

# W. J. Cameron and the Universal Catalogue of British Literature

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The concept of a universal catalogue of literature is not new. Konrad Gesner's *Bibliotheca Universalis* (1545–55)<sup>1</sup> in which he attempted to list all books written in Greek, Hebrew and Latin, extant or not, and Gabriel Peignot's *Répertoire Bibliographique Universel* (1812)<sup>2</sup> are leading instances; the catalogues of the large research libraries provide many more. One should not be misled by Bishop Charles Blomefield's 1829 letter to the Bishop of London advocating parochial libraries and "the formation of a national catalogue on all subjects of philosophy and literature," because he was driven less by bibliographical zeal than by his desire to mitigate the "horrible depravity of a great part of the national press."<sup>3</sup> He considered "whether it might not be expedient for the council of King's College, to draw up a large and comprehensive catalogue, consisting of all such works in Art and Science, Trade and Manufactures, *as may be safely recommended to the higher classes of society*":<sup>4</sup> his concerns were moral rather than bibliographical.<sup>5</sup>

The earliest attempt to get to grips with the production of a catalogue of the printing of all nations arose from the flurry of comment, in journals like *The Athenæum* and *The Gentleman's Magazine*, that was occasioned by the publication of the *Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the Constitution and Government of the British Museum* in 1850.<sup>6</sup> That report was written in the context of widespread and successful efforts to improve the literacy of the masses with cheap books and the establishment of artisans' libraries and the Public Libraries Act of 1850 (the Select Committee's report having been circulated in 1849). There

<sup>1</sup> Konrad Gesner, *Bibliotheca Universalis; sive Catalogus Omnium Scriptorum Locupletissimus, in Tribus Linguis, Latina, Graeca et Hebraica: Extantium et Non Extantium, Veterum et Recentiorum in Huncusque Diem, Doctorum et Indoctorum, Publicatorum et in Bibliothecis Latentium...* (Tiguri: Apud Christophorum Froschouerum, 1545).

<sup>2</sup> Gabriel Peignot, *Répertoire Bibliographique Universel, Contenant la Notice Raisonnée des Bibliographies Spéciales Publiées Jusqu'à ce Jour, et d'un Grand Nombre d'Autres Ouvrages de Bibliographie, Relatifs à l'Histoire Littéraire, et à Toutes les Parties de la Bibliologie* (Paris: Antoine-Augustin Renouard, 1812).

<sup>3</sup> *A Letter Most Respectfully Addressed to ... the Lord Bishop of London, on the Expediency of Establishing Parochial Libraries in the Metropolis and the Formation of a National Catalogue on all Subjects of Philosophy and Literature. By a Subscriber to King's College* (London: C. J. G. and F. Rivington, 1829), 12.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 15 (emphasis added).

<sup>5</sup> A study that is particularly useful for its documentation of parallel American and European movements towards a universal catalogue—which I came upon only after this paper was well-advanced—is Torstein Jahr and Adam Julius Strohm, *Bibliography of Cooperative Cataloguing and Printing of Catalogue Cards, with Incidental References to International Bibliography and the Universal Catalogue, 1850–1902* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1903).

<sup>6</sup> Commissioners on the British Museum, *Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the Constitution and Government of the British Museum; With Minutes of Evidence*, 2 vols. (London: W. Clowes and Sons, for Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1850).

was considerable dissatisfaction with the British Museum's catalogues and its large arrears of cataloguing. The catalogue consisted of nearly three thousand manuscript volumes that could be consulted separately by only a single reader at a time.<sup>7</sup> An entry in the *Bibliotheca Grenvilliana* provides an illustration of the arrears: it reads "Civil wars, a curious collection of about five hundred tracts published during the Grand Rebellion."<sup>8</sup> Although access to the library itself by all classes of people had improved considerably in recent years,<sup>9</sup> access to its collections was quite inadequate and felt to be unworthy of a library that was fast becoming one of the largest in Europe, as well as being viewed increasingly as "the people's library." A passage from *The Gentleman's Magazine* states the prevailing view eloquently:

The collection of printed books ... the vast depository of the productions of our national genius and learning, is resorted to by a much wider circle of inquirers, and exercises a direct and immediate influence upon our literary daily bread ... Besides its use to scholars and men of research, it is the forge and workshop of a great deal of the ordinary reading of the people; ... few things are of more general importance than its character, and there are few ways in which men in authority may do more good or more harm than by properly using, or by neglecting or abusing, that power of influencing its character which they possess in the reading-room of the British Museum ... Without a catalogue, a collection of ... 450,000 volumes is utterly useless.<sup>10</sup>

Desperately, in May 1847, fifty-seven members of the British Association petitioned the Queen to relieve the absence of a finding-catalogue, and in June a Royal Commission was established. It is not surprising then that a good portion of its *Report* was devoted to the catalogue problem, but even after the *Report* was published there was no provision for a finding-catalogue, and a further petition was made in August.<sup>11</sup>

The *Report* was reviewed at length by Charles Wentworth Dilke in *The Athenæum*.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>7</sup> This is Walford's estimate in 1878; the figure constantly increased as titles were acquired. See "Evidence," in *Report of the Commissioners*, 859.

<sup>8</sup> Verifactor, "The British Museum Library," *The Athenæum* 23 [no. 1163] (9 February 1850): 158.

<sup>9</sup> See "Facility of Research" in Edward Faulkener, "British Museum Catalogue," *The Athenæum* 23 [no. 1167] (9 March 1850): 262.

<sup>10</sup> Extracted from *The Gentleman's Magazine's* review of the Commissioners' report. *The Gentleman's Magazine*, new ser. 33 (1850): 501. This passage occurs also under "Miscellanea" in *The Athenæum* 23 [no. 1175] (4 May 1850): 483–84, with small variations. For a scathing account of the library's cataloguing arrears and the inadequacies of its catalogues see "The British Museum; The New One Hundred and Fifty-Three Volume Catalogue," *The Gentleman's Magazine*, new ser. 34 (1850): 397–402.

<sup>11</sup> "Catalogue of the British Museum Library," *The Athenæum* 23 [no. 1189] (10 August 1850): 835.

<sup>12</sup> Dilke was editor of *The Athenæum* in 1830–46. The five parts of his review appeared, under "Reviews," as follows: "Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the Constitution and Government of the British Museum ...," *The Athenæum* 23 [no. 1171] (6 April 1850): 365–67; "Report of the Commissioners ... Second Notice," *The Athenæum* 23 [no. 1172] (13 April 1850): 390–93; "Report of the Commissioners

In the fifth and last part of his anonymous review he proposed that stereotyping should be used to print “a Universal Catalogue—a Catalogue not merely of the books that our single library possesses, but of all the books ... that have ever been printed up to, say 1838?”<sup>13</sup> An appeal should be made to the principal governments of the world to cooperate with the British nation to prepare on common principles “a Catalogue of all the books ever printed” in their nations.<sup>14</sup> He expected that cooperation would be forthcoming because European governments had responded favourably to Prince Albert’s proposal for an exhibition of the works of industry of all nations.<sup>15</sup> Discussions were held during the ensuing Great Exhibition of 1851 and were brought to the attention of the Society of Arts by Sir Henry Cole on 1 December 1852, but no action was decided.<sup>16</sup> Eventually, in 1875, he printed “specimen sheets of a proposed catalogue ‘to contain the title of every book which has been printed from the invention of printing’”;<sup>17</sup> the sheets were presented to the

... Third Notice,” *The Athenæum* 23 [no. 1173] (20 April 1850): 416–19; “Report of the Commissioners ... Fourth Notice,” *The Athenæum* 23 [no. 1174] (27 April 1850): 443–46; “Report of the Commissioners ... Concluding Notice,” *The Athenæum* 23 [no. 1176] (11 May 1850): 499–502.

<sup>13</sup> “Report of the Commissioners ... Concluding Notice”: 501. Jahr writes that “the same idea [of employing stereotyping] had already occurred to Prof. C. C. Jewett, who as early as in the fall of 1847 appears to have communicated it to Mr. Henry Stevens and urged him to introduce the plan to the authorities of the British Museum.” *Bibliography of Cooperative Cataloguing*, 7. The Society of Arts documents cited below refer to Dilke’s suggestion as occurring in the 11 May 1850 number of *The Athenæum* (no. 1176) and give no indication of the extent of his review, the earliest to appear. W. E. A. Axon credits M. Danjou of the Bibliothèque Royale, Paris, with first introducing the topic in 1845, but he does not otherwise appear in the literature. See W. E. A. Axon, “The Universal Catalogue of Printed Books,” *The Academy* 5, no. 364 (April 1879): 369. The subject was first extensively considered in England in “Universal Catalogue of Printed Books,” *Society of Arts Journal* 26, no. 1317 (1878): 227–29 (Proceedings of the Society). Subsequent discussion of the Society of Arts investigation of the proposal for a universal catalogue is drawn from the preceding article and *Society of Arts Journal* 26, no. 1318 (1878): 243; *Society of Arts Journal* 26, no. 1344 (1878): 856–60 (Evidence); *Society of Arts Journal* 26, no. 1345 (1878): 868–77; *Society of Arts Journal* 26, no. 1346 (1878): 881–84; *Society of Arts Journal* 27, no. 1377 (1879): 427–28 (the Report); “Catalogue of Printed Books,” *Society of Arts Journal* 27, no. 1388 (1879): 685; *Society of Arts Journal* 27, no. 1402 (1879): 958–59 (Report of the Library Association Committee on a general catalogue of English literature).

<sup>14</sup> “Report of the Commissioners ... Concluding Notice”: 501.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* Later a convention between the Princes of Europe at the Paris exhibition of 1867 “for all countries to assist each other in obtaining reproductions of works of art” created an expectation of co-operation by Continental libraries. See “Explanation of Proposed Catalogue,” *Society of Arts Journal* 26 (1878): 228.

<sup>16</sup> Cole gave considerable attention to Dilke’s proposal in his lecture “On the international results of the Exhibition of 1851,” delivered to the Society of Arts in 1853. See *Bibliography of Cooperative Cataloguing*, 19.

<sup>17</sup> [Sir Henry Cole], *Specimen Sheets of a Proposed Catalogue to Contain the Title of Every Book which has been Printed from the Invention of Printing. These Titles will Form the Basis of a General Catalogue of the Printed Books of All Nations, Being Indispensable to Every Great Library, Both Public and Private, As Showing their Contents and Deficiencies* (London: Printed for Private Circulation by Spottiswoode, 1875).

Prince of Wales, President of the Society of Arts.<sup>18</sup> He in turn charged the Council to report on “the cost of producing a universal catalogue of all books printed in the United Kingdom up to the year 1600.”<sup>19</sup>

This phrasing makes it clear that “universal” here (and in the titles of most subsequent printed discussions) was intended to mean “all” books printed in a particular country, in this case the United Kingdom, but the circular put out by the Council contemplated a much more comprehensive design, one that tended towards the universal although pursued on national bases. S. R. Ranganathan, writing in *Libri* in 1953, made no bones about it. Universal bibliography “should include all published materials ... on all subjects, in all languages, in all countries and at all times.”<sup>20</sup> Cornelius Walford, a frequent contributor to *Notes and Queries*—and the possessor of a library of thirty thousand “volumes, tracts and pieces”<sup>21</sup>—defined it similarly: “universal” means “everything printed in the universe.” Walford regarded such a catalogue as “an altogether impracticable undertaking.”<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, the sample catalogue circulated for discussion was divided into national sections, and, at the suggestion of Sir James Lacaïta, the Italian scholar and politician who was a naturalised Englishman, the formats and notes were written in Latin, then the universal language. The specimen stated that an essential question was the establishment of cataloguing principles and procedures that could be adopted by every nation that wished to contribute to the grand enterprise. England had signed a convention for international cooperation in 1851, and it was in an international context that the apparently local proposition for a catalogue of English books to 1600 was discussed.<sup>23</sup>

Meanwhile, the project had been the subject of papers presented at the 1877 Conference of Librarians in London that recommended Walford’s proposal for a general catalogue of English books to the Library Association of the United Kingdom, established in the same year. The Association set up a subcommittee to consider the matter and report to its next meeting, in Oxford, in 1878.<sup>24</sup> Consequently,

<sup>18</sup> It is not stated whether the specimens of the catalogue printed are Cole’s (see *ibid.*, 228–29), but the dates make it likely. G. W. J. made a similar proposal but attracted no discussion and was not heard of again. See G. W. J., “Universal Catalogue of English Books,” *Notes and Queries*, 3rd ser., 7 [no. 174] (1865): 334.

<sup>19</sup> *Specimen Sheets of a Proposed Catalogue*, 227.

<sup>20</sup> S. R. Ranganathan, “Universal Bibliography and its Substitutes,” *Libri* 2 (1953): 292.

<sup>21</sup> “Minutes of Evidence,” *Society of Arts Journal* 26, no. 1344 (23 August 1878): 858.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 859.

<sup>23</sup> There appears to have been little agreement on the scope of the British contribution. The Prince of Wales’s charge mentioned 1600, but 1550 appeared in the discussion and in the Society’s circular to libraries. Justin Winsor, Harvard’s librarian, reporting on the English proceedings, inadvertently talked of a proposed catalogue of English books “issued say before the middle of the fifteenth century.” See “The British Museum and its Catalogue,” *Literary World* 9 (1878): 66.

<sup>24</sup> See Robert Harrison, “Preliminary Report of the Committee on a General Catalogue of English Literature,” *Library Association of the United Kingdom ... Transactions 1878* (1879): 8–9; “Further Report of the Committee on a General Catalogue of English Literature for 1879” (1880): 6–7; “Further Report

there were two bodies pursuing resolution of the question of a universal catalogue at the end of the 1870s, with common participants but sometimes different aims, but both equally unsuccessful.

Some readers will be disappointed if I do not recount details of the evidence presented to the committee of the Society of Arts and its conclusions, but space does not allow such an indulgence. Axon described the proceedings as “equally amusing and interesting,”<sup>25</sup> but Robert Harrison’s characterisation is more generally informative. Reporting to the Library Association, the librarian of the London Library put it thus:

They were asked by their President, the Prince of Wales, to consider *one* question; the inquiry, as appears from the printed evidence, diverged into a *second* question; and they have reported upon a *third* question. That is to say, they were asked to consider what would be “the cost of producing a Universal Catalogue of all books printed in the United Kingdom previous to the year 1600.” The inquiry turned into a discussion upon a General Catalogue of all English Literature, and the Council have concluded by recommending the printing of the Catalogue of the books in all languages contained in the British Museum. It seems not unreasonable to suggest that this circumstance scarcely adds weight to their conclusions and opinions.<sup>26</sup>

Part of the Council’s confusion was understandable in the light of information communicated by George Bullen, the Keeper of Printed Books in the British Museum, that a catalogue of its English books to 1640 was almost complete and could be printed in a short time—and would be, regardless of any alternative plans that the Society might have. It was indeed published, in 1884.<sup>27</sup> It was, of course, the prototype of A. W. Pollard and G. R. Redgrave’s *Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed ... 1475–1640* (1926),<sup>28</sup> published by the Bibliographical Society in a manner advocated by the Society of Arts nearly a half-century earlier, but there is no word of the Society in Pollard and Redgrave’s preface.

of the Committee on a General Catalogue of English Literature for 1880” (1881): 9. Harrison noted in 1881 that disagreement within his committee over the scope of a catalogue had made it impossible to deliver a specimen as originally planned.

<sup>25</sup> “The Universal Catalogue of Printed Books,” 369.

<sup>26</sup> “Further Report of the Committee on a General Catalogue of English Literature for 1879,” 6.

<sup>27</sup> British Museum, Department of Printed Books, *Catalogue of Books in the Library of the British Museum Printed in England, Scotland, and Ireland, and of Books in English Printed Abroad, to the Year 1640* ... [Compiled by George Bullen and G. W. Eccles], 3 vols. (London: By Order of the Trustees, 1884). Earlier, Henry Stevens, an American bookseller and librarian who lived in London, urged the imminent publication of Bullen’s catalogue, which he described as “discussed, modified, condensed, eliminated from that of the Society of Arts, and crammed sufficiently into the narrow confines of public economy, to be ready.” See Henry Stevens, “English Bibliography Before 1640,” *Library Association of the United Kingdom ... Transactions 1881–82* (London: The Chiswick Press, 1884), 20.

<sup>28</sup> A. W. Pollard and G. R. Redgrave, *A Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and of English Books Printed Abroad, 1475–1640* (London: The Bibliographical Society, 1926).

So, the effort of the Society of Arts to bring about the most extreme form of bibliographical control imaginable failed. However, the Society succeeded in a few ways that deserve to be recalled. The centrality of the British Museum to any form of national bibliographical control was strikingly affirmed, as was its importance to the nation.<sup>29</sup> The library probably did not enjoy the hostile attention given to its catalogues, but it responded to it. The Society's hearings, along with the contemporary meetings of the Library Association, provided the first large public forums for consideration of the principles and methods for the production of catalogues and directed attention to such technological advances as stereotyping and "the Remington typewriter"<sup>30</sup> that led eventually to the large printed catalogues of the twentieth century. One might almost claim that the Society's hearings were the first adumbration of the great age of information technology then to come: few if any works disseminate so much information in concentrated form as catalogues.

Bullen's catalogue prompted a series of short-title catalogues that led eventually, and in turn, to Pollard and Redgrave's *Short-Title Catalogue* (hereafter *STC*), Donald Wing's *Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed ... 1641-1700* (1945-51; hereafter *Wing*),<sup>31</sup> and the *Eighteenth Century Short Title Catalogue* (1983, 1992 etc.; hereafter *ESTC*):<sup>32</sup> nevertheless, the grand design of a universal catalogue was lost. Cameron himself records that "The only serious attempt at implementing a scheme of universal bibliography" was the attempt at Brussels in the 1890s to compile a *Répertoire Bibliographique Universel* by cutting and pasting entries from national bibliographies and catalogues. It "foundered at the outbreak of World War I when some seventeen million cards had been accumulated."<sup>33</sup> The idea of a universal catalogue lingered on in the professional literature of librarianship more as an unrealisable concept than as a practical incentive for international cooperative cataloguing.



It is time to introduce William James Cameron (1926-89) into this history. To do

<sup>29</sup> Later Richard Garnett, Keeper of Printed Books in the British Museum, saw the British Museum printed catalogue as a feasible basis for a universal catalogue, requiring only the cooperation of foreign libraries to identify titles not in the British Museum. Richard Garnett, "The British Museum Catalogue as the Basis of an Universal Catalogue," *The Library* 5 (1893): 93-96.

<sup>30</sup> "Minutes of Evidence," *Society of Arts Journal* 26, no. 1344 (1878): 857.

<sup>31</sup> Donald Wing, *Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and British America, and of English Books Printed in Other Countries, 1641-1700*, 3 vols. (New York: Printed for the Index Society, 1945-51).

<sup>32</sup> See *Eighteenth Century Short Title Catalogue* [microform], edited by R. C. Alston (London: The British Library, 1983); *Eighteenth Century Short Title Catalogue* [CD-ROM] (London: The British Library, 1992), etc.

<sup>33</sup> William J. Cameron and Brian J. McMullin, *The HPB Project: Phase I, Describing 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* (London, Ontario: School of Library and Information Science, University of Western Ontario, 1968), 4.

that I pass swiftly over the short-title catalogues of which the stories are relatively more recent and therefore more familiar. Their common feature is that they ignore the history I have recounted as if it had no relevance to their enterprise. Cameron was not involved in any of this save that he proposed a method for the *ESTC* in the earliest stage of its creation, but this too is neglected in its quite voluminous literature. However, Cameron is significant inasmuch as he revived the concept of the universal catalogue in a theoretically advanced but intrinsically practical way. The title-page of his and Brian McMullin's *The HPB Project: Phase I* (1968) proclaimed that his work was "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." Note here that the universal catalogue of the previous century has become a universal *bibliography* (as it was for S. R. Ranganathan), presumably on the grounds that a list of books held in numbers of libraries, however capacious, forms a bibliography rather than a catalogue: the books so listed are not found together in the same physical place, hence "catalogue" is not appropriate.

The principal object of what follows is to describe in broad terms the scope of the Hand-Printed Books Project that Cameron directed at the University of Western Ontario and to conclude by suggesting why his proposals were not favourably received at the two early conferences on the possibility of an eighteenth-century catalogue. I hope incidentally to more thoroughly detail his achievements in the fields of bibliography, cataloguing, and natural-language computer processing—in which he was a pioneer—than I was able to do in a paper on "Three Great New Zealand Bibliographers" in 2006.<sup>34</sup>

Before this, however, I should briefly outline his career in order to provide a context for his attempts to devise a method for a universal catalogue. A New Zealander, he was born in 1926 and taught me first-year English at Victoria University College in Wellington in 1951. After taking his MA in 1952 he completed a PhD at the University of Reading in 1957 and was appointed to a lectureship in Auckland in 1958. The success of his dissertation led to him becoming a research assistant at Yale University, working on *Poems on Affairs of State: Augustan Satirical Verse, 1660–1714* in 1961–62: his volume (vol. 5, 1971) was accounted to be the best of the seven volumes published between 1963 and 1975. After returning to Auckland, he was invited to join the Department of English at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario as full Professor where he remained between 1964 and 1968, when he became Associate Dean of the recently-founded School of Library and Information Science, succeeding Andrew Osborn as Dean in 1970. In 1984 the administration persuaded him to establish a new Department of Modern Languages and Literatures on the basis that that simple task would give him ample time for teaching and research before retirement. Brian McMullin reported that Cameron "was already

<sup>34</sup> T. H. Howard-Hill, "Three Great New Zealand Bibliographers," *Turnbull Library Record* 39 (2006): 36.

familiar with Spanish through listening to short-wave radio broadcasts from South America while still in New Zealand.”<sup>35</sup> He died of a stroke in his home on 18 April 1989 probably aged sixty-two.

Cameron’s professional career, impressive enough, pales beside the record of his publications, of which three warrant mention in the present context. The first two of these will be familiar to many of my readers. In two months in 1960–61 he produced *A Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed ... 1641–1700, Held in Australian Libraries* (1962).<sup>36</sup> This list was probably the basis of the National Librarian of Australia’s invitation to him later to catalogue the eighteenth-century books at Canberra after the acquisition of the rich Nichol Smith collection. At that time, Cameron was at McMaster and could spare only two months for the job, for which he was the supervisor and checker, with Diana Carroll. His *Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed ... 1701–1800, Held in the Libraries of the Australian Capital Territory* was published in 1966 with a full appraisal of the holdings of eighteenth-century books elsewhere in Australia.<sup>37</sup>

Cameron always delivered more than expected. I have given a brief account of his methods elsewhere:<sup>38</sup> “bibliographical blitzkrieg” seems an appropriate characterisation of a man who could cooperatively catalogue “about 8,000 short title entries totalling over 10,000 volumes” in two months, besides surveying and reporting on the eighteenth-century holdings of Australian libraries outside the Capital Territory. He calculated that there were about 19,100 volumes beyond the 8,389 in the ACT catalogue.<sup>39</sup>

The third title is less familiar:<sup>40</sup> *Robert Addison’s Library* (1967) is the catalogue of the library of Robert Addison, Bishop of the oldest Anglican diocese in Canada, which Cameron acquired for McMaster University; it consisted largely of early classical, theological, and philosophical books.<sup>41</sup> Unfortunately, Addison’s will mandated that the library stay in St. Mark’s, Niagara-on-the-Lake, and the

<sup>35</sup> “Three Great New Zealand Bibliographers,” 39.

<sup>36</sup> See *ibid.*, 35–36, on the following: William 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).

<sup>37</sup> William J. Cameron, and Dianna 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. (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 1966); *Short-Title Catalogue of Books ... Volume 3: Supplement*, ed. Ivan Page (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 1970); *Short-Title Catalogue of Books ... Volume 4: Supplement*, ed. Margaret Clark (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 1980).

<sup>38</sup> “Three Great New Zealand Bibliographers.”

<sup>39</sup> *Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed ... 1701–1800, Held in the Libraries of the Australian Capital Territory*, 1.iv.

<sup>40</sup> William J. Cameron and George McKnight, *Robert Addison’s Library: A Short-Title Catalogue of the Books Brought to Upper Canada in 1792 by the First Missionary sent out to the Niagara Frontier by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel* (Hamilton, Ontario: Synod of the Diocese of Niagara, 1967).

<sup>41</sup> “Three Great New Zealand Bibliographers,” 37–38.



University returned it after Cameron's death. At least it was properly catalogued, and Cameron had a rich source of early English imprints for his project: he referred to it frequently as the testing-ground for the short-title cataloguing principles he had developed for his Australian bibliographies.<sup>42</sup> (I might add that his grateful university sold "for a pittance"<sup>43</sup> the large collection of early books he had amassed, as it moved from books and librarianship to computers and information studies—in which connection Cameron himself had been prominent.)

There is no complete bibliography of his publications,<sup>44</sup> which began with a contribution to *Notes and Queries* in 1953, before he left for England. (This note was based on the Turnbull Library's collections, like many of the bibliographies, checklists and catalogues he produced, and influenced others to produce.) All these publications provided the basis for the first stage of the Hand-Printed Books Project (hereafter "HPB Project") at the University of Western Ontario, while he bought books for the School of Library and Information Science Library from which he and his students produced many of the checklists. The catalogue of the University of Western Ontario lists one hundred and sixteen monographs under his name, of which sixty-three begin with the word "Bibliography" and twenty-nine with the words "Short-Title Catalog."

Finally, I am able to discuss the three "Phases" of Cameron's *The Hand-Printed Books Project* that show the evolution of the methods that underlay his presentations to the two *ESTC* conferences in 1975 and 1976. I'll take them in order. *The HPB Project: Phase I* (1968) starts with a critical account of previous attempts to achieve a universal bibliography. Surprisingly, given Cameron's interest in the bibliographical control of British books, *The HPB Project: Phase I* refers to the universal catalogue movement of the 1870s only obliquely.<sup>45</sup> Using Ranganathan's criteria of "all subjects, in all languages, in all countries and at all times," *The HPB Project: Phase I* then considers "Substitutes for universal bibliography"<sup>46</sup> and positions itself as complying with all the criteria except that of time, because this stage of the HPB Project was limited to books printed before 1801. Further, because the HPB Project was to be based on checklists of books in Australia, Canada and New Zealand, universality of distribution also would not be achieved in this experimental stage.

<sup>42</sup> Short-title cataloguing goes back to the beginnings of librarianship. Despite his insistence on removing unnecessary descriptive elements, short-title entries such as Cameron's were not uncommon before the twentieth century, as demonstrated by Aristides Brezina's "A Universal Catalogue," *Nature* 20 (1879): 94–95.

<sup>43</sup> "Three Great New Zealand Bibliographers," 39.

<sup>44</sup> I list the English items in "Three Great New Zealand Bibliographers."

<sup>45</sup> *The HPB Project: Phase I*, 4; it is mentioned only by implication as a form of international bibliography described in Frank Campbell's *The Theory of National and International Bibliography* (London: Library Bureau, 1896).

<sup>46</sup> *The HPB Project: Phase I*, 5–6.

What made the HPB Project's pragmatic approach possible was the "Applications of computer techniques" that enabled the creation of three data banks.<sup>47</sup> The first, subsequently named the location file, was assembled from existing short-title lists of early English books compiled in the three countries. It consisted of an *STC* or Wing item number, a simplified date of publication, and a list of location symbols for each title; there were "symbols for 8,000 entries with the holdings of 40 libraries in Australia, Canada and New Zealand added."<sup>48</sup> A copy of *The HPB Project: Phase I* was sent to each of the libraries, together with a printout of their holdings, for checking and additions. The second data bank was the master file of the entries in the lists; *The HPB Project: Phase I* contained "A selective printout of about 150 entries [from the main file] in order to explain the relationship between the two files."<sup>49</sup> (The use of these two computer files is described in *The HPB Project: Phase II*.) The third data bank was of anonyms and pseudonyms, intended ultimately to be assimilated into the master file. I need not describe *The HPB Project: Phase I* further other than to mention that it concluded with detailed accounts of the methods and costs of compiling the files with the aid of students in the School of Library and Information Science. Although the costs are local and now outdated, the methods included useful descriptions of how to produce lists of early books from catalogue cards, but these too are probably irrelevant now in libraries that no longer maintain such catalogues.

*The HPB Project: Phase II* (1970) describes a project significantly advanced: the main file, which it was intended to describe and illustrate, consisted of 19,085 entries.<sup>50</sup> The monograph is divided into four chapters: "Principles of short-title cataloging"; "Computerizing a short-title catalog"; "Using the computerized short-title catalog"; and "Research and development." Of these, given the ultimate fate of the project, the most durably interesting is the first, in which Cameron continues to refine his analysis of the principles on which short-title catalogues should be compiled. With the aid of a diagram divided between "The physical character of a book" and "The intellectual contents of the work," he stresses the necessity to separate identification from description in short-title cataloging and seeks to find a "minimum physical description" that will serve to distinguish one book from another.<sup>51</sup> In discussing the relative merits of formats and collations for identification he arrives at a further principle for short-title cataloging: "the *time* taken for compiling each entry must

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 6–14.

<sup>48</sup> William J. Cameron, Brian J. McMullin and Joginder K. Sood, *The HPB Project: Phase II, Describing an Experiment in Creating a Computerized Cumulative Short-Title Catalog of Hand-Printed Books Leading to a Universal Bibliography of Books Printed 1453–1800 ...* (London, Ontario: School of Library and Information Science, University of Western Ontario, 1970), i. *The HPB Project: Phase I* is described quite fully in the introduction to *The HPB Project: Phase II*.

<sup>49</sup> *The HPB Project: Phase II*, i.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 3, 6.

be reduced to an absolute minimum.”<sup>52</sup> The most economical method is to transcribe the first few words of the title wherever they may be and then reduce the title by ellipsis until “transcription resumes where the subject matter really begins in the wording.”<sup>53</sup> He insists that before the main file can be used for subject indexing and other selective purposes “books have to be *physically identified* and assigned a unique *address* in the record.”<sup>54</sup> This is achieved by employment of an alphanumeric representation of the unique book record suitable for computer manipulation in a manner made familiar subsequently as the fingerprint advocated by the “LOC” (London, Oxford, Cambridge) Project.<sup>55</sup> Further, attention was paid to the problems of variant forms of authors’ names and of anonyms and pseudonyms that were intended to provide the focus of *The HPB Project: Phase III*.<sup>56</sup> The summary of short-title cataloguing principles<sup>57</sup> and the following chapter showed that Cameron and his team had gone a long way towards establishing the principles of and creating a method for a computer-assisted short-title catalogue.

*The HPB Project: Phase III* (March 1976),<sup>58</sup> however, was not devoted to names, as promised, but instead turned the project in a new but related direction, being “an exploration of ways of improving the ‘National Union Catalog: Pre-1956 Imprints’ by the use of the machine-readable records of the HPB project, standard bibliographies and published library catalogs,” a title that pretty well says it all. Cameron may have been led in this new direction by Julian Roberts, who, in 1970, drew attention to “two major published files containing eighteenth century books: The British Museum’s *General Catalogue* and the American *National Union Catalog*,” the advantages and disadvantages of each of which he considered in an almost Cameronian manner.<sup>59</sup> In *Phase III* Cameron urges the necessity to recatalogue

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 12. See *Computers and Early Books: Report of the LOC Project Investigating Means of Compiling a Machine-Readable Union Catalogue of pre-1801 Books in Oxford, Cambridge and the British Museum* (London: Mansell, 1974), especially “Standard for a ‘fingerprint’ for printed books” (*ibid.*, 95–99) and my comments on it: T. H. Howard-Hill, [review of *Computers and Early Books*], *The Library*, 5th ser., 30, no. 3 (September 1975): 255–56. It is remarkable how the LOC report and the “Phases” of *The HPB Project* run parallel to each other.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>58</sup> William J. Cameron, *The HPB Project: Phase III: An Exploration of Ways of Improving the ‘National Union Catalog: Pre-1956 Imprints’ by the use of the Machine-Readable Records of the HPB Project, Standard Bibliographies and Published Library Catalogs* (London, Ontario: School of Library and Information Science, University of Western Ontario, 1976).

<sup>59</sup> Julian Roberts, “Towards a Short-Title Catalogue of English Eighteenth Century Books,” *Journal of Librarianship* 2 (1970): 246–62. Roberts traverses much of the ground covered in Cameron’s first two “Phases” of *The HPB Project*, which, apparently, Roberts did not know of. Cameron’s April 1976 paper for the American Society for Eighteenth Century Studies begins by identifying the *NUC* and the British Museum *General Catalogue* as prime resources for the compilation of an eighteenth-century short-title catalogue.

eighteenth-century entries identified in the *National Union Catalog* (1968–81; hereafter *NUC*)—for which he describes comprehensive procedures—so that records will be suitable for computer manipulation. Further, the principles on which such records should be made (discussed in *Phase II* previously) are set out in an appendix that embodies the rules specifically.<sup>60</sup>

Cameron drew on his work towards *The HPB Project: Phase III* conspicuously in “Short-Title Cataloging and Automated Bibliographical Control of Pre-1800 Books,” a paper presented to the Rare Books and Manuscripts section at the American Council of Learned Societies conference in San Francisco in June 1975 (published in 1976).<sup>61</sup> The content of this paper will not surprise my readers. It contains many instances of faulty *NUC* records detected by his procedures, and he introduces his audience to three “collocation files,” one now called the “HPB locations register,” another the “*NUC* locations register,” and the third the “*NUC*/HPB matching file,”<sup>62</sup> all providing examples of concise formatted alphanumeric computer records that are completely unintelligible to laymen. When merged, these files made up the “HPB/*NUC* index file,” from which may be drawn, by means of a “switching file,” a *CANUC: Pre-1800 Imprints*—an advance into fresh bibliographical territory.<sup>63</sup>

Responding to the papers of the conference in a keynote address, W. B. Todd, by general account the greatest American bibliographer of eighteenth-century English books—and a predecessor of mine as editor of *The Papers of The Bibliographical Society of America*—was non-committal about Cameron’s proposals. He judged Cameron’s product likely to be somewhat less extensive than the *NUC*, but far more extensive than the Cameron/Carroll catalogue to which he (Todd) was greatly indebted.<sup>64</sup> However, in his summary of the conference proceedings, Herman W. (“Fritz”) Liebert paraded his inability to understand Cameron’s proposals, in particular the location registers at their heart:

<sup>60</sup> *The HPB Project: Phase III*, Appendix K, pag. K1–13.

<sup>61</sup> William J. Cameron, “Short-Title Cataloging and Automated Bibliographical Control of Pre-1800 Books,” in *Eighteenth-Century English Books Considered by Librarians and Booksellers, Bibliographers and Collectors ... Proceedings of a Conference ... June 25–28, 1975* (Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 1976), 18–21.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 20, “*CANUC*” being an acronym for “Canadian National Union Catalog.” Cameron contributed a proposal for “Automating a Retrospective Canadian Union Catalog” to the Canadian Association for Information Science Conference, Quebec, 8–10 May 1975. See William J. Cameron, “Automating a Retrospective Canadian Union Catalog: A Proposal,” *Proceedings of the Second Open Conference on Information Science in Canada*, ed. Eric Marshall (Ottawa: Canadian Association for Information Science, 1975), 110–15; apparently he did not publish a monograph specifically on the Canadian National Union Catalog.

<sup>64</sup> William B. Todd, “Eighteenth-Century English Books: An Antirevolutionary Tract,” in *Eighteenth-Century English Books Considered by Librarians and Booksellers, Bibliographers and Collectors*, 2. It is interesting in this context to revisit my review: T. H. Howard-Hill, [review of *Eighteenth-Century English Books Considered by Librarians and Booksellers, Bibliographers and Collectors*], *The Library*, 5th ser., 27 (1972): 63–65.

If an HPB location register will help to get us an eighteenth-century STC, more power to it. I gather, however, that it is more useful as a training exercise for machine-oriented bibliography students than as a key to the long corridor leading to an STC. As for me, I put my faith in a bibliographer with two eyes, two hands, and a book in one of those.<sup>65</sup>

I shrink from imagining Cameron's emotions when he listened to those dismissive, uncomprehending remarks, particularly as he had not mentioned "bibliography students" in the paper.

Soon after the publication of *The HPB Project: Phase III*, on 9 April 1976, Cameron presented "Procedures for Cataloging Short-Title Catalog Materials" as a six-page working paper to a seminar of the annual meeting of the American Society of Eighteenth Century Studies; the same paper was circulated as a pre-conference paper at "London 76: Conference on an English 18th Century Short-Title Catalogue," held in June 1976.<sup>66</sup> By this time Cameron was pre-eminently well qualified to contribute to all areas of discussion pertinent to the scheme of an English eighteenth-century short-title catalogue. His wide knowledge of English literature of the long eighteenth-century, his pioneering adoption of computers to the production of cooperative bibliographies, and, above all, his searching analysis of existing short-title catalogues and the principles and practice of short-title cataloguing rendered him more broadly experienced than most of the over forty scholars who met to consider the presentations. Amongst those giving papers were such bibliographical luminaries as R. C. Alston, the eventual director of the *ESTC*; R. J. Roberts, Assistant Keeper of Printed Books in the British Museum and secretary of the Bibliographical Society; W. B. Todd; and John W. Jolliffe, director of the LOC Project, another who circulated a paper beforehand. Cameron's paper traversed familiar ground. The only fresh aspect of it is the joining of the British Museum *General Catalogue* and the *NUC* as prime sources of large numbers of records for eighteenth-century books. There is no evidence of how Cameron's paper was received or whether he was present, though the minutes of proceedings, in a discussion of "Cataloguing Methodology,"<sup>67</sup> record only the

<sup>65</sup> Herman W. Liebert, [conference summary], *Eighteenth-Century English Books Considered by Librarians and Booksellers, Bibliographers and Collectors*, 94. It is possible that Liebert had read the first sentence of the introduction to *The HPB Project: Phase III* that was distributed to libraries that had shown interest in Cameron's work. It reads "This report is published primarily to be used by students in the School of Library and Information Science in the on-going evaluation of the HPB Project." *The HPB Project: Phase III*, 1. Historically, *The HPB Project: Phase III* is particularly valuable for Cameron's account of how the HPB Project was integrated with his teaching and the contributions of SLIS students to it.

<sup>66</sup> William J. Cameron, "Procedures for Cataloging Short-Title Catalog Materials," in *London 76: Conference on an English 18th Century Short-Title Catalogue* (London: British Library Board, 1976), 120–26.

<sup>67</sup> R. A. Christophers, "Eighteenth Century Short-Title Catalogue: Comments on Cataloguing Methodology," in *London 76*, 6.

contribution of Jolliffe. Jolliffe was included on the Organizing Committee, Cameron was not.<sup>68</sup>

The final phase of the HPB Project suggests that Cameron found it more stimulating to apply his procedures to another field of literature. Hence, *The HPB Project. Phase IV* (1980)<sup>69</sup> was devoted to “The French Canadian Contribution to the Development of a Western Hemisphere Short Title Catalog ... of Spanish, French and Portuguese Language Books Printed Before 1801.” However, we need not pursue Cameron through the host of bibliographies and short-title catalogues of Spanish, French, and Portuguese books that occupied the rest of his life.



It is time to answer the question I set myself before embarking on this enquiry. Why did Cameron’s HPB Project make no distinctive contribution to the evolution of the *ESTC*? Setting aside the important fact that he was not closely connected to the institutional sponsors of the 1976 London conference (the British Library and the National Endowment for the Humanities) or to any major funding source, a conclusion—not inevitably the correct one—appears to be this: his writings demonstrated and advocated the use of a computer-based methodology that was mainly unintelligible and alien to most of those to whom he described his project. I don’t believe that Liebert’s reaction was exceptional. The attendees were sympathetic to the use of computers, as subsequent developments confirmed, but were not interested in discussions of the technology except in very general terms. They could hire people to attend to computer details, and did. Moreover, Cameron urged the adoption of a minimalist form of cataloguing that apparently would deprive the ultimate users of the catalogue of descriptive information that previous short-title catalogues and library catalogues had incorporated and that they had come to expect. Librarians and scholars were not willing to sacrifice content for form: Cameron’s methods limited the very descriptive data that they regarded as inseparable from even a short-title catalogue.

Even though Cameron had repeatedly explained that although *identification* was the essential prelude to *description*, which could readily be added into records at

<sup>68</sup> R. C. Alston and M. J. Jannetta, *Bibliography, Machine-Readable Cataloguing, and the ESTC; A Summary History of the Eighteenth Century Short Title Catalogue ...* (London: The British Library, 1978), 4–5. The history begins with the 1976 London conference and ignores American advocates of an eighteenth-century short-title catalogue in the early 1970s. Cameron’s review of Alston and Jannetta effectively summarises his cataloguing principles: W. J. Cameron, [review of *Bibliography, Machine-Readable Cataloguing, and the ESTC*], *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 74 (1980): 166–69.

<sup>69</sup> *The HPB Project. Phase IV, The French Canadian Contribution to the Development of a Western Hemisphere Short Title Catalog (WHSTC) of Spanish, French and Portuguese Language Books Printed Before 1801: A Report to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council* (London, Ontario: School of Library and Information Science, University of Western Ontario, 1980).

later stages, all those who read or heard his papers *saw* only the most stringently minimalist records. They saw, indeed, the product of a highly-intelligent and -educated visionary mind that intended to create the purest form of a short-title catalogue as a model for all future short-title catalogues. But, in the catalogues that scholars used and expected, the descriptive information was intrinsically useful for literary research and therefore always desirable. Increasingly, to our time, modern library cataloguing has added descriptive information into bibliographical records, taking advantage of capacious standard record formats such as MARC<sup>70</sup> and the ever-increasing capacity of computers to provide *penultimately*, the fullest range of information about a book possible, and *ultimately* the book itself in electronic form.<sup>71</sup> Whatever the force and logic of his arguments it is clear that Cameron was moving in another direction from established thought about bibliographical cataloguing.

In our beginning is our end. From the Society of Arts universal catalogue of the 1870s to the ESTC Committee, established a century later, description was an intrinsic and essential part of a good short-title catalogue, as Bullen's shows, and always had been. No-one would listen sympathetically to proposals that required most of the descriptive elements to be abandoned. The Society of Arts proposal failed mainly because nobody could agree on a method that would produce a catalogue economically within the available technology. Cameron had the technology but failed because his readers and auditors reacted conservatively to such things as punched cards, sort keys, collocation tables, and the rapidly-changing mechanisms of computing. We may ponder the tragedy of the brilliant man who worked so hard and energetically but in the end achieved so little that endures. Nevertheless, he was a bibliographer of wide range, an innovator whose enthusiasm inspired all those who came into contact with him. Cameron has his place in the bibliographical history of three nations—New Zealand, Australia, and Canada—a considerable achievement that we should remember.

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<sup>70</sup> MARC, an acronym for "machine-readable cataloging," was developed by Henriette Avram at the Library of Congress in the 1960s.

<sup>71</sup> W. B. Todd distinguishes the hardheaded realists (librarians) from the softheaded visionaries, "a motley contingent of academics." W. B. Todd, "The ESTC as Viewed by Administrators and Scholars," *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 75, no. 4 (1981): 390. He refers to Cameron's "disturbing thought" of the cost of adopting a fuller style of cataloguing and the difficulty and cost of reducing American libraries' fuller records to "base file" requirements. W. B. Todd, "[review of *Bibliography, Machine-Readable Cataloguing, and the ESTC*]," *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 74 (1980): 169. Nevertheless, Todd welcomed the provision of descriptive information, which he believed modern technology would facilitate. Bettina Wagner recently described a computerised catalogue that links the catalogue description of an incunable to images of its ornamentation, text, etc. See Bettina Wagner's "Collecting, Cataloguing, and Digitizing Incunabula: Activities and Projects of the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Munich," *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 101, no. 4 (December 2007): 451–79.