

WILLIAM J. CAMERON 1926-1989

THE BIBLIOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND has particular reason to regret the sudden death — at his home in London, Ontario, 18 April 1989 — of Bill Cameron, for he was not merely a foundation member of the Society but a prime mover in its establishment: it was he who suggested in the early 1960s that it be created, an event that did not follow until February 1969. At the time of his death he was recuperating from what had appeared to be a routine operation.

Bill was born into a railway family at Paekakariki, north of Wellington. After graduating with first-class honours in English from Victoria University of Wellington in 1952 he went on to Reading University, where he completed a Ph.D. thesis entitled 'Tonson's Miscellanies 1684-1716'. His attachment to the literature and history of the Restoration and the early eighteenth century was thus marked from the beginning of his career, and it is for his contributions to this period that he will undoubtedly be best remembered. But his tastes were catholic and his enthusiasms wide-ranging — I can recall him at various times talking knowledgeably about Quintilian, Rousseau and C.P. Snow. He was a memorable lecturer on English drama of all periods, as well as on figures as diverse as Sterne, Behn and Deloney, and at McMaster his first-year Introduction to Eng.Lit. course was particularly popular. Above all, he was a great teacher of analytical and descriptive bibliography who inspired so many of his students — now scattered around the world — to pursue careers in rare-book librarianship and/or bibliographical scholarship. Many a bibliographical interest has had its origins in Bill's course in bibliography at Auckland or Western Ontario.

After returning from England, Bill spent the years 1958-64 in the English Department at Auckland University, first as lecturer and then as senior lecturer. In 1961-2 he was a research assistant at Yale, working on the *Poems on Affairs of State* project, and friendships established then with North American scholars led to his finally accepting a professorship in the English Department at McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario in 1964. This was a boom time for higher education in North America in general and coincided with the Ontario provincial government's decision to establish a second library school (the school at Toronto had been established in 1928). This decision was to mark a change of career, for when the new school — at the University of Western Ontario, London — opened for the 1967-8 academic year Bill was appointed a visiting lecturer, joining Andrew Osborn (the founding dean) and Tim Hotimsky in a remarkable triumvirate of book collectors and collection builders. During the first year of the School of Library and Information Science ('SLIS') Bill commuted from Hamilton, but in 1968 he took up a full-time appointment as Associate Dean, and in 1970 succeeded Dr Osborn, who had retired to Sydney. His final academic translation came in 1984, when his administrative skills and his versatility were recognized by his appointment as Chairman of the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures (i.e. German; Slavic; Spanish and Italian; Western Literature and Civilization), the position he occupied at the time of his death. Though for much of the past twenty years his scholarly activities had been confined by administrative duties mainly to periods of study-leave he maintained his bibliographical interests, not least by teaching bibliography in four departments within the University: Spanish, French, English and Librarianship.

One of Bill's long-standing enthusiasms was for bibliographical presses, which he had been introduced to in England. On his return to New Zealand he quickly acquired an 1863 Albion, formerly one of the Government Printer's original presses, which was brought to Auckland from the Mount Crawford Prison in Wellington in a truck belonging to the touring New Zealand Players. While arrangements were being made to accommodate the press and its accoutrements in the basement of the old Mount Pleasant Hospital, which had been acquired for conversion to the university registry, cases of type were carefully disposed on the floor of Bill's office in one of the temporary buildings which had served the University in the immediate post-war years and which were by the late 50s in a parlous state: careful disposition was necessary to reduce the possibility of the floor collapsing ahead of the occupants' move to refurbished quarters in nearby rooming-houses. Helping Bill erect the press at the Auckland War Memorial Museum for the 'Pioneer Press' exhibition in September and participating in tutorials conducted with feet competing with type cases for floor space were for students in 1958 the first introduction to the mystery of printing; for some of us the introduction became a long-term engagement. Monotype Perpetua was the only face that could be obtained locally in a sufficient range; there was apparently no paper available locally at the time suitable for use with a hand-operated flat-bed; and we never really mastered the temperamental machine. Nonetheless a bibliographical pamphlet series was launched, covering various topics of New Zealand interest, with one aim being to stimulate research; that aim not being achieved, Bill wound up the series in 1963 with his *Centenary of a Press* and the Mount Pleasant Press confined itself thereafter to more modest projects. Bill was to establish further bibliographical presses at McMaster and SLIS, but — as in Auckland — so much depended on his presence, and after his departure they tended to languish for some time.

In this part of the world — to those who did not know him personally — Bill will be remembered best as the compiler of catalogues of the local holdings of early-printed 'English' books. His activity had begun with the lists published in *New Zealand Libraries* in the late 1950s and early 1960s of the holdings of various New Zealand libraries of publications from the STC and Wing periods. The outcome of this activity was to be a consolidated NZSTC, but the project lapsed with the departure of David Esplin (and the files) to California. A further venture of the same kind was his Wellington Library School pamphlet of 1960, *John Dryden in New Zealand*, whose title — itself of seventeenth-century proportions — includes the statement 'A pamphlet designed to illustrate methods of publicising library holdings of rare books'. Common to these early endeavours was the publicising of library holdings by the 'most economical, practical, and speedy' method: the publishing of lists of numbers given to specific items in standard bibliographies.

Australia first felt the impact of Bill's enthusiasm and energy in the summer of 1960-61, when he spent two months compiling his catalogue of Wing-period books in Australian libraries, published by Walter Stone in the 'Studies in Australian Bibliography' series. Since he had only two months for the work Bill limited his search, both by institution and by area of the collection within the institution, with the result that he could do no more than hope that he had included between 50% and 60% of the relevant items in Australian libraries. Despite the limitations the catalogue was useful

and will continue to be so until the results of the Early Imprints Project are made available. It also reflected one of Bill's principles: that the pursuit of completeness and exactness was not always appropriate, that an incomplete bibliography might still be useful and might indeed prompt others to work towards its completion. Two supplements were published, in the *Australian Library Journal*, but the process of supplementation then lapsed, despite the apparent readiness of librarians to contribute copies of relevant catalogue cards. Fifteen years on, the memory of this 'abandoned' project was invoked by major libraries to refuse to devote staff time to the EIP project. The lesson that there is a virtue in publishing something known to be incomplete and perhaps in other ways defective — i.e. that something is better than nothing — is one which I for one have only slowly come to accept; my residual suspicion is that by its mere publication the imperfect may inhibit the more nearly perfect.

Probably the most frequently cited work of Bill's is 'Cameron & Carroll' (or 'C & C'), the catalogue of the holdings of libraries in the A.C.T. of eighteenth-century English books. It was compiled at breathtaking speed in conjunction with Diana Carroll as the National Library of Australia's contribution to the first David Nichol Smith Seminar, in August 1966, a seminar at which Bill spoke on the development of eighteenth-century studies in the Commonwealth. Again, bibliographers in this part of the world — and indeed students of the eighteenth century in general — have cause to remember him for his part in launching the DNS seminar series, which recognizes the contribution to literary scholarship of David Nichol Smith himself and the potential for research of his library, acquired by the National Library of Australia in 1962. The DNS seminars have continued and supplements to C & C have been produced to accompany two of them (1970 and 1980).

On his move to McMaster Bill became an enthusiast for the application of computers to humanistic studies. His own contribution in the area of computerisation was to be in the listing of early printed books (initially English) via the Hand Printed Books (or HPB) project, the ambitions of which were announced on the title page of the report on the first stage: '... an experiment in creating a universal bibliography of hand-printed books by using the computer's memory bank and by developing a step by step cumulation of existing records'. Bill was concerned to counter the British Isles/United States bias of existing bibliographies and catalogues by giving their proper due to libraries in countries he described as 'on the periphery' — specifically Canada, Australia and New Zealand. He was also an advocate of what he called the 'minimal identification & ingressive principle', which HPB exemplified, with its system of linkages, a system discussed in the Ranganathan lectures of 1976. With this background and these attitudes he was invited to take part in the June 1976 conference at the British Library, which was charged with the task of exploring the mechanisms for extending 'bibliographical control' beyond the end of the Wing period into the virtually uncharted waters of the eighteenth century. There were competing schemes vying for adoption by the conference; the HPB way was not espoused. Bill continued to have reservations about the methods adopted by the Eighteenth Century Short Title Catalogue, which were rather of a 'full description & degressive' nature. As he observed, it is hardly short-title-cataloguing of the traditional kind. I infer from the sponsorship of the June conference and the circumstances of the launching of ESTC

that the major determinant in formulating the ESTC rules was the relationship between funding bodies and the library profession, particularly in the U.S.A. Certainly we in Australia and New Zealand have had cause to regret the degree of elaboration in the ESTC rules, not least the librarianly interest in pagination, for, having agreed to conform to ESTC rules for the EIP project we have seen it founder (temporarily, we must hope) for want of financial support for such a labour-intensive activity.

With the launching of the ESTC Bill's energies were increasingly directed to the WHSTC (Western Hemisphere Short Title Catalog), the primary aim of which is the bibliographical control of books published before 1801 printed in the Western Hemisphere or containing material about the Western Hemisphere, or found in Western Hemisphere libraries. The scope is typically Bill. What he envisaged for the WHSTC — as previously for HPB — was a machine-readable file which was always being added to from various sources and from which catalogues and bibliographies could be extracted. Over the years scores of these print-outs were produced from HPB and WHSTC, generally reflecting Bill's current interests; all were seen as perfectible, calling on the co-operation of users in improving the file by the application of the ingressive principle.

In the wider scholarly field Bill's reputation will undoubtedly rest on his editing of the 1688-97 volume of the Yale *Poems on Affairs of State* (1971). Harold Love has observed (in his paper delivered at the Maslen Conference, to be published as part of the volume celebrating the occasion) that Bill's was the outstanding volume of the seven published in the series: he was a far better bibliographer and editorial theorist than most of his fellow editors. Indeed, the *TLS* reviewer was moved to lament that the poets were, with one exception, not worthy of their editor. Underpinning the Yale volume was the work that Bill had done on the 'late seventeenth-century scriptorium'. This is recognized by students of the verse of the Restoration as a monumental piece of work, though its wider recognition has been hindered by publication in the relatively obscure *Renaissance and Modern Studies* (1963).

Bill was not a professional librarian, even though he rose to be dean of a library school. He could, however, claim to have used more libraries than most people; he was acknowledged as an authority on the production of early-printed books — and was therefore a librarians' friend and ally; and he was an energetic builder of collections for those libraries which he was associated with or which enlisted his aid, ranging from the Turnbull in Wellington and the National Library in Canberra to a number of academic libraries in Ontario. Many of these collections were of eighteenth-century material, much of it selected from the stock of Ralph Howey in Philadelphia. The Howeys lived in one apartment and the books (and visitors) were housed in an adjoining one. On one occasion I accompanied Bill to Philadelphia and had the delightful experience of sleeping between ranges of eighteenth-century books in contemporary bindings, with that unmistakable aroma of old leather; the pleasure was relived years later when I met up with the books we had chosen on that occasion for the National Library of Australia, where they are appropriately kept together as the 'Cam.' collection. I also once accompanied him on a book-buying trip in the west of England which took in Hay-on-Wye and had occasion to observe his instinct for assessing a bookseller's stock and relating volumes to libraries.

Bill was well regarded by members of the profession: they accepted him because he had earned their trust, both by his actions and by his writings, even though in the latter he had in his pre-library-school days been critical of them. His long tenure as Dean of SLIS was marked by harmonious relations with the profession, and he himself did much to assist in the development of librarianship in the Caribbean and Latin America, while his advice was also sought from other parts of the world. Much of the present structure of SLIS, many of its innovative programmes, and a great part of its reputation are attributable to him. Nonetheless it might be noted at this point that bibliography of the analytical and descriptive kind has taken a back seat at SLIS in recent years — so much so that there is no regular course in it listed in the current handbook.

Many of Bill's other ex-students too will remember him as an inspiring teacher, whatever his topic. But he was also a good friend, always ready to advise and actively assist in career plans and in research and writing; and, with Pamela, he was a generous host. I am surely not alone in this part of the world in regretting that his contacts in the last twenty-odd years had not been extensive: he had made several visits to New Zealand for family reasons, but plans to visit Australia en route were thwarted by the efforts of airlines and assorted functionaries. But he had moved far away from New Zealand (and possibly Australia) not just physically. The germ of this alienation — if that is what it was — is to be observed in one of his publications which it would be easy to overlook, the volume *New Zealand* in the Prentice-Hall series 'Modern Nations in Historical Perspective', published in 1965. It was written as a direct consequence of the year spent at Yale: it was an attempt to 'set down in a more systematic and better-informed way' the answers he had been called upon to give to questions by American friends about what New Zealand and her people were like. Though a 'personal essay' it reveals a surprisingly broad knowledge and understanding of a society and its history, particularly in the chapter 'Maoritanga, the way of the Maoris' — twenty-five years on it appears to have been a rather 'advanced' history. Among its themes was Bill's concern at 'an unconscious form of isolationism that still threatens to inhibit boldness and imagination in New Zealand'. I believe that he found that boldness and imagination in Canada, where he came to feel more at home and where his various views about the nature of society in New Zealand were reinforced.

Administration did not entirely preclude research. As occasion permitted, Bill had been working for about fifteen years on a book on John Bell which would have superseded Stanley Morison's admirable though limited one of 1930. But increasingly matters Hispanic took his attention. The WHSTC, his experiences in Latin America and his new position presumably helped steer him in that direction, though he was already familiar with Spanish through listening to short-wave radio broadcasts from South America while still in New Zealand. In a 1987 letter he spoke of being 'deeply into Spanish bibliography nowadays', but still doing 'a little on Bell and on English drama as a side-show to "comedias sueltas" and such-like.' He also spoke of writing a manual of bibliography appropriate for Spanish materials, 'as there's nothing like McKerrow or Bowers in Spanish and the publication practices of Spain in the 15th-18th centuries make many of the analytical techniques of the Greg-Bowers tradition irrelevant. But other bibliographical problems that the Anglo-Saxon does not have to face require new analytical techniques which I have been trying to develop.' His 'long-

term' project was a new catalogue, supplementing and correcting Escudero, of Sevillano imprints up to 1800, which he expected to 'reach a significant plateau' in 1992, the 500th anniversary of the 'discovery' of the Americas. We can only hope that it will be possible to have these works in progress brought to completion and published: there is much that is tantalizing, much from which we could all profit. If a general regret might be voiced here it is that Bill's published output was relatively limited, that after the Yale volume there was no major publication. To be sure, he was not a scholar who was conscious of the list of publications on his C.V., and energies which might have gone into his own work were often devoted to helping others with theirs.

Bill was a great all-rounder: teacher, scholar and administrator. His memory will live on in the minds and achievements of those with whom he came in contact.

B.J. McMullin,
Monash University.

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