore, if one could get exact information about survival rates of those works that have come down to us, it would provide important information about the number of works which have now wholly disappeared. Clearly, this has happened to some extent. For instance, many editions of *Practise of Pietie* were numbered and it is reasonable to assume that the numbering sequence was continuous. Yet it has not been possible for the editors of STC 2 to locate examples of all numbered editions. Michael Sparke's *Crumms of Comfort*, first published in the 1620's, is in an even worse position. The earliest recorded edition is described as the sixth (STC 23015.7) and only six of the first 20 editions seem to have survived at all. Of the seven editions recorded in STC 2, none is reported as having more than one location and one has no location at all. (The entry for STC 23016.7 reads: "This was purchased by Hofmann & Freeman for Weissman but was lost in the mail.") A slightly happier survival is the undated 28th edition, presumably published somewhere about 1639, of which a copy survives in the Fountaine travelling library. Unfortunately this edition has disappeared into

a bibliographical black hole. The last edition recorded in STC 2 is the 20th, which has been assigned the date 1635. The earliest edition recorded by Wing 1 is the 41st. On any view, it would appear that many editions of this work have been lost forever.

Now if a book was always published with an edition statement and this statement was trustworthy, it should be possible to work out which editions have disappeared. However, by no means all books in this category were published in numbered editions. For example, none of the early editions of *Learne to Die* were numbered and many books that were published with numbered editions, such as *Practise of Pietie*, also had other unnumbered editions. The question arises as to how many editions have disappeared. This is where survival statistics can help. Where a book is repeatedly re-issued over a long period, a proper statistical analysis of numbers of copies surviving in known editions should give one a useful guide to the number of editions that have disappeared altogether.

This brings us to the question whether the data obtained by the editors of STC 2 could be useful for this purpose. I think that it could. No doubt it is still not a census and no doubt also great care would be required before forming any definite conclusions from the numbers of copies of individual editions known to the editors of STC 2. However, the range of information available to them was vastly greater than that available to the editors of STC 1. Information was gathered from over 500 libraries and also from a large number of individuals. Properly handled, this information could provide a very useful guide to the scarcity of individual books.

It would be necessary, of course, to take careful account of certain biases inherent in the way in which the data were collected. Some libraries reported their holdings in their entirety, others reported only selected items. Those in the latter category will clearly be biased. For example, the reporting of notorious rarities is likely to be substantially complete. Thus we can take it that the first editions of *Tottel's Miscellany* 1557 and *Basilikon Doron* 1559 survive in respectively one and two copies. Slightly less drastically, STC 2 is probably a substantially complete census of early editions of Bacon's *Essayes*. (An additional copy of the second edition went down with Harry Widener in the Titanic.) Other books will be reported less enthusiastically. For example, I suspect that many minor STC editions of the Bible are less rare than STC 2 might suggest. More generally, I suspect that many people adopted the practice, as I did myself, of reporting only examples of works known to be rare or to be unrecorded in STC 1 and were then surprised, as I was, to find that some books known to them should have been reported.

However, despite these very important limitations and the consequent care required for dealing with data of this sort, it would still be of very great value to know how many examples of *each* work have been reported to the editors of STC 2 (not merely the pathological cases). It would be particularly useful to know how many have come from sources that have reported their



entire holdings so that the various biases discussed above were not present. I think that the numbers would be sufficiently large to provide much useful information and it should always be remembered that any useful information of this sort is valuable when, as at present, we have substantially no information at all about the survival rate of the great majority of STC books. It is to be hoped that at some stage the editors may publish some of this information.

Special problems arise, as always, for Australian scholars because of our remoteness from any of the libraries holding the majority of STC titles. The problem is reduced to some extent, of course, by the microfilm series, but the problem is that one can never find out as much from a microfilm of a book as one can from the book itself. It is necessary to make the best possible use of what we have and, within the usual limits that apply in difficult times, to add to existing collections.

Now that the alphabetical sequence of STC is complete, the case for publishing a consolidated Australian supplement has become very much stronger. The Bulletin has done useful work by publishing occasional listings of individual STC holdings. But the information would be much more useful if presented in a more readily accessible consolidated form. Ideally, the form should include short title entries as well as STC numbers so that it can be conveniently used without constant reference to STC. This would enable one to assess existing holdings in their entirety and to form a much clearer understanding of the extent and geographical distribution of STC holdings in Australia. It would be an invaluable guide to assist scholarly use of existing collections and, equally important, to encourage further building on areas of present strength. The necessary data should come out of the Early Imprint Project and an Australian supplement to STC would be one of the most important by products of that Project.

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