Durning-Lawrence Online: Benefits Of A Retrospective Catalogue Conversion Project

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Abstract

The University of London Library has recently undertaken a project to catalogue one of its special collections online, that of Sir Edwin Durning-Lawrence (1837-1914), a protagonist of the Baconian theory in the controversy over the authorship of the works attributed to Shakespeare. The collection is especially rich in editions of Bacon's works and other Baconiana and in seventeenth-century English drama, with other strengths being emblem books and early editions of the works of Daniel Defoe. This article places the retrospective cataloguing project in the context of the international drive for retrospective conversion of antiquarian material and of the Library's mission to support research within the federal University of London and the region and internationally. It describes the method used for cataloguing, then focuses on the benefits of the project both academically for researchers and administratively. In addition to the commonly acknowledged benefits of multiple access points in online catalogue records and speed and precision of searching from anywhere in the world, others include the opportunity as part of the project to conduct a preservation survey with little extra cost of time or handling, establishing the rarity of particular items and classes of items in the collection, and insight into the collector provided especially by provenance notes in the catalogue records, enabling scholars to learn a considerable amount about Durning-Lawrence and his collecting patterns from direct electronic access. The value of projects conducted along similar lines may easily be inferred.

Introduction: the background

Retrospective conversion of manual catalogues has been a growing international concern for over a decade. For modern books, it has often been done from cards, frequently by para-professional staff, sometimes by outsourcing (e.g. from a British perspective, Law 1988, 84, 87-90, and from an American one, Bradshaw and Wagner 2000, 526-7).

The technique differs for antiquarian books. While conversion can be done from cards, and in Germany often is (Haller 1984, 263), this results in short records (Snyder 1996, 117) comprising only the barest details of author, title, imprint and format as in standard printed short-title catalogues. There is a growing desire to serve researchers by describing books more fully, to index publishers, printers, and former owners, perhaps to index genre or specific physical features, such as armorial bindings, and to note copy-specific details such as provenance and binding. General concensus is that antiquarian cataloguing is best done with the book in hand (Bradshaw and Wagner 2000, 527; Ofteley 1998, 14; Snyder 1996, 116).

The cataloguing is labour-intensive and requires a good academic background and knowledge of historical bibliography. Bradshaw and Wagner (2000, 529-30) write:

> Rare book cataloging demands expertise and training beyond what is required in most cataloging departments, even those that do a significant amount of original cataloging

and Shaw (1993, 190) states:

> In many ways the rare books cataloguer has to be more innovative than his counterpart dealing with the more bread-and-butter modern monographs. The need for encyclopaedic knowledge, well-developed linguistic skills and a detective's nose is just as strong as ever.

For these reasons, the cataloguers will be appointed at professional level, and electronic catalogue conversion, never cheap, is more expensive for antiquarian than for modern material. As for modern material, retrospective catalogue conversion may result in immediately and obviously greater demand for the books: in the first year after the electronic catalogue conversion of the Goldsmiths' Library of Economic Literature at the University of London, use rose by 50 %. Nonetheless, as antiquarian material is by its nature less heavily used than modern, a cost benefit analysis might not render the retrospective conversion of antiquarian collections a high priority in libraries, especially in an environment in which lack of finance has been and remains a major concern (Lennon and Pearson 1991, 11 and 25; Davis 1984, 62; Bradshaw and Wagner 2000, 526 and 529). Retrospective conversion of rare books has trailed behind that for modern books (Lennon and Pearson 1991, 8; Snyder 1996, 115).

Because retrospective catalogue conversion of antiquarian material is financially costly, the advantages require constantly to be recalled. In the 1980s Haller (1984) reported retrospective conversion work done at the Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Göttingen and at the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek. Reasons given included the provision of multiple access points, the value for a union catalogue, the ability to browse by classmark, and physical preservation of the guard book catalogues (Haller 1984, 263-4). Ruppli and Rico (1996) provide a French perspective, describing the catalogue conversion of the municipal library at Dijon. They concentrate on the technological aspects of the project, but note also speed of searching and the enhanced availability of the catalogue (Ruppli and Rico 1996, 47). English and American literature, cited as relevant, addresses cataloguing standards and the content of catalogue records. This article discusses an electronic retrospective conversion project at the University of London Library, that of the pre-1850 material in the Durning-Lawrence collection. It describes the method used and outlines benefits of the work not hitherto stressed in literature about retrospective conversion work.

The context: the University of London Library

A major British research library for the humanities, the University of London Library, in the centre of London, houses some two million titles in addition to extensive archive, manuscript and artefact holdings. It is an innovator (Robinson 1996, 138), whose desire nationally and internationally to promote intellectual access to collections is evident from it having been one of the seven co-founding members of the British co-operative preservation and cataloguing programme CURL (Consortium of University and Research Libraries) and by many initiatives, including a recent project (October 1999 - July 2002) to host a project to develop a U.K. distributed

national resource in Palaeography and Manuscript Studies (described at http://www.palaeography.ac.uk).

The Durning-Lawrence Library, one of the special collections in the University of London Library, is primarily the collection of Sir Edwin Durning-Lawrence (1837-1914), a protagonist of the Baconian theory in the Bacon-Shakespeare authorship controversy, whose labours culminated in the monograph *Bacon is Shakespeare* (1910). The collection comprises an estimated 5,750 items, bequeathed to the Library by Durning-Lawrence's widow, Edith Jane Durning-Lawrence, in 1929 and passing into the Library's possession in 1931, and a small amount of related material since purchased by the Library from an endowment fund. Much of the collection is housed in a room which incorporates the furnishings of Durning-Lawrence's own library in Carlton Terrace.

Lady Durning-Lawrence claimed of her husband's collection that:

> every book was purchased with one aim, and that aim was to prove that Francis Bacon was at the head of a great literary and scientific society, from whence emanated all the Elizabethan and Jacobean literature (Gordon 1915, [2] of pref.).

This is not quite true, as shown, for example, by a little nineteenth-century literature, and by a large number of Bibles and theological works which reflect Durning-Lawrence's Unitarian bent. However, the collection's major strengths are multiple editions of works by and about Bacon and of seventeenth-century drama. A group of emblem books and a clutch of Rosicrucian literature bear on Durning-Lawrence's researches into Bacon. Early editions of the works of Daniel Defoe may constitute an independent strength. The Library Report of 1931 lists some of the outstanding contents in over two pages of small type, concluding: 'this selection of some of the rarer items ... will give an idea of the exceptional value and interest of the collection'.

The seventeenth-century plays in the Durning-Lawrence Library, excepting very imperfect copies, were listed in 'English Renaissance Plays in the University of London Library' (1968, 66-72) by author, title, date and STC number. Almost the entire contents of Durning-Lawrence's library appear in the University of London Library's author-title card catalogue, with brief details of author, title, imprint and imperfections. This catalogue has been digitised, and can now be searched via the Library's website (http://cards.ull.ac.uk). Both these tools serve those desiring specific books. Overviews of Durning-Lawrence's collection exist in two manuscript sources, available for consultation within the library, Durning-Lawrence's three-volume accessions book, noting accession number, author and title of each work, and his two-volume library catalogue, recording number, author and title of each work, number of volumes, and the date of publication. Information was helpful but restricted.

In 2001, two rare book cataloguers were appointed for one year each to catalogue the pre-1850 material in the Durning-Lawrence Library, a project enabled by Vice-Chancellor's Development Funding. This was by no means the first retrospective conversion project undertaken by the University of London Library: most significantly, the Goldsmiths' Library of Economic Literature, described as comprising over 65,000 volumes (Bloomfield and Potts 1997, 402) and now containing some 70,000 titles, had already been converted, as had nineteenth-century pamphlets across several collections as part of a collaborative project funded by the Research Support Libraries Programmes (RSLP), the Eliot-Phelips collection of early Spanish imprints (described in Bloomfield and Potts 1997, 407), and the majority of

the 4,000-item Bromhead collection featuring pre-1800 works about London (described in Bloomfield and Potts 1997, 404-5). It was, however, the first project for which special rules for cataloguing standards were evolved, with particular emphasis on provenance.

Method

Cataloguing was done from the books in hand. Any other method would have been almost impossible, since the catalogue cards were scattered among the general author-title catalogue, and Durning-Lawrence's manuscript catalogue neither provided sufficient information nor allowed for books subsequently added to the collection through a small endowment fund. General policy was to copy and adapt an existing University of London Library record if one was on the system for a copy of a book in another special collection, and otherwise to download from the CURL database where possible, and the RLIN database for books not present on CURL, with some discretion when a sparse record in the preferrred source contrasted with a fuller record elsewhere. Relatively little original cataloguing was necessary, a reflection of the marked increase in electronic antiquarian cataloguing since the 1980s and early 1990s, when in both the United Kingdom and the United States the value of co-operative catalogues was deemed minimal because of the small number of records on them (Hoare 1986, 101; Lennon and Pearson 1991, 11 and 13; Davis 1984, 165), but validating the predictions of Lennon and Pearson concerning CURL (1991, 13) and Davis more generally (1984, 165) that the situation would change, and confirming the more recent experience of Snyder (1996, 117) and Oftely (1998, 14) concerning the value of co-operative catalogues, affirmed as a theoretical statement by Bradshaw and Wagner (2000, 528).

Most records could be derived from CURL. RLIN records included occasional use of records from European libraries via EROMM (European Register of Master Microforms). Original cataloguing did not necessarily entail keyboarding an entire catalogue record, since it was possible to copy and paste text from additional databases such as records of the older libraries on the experimental COPAC interface (http://www.copac.ac.uk) not yet integrated into CURL (chiefly the National Library of Scotland), the combined catalogue of French libraries (Catalogue collectif de France, http://www.ccfr.bnf.fr) and Germany's Karlsruher Virtueller Katalog (http://www.ubka.uni-karlsruhe.de). Nominally original cataloguing sometimes involved minimal alteration of downloaded records for variant editions. For example, Durning-Lawrence possessed a copy of each of the three editions of Bacon's Essays with the imprint date of 1613, differentiated from each other most clearly by the spelling of the word "atturney" on the title-page (STC 1142 "atturny", STC 1143 "aturney", STC 1144 "atturney"): a record was downloaded for one edition, then amended in two original records. Creation of a new record could thus be less labour-intensive than the updating of a brief downloaded record.

Frequent reference was made to the online ESTC (English Short-Title Catalogue). This was invaluable because many of Durning-Lawrence's books were defective. The ESTC not only enabled the provision of details missing from the copy in hand (in the worst scenario because the title-page was lacking) but helped to establish whether vagaries were copy-specific or pertained to the ideal copy.

The cataloguing standards followed were AACR2 and DCRB. Added entries were made for printers, publishers and booksellers of books published before 1700. Relator terms were added when the function was obvious from the form of the imprint (e.g. "Printed at London by Iohn Legatt for Simon Waterson"). Former

owners received added entries, as did binders when known. Added entries were not made in a standard form for places of publication, in accordance with existing policy to add such entries only for cartographic material. They were unnecessary for the Durning-Lawrence collection, since the place of publication in most cases was London, and the spelling did not vary (cf Shaw 1993, 188).

In order to save time, library policy was not to look up and add reference to printed sources to catalogue records, but to assume that downloaded references were correct and neither to verify nor to delete them. However, if it was necessary for cataloguing purposes to refer to an external work, the reference was added. In hindsight, the value of verifying references and of looking up standard sources became apparent. References in derived records were not always correct. Incorrect attribution of function as well as incompleteness could result from failure to consult STC, typically because the imprint read: "Printed by x", corrected by STC to: "Printed [by y for] x".

Provenance was always recorded, and the names of former owners and inscribers were indexed. For reasons of time, the recording of provenance was not always done in the detail recommended by Pearson (1998, 319), with the position as well as the wording of inscriptions noted.

Most bindings in the collection were either calf or Durning-Lawrence's house binding of half or quarter morocco and sheepskin. Bindings were recorded in two circumstances: (1) bindings rendered distinctive by coats of arms or other decoration stamped on them: for example, a copy of Bacon's *Instauratio magna* (1620) with his crest on it; (2) to differentiate between two copies of the same book (especially helpful for book fetchers, since classmarks were not unique).

Deviations from the ideal copy such as unusual order of binding (notably for the ninth edition of Bacon's *Sylva sylvarum* (1670)) and all defects that affected content were recorded. This occasionally entailed noting the inability to identify an edition, when two editions of a seventeenth-century play appeared in one year, differentiated by wording on the title-page, and the title-page was lacking in Durning-Lawrence's copy (e.g. for Middleton's *Changeling* (1653); Markham's *True tragedy of Herod and Antipater* (1622)).

Benefits of the retroconversion project

Cutter defined, and the Paris Principles of 1969 reaffirmed, the purposes of a library catalogue as being to locate a work in a library collection, and to collocate the works held by an author in the library (Davis 1984, 162). From this viewpoint, the University of London's card catalogue, available worldwide through having been digitised and made available on the Library's website, satisfied requirements. The retrospective conversion of Sir Edwin Durning-Lawrence's library, however, enabled much more than that. Advantages were as follows:

(1) Multiple access points
The indexing of printers, publishers and former owners in particular provided entry into records impossible through an author-title sequence. The University of London had not held a separate subject catalogue, so the ability to search works by subject headings was a bonus.

(2) Speed and precision of searching
As an extreme example of the multiple editions in the Durning-Lawrence collection mentioned above, Sir Edwin Durning-Lawrence owned 74 editions of Bacon's Essays

published before 1850. To find the edition, or editions, of a given year, is evidently much easier when one can limit a computer search by date (or publisher, or language) than by a trawl through catalogue cards.

(3) Knowledge of the collector

This is becoming increasingly important in view of the growing interest in provenance research. While the large number of books and articles about particular book collectors testifies that cataloguing a collection is not a prerequisite to build up a picture of a man as a book collector, it helps. Oftely remarks upon the knowledge gained by a cataloguer of a collection (1998, 15). This is of course beneficial for promotional activity, but what is more valuable, in a world in which cataloguers and scholars are often two separate breeds, is that the new catalogue records enable the researcher to build up an accurate picture of Durning-Lawrence's library from his computer terminal, without going near London or the books: a significant consideration in an era of reduced travel budgets (Bradshaw and Wagner 2000, 527).

From the catalogue records created in the retrospective conversion project, one builds up in the first instance an idea of the thoroughness of Durning-Lawrence's collection, and the methodical nature of his collecting. One can establish speedily, for example, not only how many editions he owned of any given work by Bacon, but where the strengths are: for example, that on the front of seventeenth-century drama he owned quartos of thirteen of the sixteen plays by John Crowne; sixteen, or about half, of the plays of James Shirley, but only four of the eighteen plays by Aphra Behn. The description of the book is just one click away. The impression is not complete because the project specified for rare books cataloguers was to catalogue only books published before 1850, in the expectation that clerical staff would catalogue more recent material over the current year. Thus, enough early Bibles are present to make it clear that Durning-Lawrence had a collecting interest in this area, with, for example, the Coverdale Bible of 1535, Authorised Version from 1611 and 1612, and the Geneva Bible from 1600 and 1611. Yet early English Bibles represent only one aspect of the collecting interest, and for a relatively monolingual collection, Durning-Lawrence's indulgence in foreign Bibles is striking. In addition to Bibles in the common European languages, he possessed the New Testament in such diverse languages as Balla, Bulgarian, Croat, Fijian, Galla, Gaelic, Hindu, Khasi, Magyar, Malay, Sinhalese, Tamil, Turkish, Upper Wendish, Welsh and Yoruba among others, which he evidently wanted for completeness. Most of these were published after 1850, so do not appear in the computer catalogue. Full retrospective conversion will round off knowledge of the collector.

Provenance notes in the catalogue records provide an insight into how Durning-Lawrence acquired his library, supplementing scrapbooks of invoices, present for the years 1892-1914. Several early editions of Defoe and a smaller number of emblem books were purchased at the auction of the famous Huth library, and Durning-Lawrence owned books purchased from other major auctions of the nineteenth century: from the libraries of Richard Heber and of Charles Spencer, 3rd Earl of Sunderland, from the Britwell Court library of S.R. Christie-Miller, from the Rowfant library of Frederick Locker-Lampson. Less interesting for scholarly purposes but more amusingly, provenance notes also indicate the assimilation of some of his wife's books into his collection. Records of single provenance do not indicate Durning-Lawrence's purchasing methods in the same way, but do assist to build up a picture of the former owners, in a way which would have been difficult to impossible before the project. Outstanding former owners of books in Durning-

Lawrence's library, now indexed, include the novelist Anthony Trollope, the poet George Herbert, the antiquarian William Cole, and even Francis Bacon himself.

Durning-Lawrence evidently took a certain pride in his books. In one of his scrapbooks of invoices he gives instruction for binding. Many books are bound in a house style. Yet he purchased many defective works, and condition notes in a copy-specific field in the catalogue records help to show this. They suggest that he took care to repair books: a note along the lines of a title-page having been backed, or of leaves having been torn and repaired, is not proof that Durning-Lawrence himself was responsible for the repairs, but repairs occur often enough to imply that he could have been, and the catalogue user can see this. Especially for the seventeenth-century plays, close cropping results in the loss of some head- and tail-lines, and throughout the library final blank leaves have been discarded in binding; catalogue notes such as: "ULL copy wants final (blank) leaf" and: "ULL copy is closely cropped, with some loss of headlines" make this apparent. Some seventeenth-century plays want a title-page; some consist of little more than a title-page. Information about this obviously helps the prospective user to know when it is beneficial to consult the copy of a work at another library, and contributes to knowledge within the booktrade about the quality of copies of any given item. It also sheds light on Durning-Lawrence as a man who had perhaps lost his initial aim in simply acquiring as fully as possible, in whatever condition the material was available.

The electronic catalogue records notes when books have been bound together. Sometimes such books were frequently bound together, as indicated by copy-specific notes on the online ESTC, sometimes issued together, shown by notes in the printed STC. In these instances the online catalogue note helps to confirm a general picture. In other cases the notes provide the rationale behind acquisition. Durning-Lawrence frequently possessed multiple editions even of non-Baconian works (e.g. Camden's *Annales Rerum Anglicarum et Hibernicarum Regnante Elizabetha* from 1615, 1625 and 1627 in Latin and from 1625 (Books 1-3), 1629 (Book 4) and 1635 in English), including editions with minor variations, such as both the "he" and the "she" versions of the King James Bible. He less often possessed exact duplicates, and the notes of books being bound together reveal that exact duplicates are likely to be present in his collection for the sake of the text with which a duplicate was bound. Notes in catalogue records of Durning-Lawrence's annotations in the front of books shed further light on the reason for acquisition, typically pointing to a Baconian connection. For example, in his copy of Thomas Wilcox's *Short yet sound commentarie* (1589), Durning-Lawrence recorded on the front paste-down: 'Dedicated to Lady Bacon'.

Ultimately, the serious scholar working directly on a particular collector will want to examine the books and manuscripts for himself (cf Winship 1992, 102). Nonetheless, examination of the catalogue records will take him a long way in the first instance, and may provide an adequate substitute for scholars wanting to compare the strengths of particular collections.

(4) Rarity
Because catalogue records were derived from the CURL database in the first instance and the RLIN database in the second, the retrospective conversion project allowed the Library to ascertain the relative national and international rarity of specific items in the collection and to establish its particular strengths. This benefit, unimaginable a decade ago, remains no more than a rough guide, since many relevant libraries, such as those of Oxford and Cambridge Colleges, are not on COPAC. Not all libraries represented on the collaborative databases have completed the retrospective

conversion of their antiquarian holdings: in particular, Cambridge University Library, the largest in England except for the British Library and the Bodleian Library, has only a fraction of its records on the shared database. The holdings of the British Library were loaded onto COPAC only towards the end of the cataloguing exercise, and both its holdings and those of the National Library of Scotland were available on the experimental interface of COPAC (http://www.copac.ac.uk), but not on CURL. However, a rough guide sufficed to prompt us when to look further to establish rarity. The seventeenth-century plays and the emblem books had been described from the acquisition of the collection as special strengths. The conversion project confirmed the truth of this: several emblem books were recorded as present only in Glasgow University Library, and many of the plays were recorded as present only as microfilms held at Birmingham. It was no surprise to learn that German Rosicrucian literature does not feature in English research libraries. Among the items which required original cataloguing, a metasearch on French and German library catalogues revealed only one exact match for one book, Emilie Berrin's *Secretair der Liebe* (Leipzig, 1808), in the Bibliothèque Nationale, with a second record for an earlier edition, published in 1800, in Göttingen: in this instance, the work was intended as a pattern book, to be cut up, which could explain the rarity.[1]

(5) Preservation exercise

As cataloguing proceeded, any books with loose hinges or similar defects were tied up with tape. Notes (visible to staff only) were made by the cataloguers about loose hinges or pages, detached boards, cracked spines or torn leaves, and print-outs of the catalogue records for these items were given to the conservation officer. Thus the retrospective conversion project provided an opportunity to provide a preservation survey involving very little extra time and no additional handling.

Conclusion

The desirability of retrospective conversion of catalogue holdings for improved access is generally accepted. The benefits of detailed descriptive cataloguing of antiquarian material, with the book in hand, receive at least lip service. The retrospective catalogue conversion of the Durning-Lawrence Library at the University of London Library demonstrates additional benefits, not generally discussed, of assessing a collection and surveying its condition, and the value of retrospective conversion of special collections for bibliographical scholarship.

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[1] I should like to thank James Caudwell for drawing my attention to this item.

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