

Preface

Change and Continuity

The first issue of the *Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand Bulletin* — no. 1 for March 1970 — was a distinctly modest production. But it was strengthened by a determination to secure a future for bibliographical study in Australia and New Zealand. Prepared on a typewriter and “simply multilithed” rather than printed, as the Introductory Note declares, the *Bulletin* ran to only twelve saddle-stitched pages.

This mere pamphlet was replete with hope. Apart from information about the formation of the Society it contained two “Bibliographical Notes,” one by the new (and rather young) president, Wallace Kirsop. In the course of his correction, by means of physical description and analysis, of an entry to Ferguson’s recent volume 9 of *The Bibliography of Australia*, Kirsop argued that “the increasingly rigorous character of bibliographical analysis will bring about revisions of many of Ferguson’s descriptions. As a living discipline, Australian bibliography, however mindful of great debts to its founders, must move into the Greg-Bowers era and beyond.”

The seizing of opportunity would be crucial. It was not intended at first that the *Bulletin* would be the Society’s principal publication. The constitution does not specifically mention it, and it was more a newsletter than a journal at first. While the object of the Society would be “to promote research in bibliography and to issue bibliographical publications,” by-law 9 refers only to the “publication of papers at the expense of the society.” As the years went by and the *Bulletin* grew in size and frequency, and as a series of Occasional Papers was inaugurated and annual conferences held, Kirsop’s hope was in some measure fulfilled.

Physical bibliography, understood very broadly, was to be the Society’s remit: “the history of printing, publishing, bookselling, typefounding, papermaking, book-binding; palaeography and codicology; textual bibliography” but not “reference bibliography, documentation and information retrieval.” In staking out a territory in its prospectus that was somewhere between professional modern librarianship and the traditional pursuits of rare book collecting, scholarly editing and what we now call book history, the new Society laid the ground for a non-professionalising, broad-church approach to the common object of concern: the book as material object and the texts that books witness. And, by the same stroke, the conditions were laid for the refreshing interplay and fellowship between rare books librarians, academics, students and book collectors that members have enjoyed at the annual conferences ever since.

The year in which the Society was founded, 1969, was not, as it turned out, a propitious one for such declarations as Kirsop's about the importance of physical bibliography. The New Bibliography of Pollard, McKerrow and Greg had decisively done away with the subjectivity of earlier editorial traditions; but, in the literary field, the New Criticism of the postwar period decisively cut itself off, by virtue of its assumptions and methods, from bibliography. So the latter was forced to wend its own way, increasingly separated from that of mainstream literary study. By the late 1960s it was losing its place in the university English curriculum. From the same moment — the late 1960s — the rise of new forms of literary and cultural theory in France and then in the anglophone world saw different models of textual formation and circulation further displace bibliographical assumptions (about the work, its ideal text and the author) that the New Criticism had either silently rested upon or left alone.

But the reply was coming. During the 1980s and 1990s various editorial theorists, most of them scholarly editors chafing at the Greg-Bowers bit, made efforts to broaden the definition of the work, to understand it as having a 'life' (as the aesthetic philosopher Roman Ingarden had put it in the 1930s), one that stretched through all its materialisations from first drafts, to documents of production, to its various editions, and then into a bibliographic afterlife in its reviews and readings. The new editorial theory at least kept textuality in touch with the material documents, but, in terms of recruiting postgraduate interest, it definitely did not sweep the field. In addition, longstanding scholarly editorial projects, being in their progress more like ocean liners than leopards, could begin only very slowly to change their spots to reflect this new light. Fortunately in Australia, where new editorial projects were just then being conceptualised, some real development was able to happen almost immediately.

Now that the era of post-structuralist theorising is over, the rise of interest in empirical forms of research has returned, and we have seen the remarkable rise and rise of book history over the last fifteen years. In anglophone countries, it is not surprising that it should have grown, in significant part, out of bibliography — something impossible in France, where the burgeoning of the area of study occurred earlier and arose out of a different tradition.

Because book history is an inter-disciplinary area of study, not a discipline in itself, it must find its methodologies where it can. At the *Books and Empire* conference in Sydney in 2003 it became apparent that at last we had sufficient practitioners, from many disciplinary backgrounds, to be able to claim credibly that book history, especially in relation to the Australasian region, had reached something like a firm footing. A selection of papers from that conference was edited as a double issue of the *Bulletin* (vol. 28, nos. 1 and 2). Successor conferences in

Wellington in 2005, Kolkata (Calcutta) in 2006 and Cape Town (planned for 2007) have explored the common theme of the effects of Empire on the book in each country, as well as the other and later book histories proper to each region.

With volume 29 the *Bulletin* changes its title to *Script and Print*, retaining the old title as the new subtitle. This change follows a vote of the membership on the matter. The decision recognises the growing interest in book history while respecting the Society's founding commitment to all aspects of physical and textual bibliography. The relationship of book history to bibliography is fundamental and enriching: it is not the only methodology for book history but exploration of its many possibilities is the understanding upon which *Script and Print* proceeds.

It will be an intriguing business watching the ways in which the relationship is inflected over the next decade: watching how, as in the past, existing assumptions are stretched, challenged or confirmed, both at the Society's conferences and in its publications. The existing Occasional Papers series will also be renamed and relaunched to take account of this new bibliographical landscape.

With the publication of the present, substantial volume for 2005 — which represents, for this celebratory occasion only, the quarterly journal's entire output for the year — the Society moves, deliberately, further into the 'beyond' that Kirsop dimly foresaw in 1970 as following the Greg-Bowers ascendancy. But it does so without losing touch with the bibliographical way that he was having then, defiantly, to argue for.

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