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*British Bibliographical Journals:
past present and future*

The history of the journal literature of a subject tells us some important things about the history of the subject itself. Since the publication of the earliest scientific journals in the late 17th century, the genre has proliferated. As subjects grew, and as new subjects were created, periodicals became an essential element in how scholars and practitioners communicated with each other. When modern academic conventions developed in the late 19th century this became even more the case than it had been previously. The history and structure of journal literature is of particular significance to the bibliographer and the information scientist both generically and in their own fields of study as it has evolved in parallel with the disciplines themselves. In this paper, I shall try to offer a history and analysis the British literature of the related fields which have been developed around the study of books and information.

The study of books – as opposed to their contents – is essentially a product of the enlightenment. Although the origins of printing had attracted some attention before the end of the 17th century onwards, it was largely for nationalistic reasons as German and Dutch protagonists

argued about the first printers and their earliest products.¹ By the middle decades of the 18th century, the dispute was resolved in favour of Gutenberg – indeed his alleged Dutch rival Coster was a fabrication – and librarians and scholars began to develop the lists of early printed books which began with Maittaire’s *Annales typographici* (5 vols. 1719–41) and was to culminate in the *Gesamtkatalog* in the 20th and 21st centuries.² Despite the nationalistic element in its origin, this scholarship was essentially international in scope and ethos. The early catalogues and other studies were typically published in Latin and in so far as the discipline had a name it was called *historia litteraria*.³

It was the upsurge of bibliophilic interest in early printed books which really drove the development of the academic discipline in the aftermath of the French Revolution of 1789.⁴ The release of tens of thousands of early books onto the market, and the transfer of tens of thousands more into new public libraries (especially in the *bibliothèques publiques* in France) sparked a new interest as well as creating significantly enhanced commercial values. Particularly in England, where the post-revolutionary wars had an economic and social impact but caused little physical dislocation or destruction, a new kind of book collecting became a fashionable hobby. Incunabula, *editiones principes*, fine bindings and provenances became aristocratic fashions. The study of these books as physical objects became a necessary part of the process of acquisition and ownership. The works of Thomas Frognall Dibdin (1776-1847)⁵ – who coined the word *bibliomania* to describe the phenomenon which he was helping to create – shamelessly promoted certain kinds of books as fashionable (and very costly) possessions. For a generation of English aristocrats, collecting early books and furnishing library rooms in their houses

¹ For the context of the claims made for Coster, see: Johns 1998, Chapter 5.

² See <<http://www.gesamtkatalogderwiegendrucke.de/GWEN.xhtml>> (accessed 02.02.2018).

³ Blum 1969 (english translation Blum 1980).

⁴ Jensen 2011.

⁵ Richardson Jr. 2004 (accessed 02.02.2018); Windle - Pippin 1999.

became almost a social necessity.

To promote and support this aristocratic fashion a new branch of bookselling developed which was concerned with the sort of books these wealthy collectors wanted.⁶ At the same time, a small and specialised literature also developed, partly to provide a scholarly underpinning to collecting and partly – and perhaps more importantly – to enhance the reputations of the collectors and the value of their books. This development was particularly associated with Dibdin, but there were other writers, one of whom, Sir Samuel Egerton Brydges, was himself an aristocratic collector with some scholarly insights.⁷ Brydges established what is probably the first specifically bibliographical journal in English, *The British Bibliographer*, published from 1810 to 1815. Of course the proliferating general interest magazines from the late 17th century onwards had contained some articles of interest to book collectors and those interested in the history of printing, but here was for the first time a journal aimed solely at that audience. Long forgotten, it deserves recognition as the pioneer – short-lived as it was – of a line which stretches to the present day.

The bibliomania proved to be a passing fad, although some of the collections assembled between 1790 and the mid-1820s were hugely influential on the future direction of bibliophily, and some indeed still survive in whole or in part. But this fashion left important traces in its wake. In particular, the study of books became more systematic and more commercial. Collectors wanted to know about the books they were buying (and indeed booksellers to know about what they were selling); the best way to establish this was through authoritative bibliographies and the underlying bibliographical scholarship. During the middle decades of the 19th century, this more systematic approach to collecting developed in parallel with the development of librarianship as an occupation and profession. In Britain, this development had its origins in existing libraries. In the 1840s and

⁶ Jensen 2011; Munby 1972.

⁷ Manley 2004 (accessed 02.02.2018).

1850s the library of the British Museum, soon to be followed by the university libraries in Oxford and Cambridge, had senior librarians who wanted to raise the standards of cataloguing and public service. Their collections were catalogued to new and uniform criteria, and were augmented by acquisition of important antiquarian material as well as contemporary publications. In turn this led to the foundation of professional associations, notably the Library Association of the United Kingdom in 1877 and learned societies, notably The Bibliographical Society founded in 1892 as a specialised spin-off from the Library Association. It is with these mid- to late-19th century organisations that there begins the continuous history of book-related and professional librarianship journals in the United Kingdom.⁸

The Library Association was established by a group of librarians who sought to set and raise professional standards, not least through the education and training of new entrants.⁹ Their methods included papers on both current professional practice and historical matters presented at regular meetings and conferences. The *Library Association Record* was founded as a combination of professional journal and members' newsletter. In addition to this UK-wide body, a number of librarians' organisations came into existence in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, including bodies in Scotland and some of the English regions, and a national association for assistant librarians to counterbalance the domination of the LA by senior members of the profession. Most of these bodies published some sort of bulletin, and in one or two cases became more a substantial journal. The Scottish Library Association, for example, was founded in 1908, affiliated to the Library Association in 1931 and produced its own newsletter from 1950 onwards.¹⁰ The Association of Assistant Librarians, founded in 1895, also published its own journal, *The Library Assistant*.¹¹ By the

⁸ Francis 1949.

⁹ Mumford 1976.

¹⁰ <<http://www.cilips.org.uk/about/our-history/>> (accessed 29.01.2018).

¹¹ Ramsden 1973.

1930s there was a growing body of professional literature, most of it focussed on the day-today concerns of public librarians.

In so far as there was also a more formal research literature, this was largely in the field of book history and historical bibliography. Throughout the 19th century, there were occasional bibliographical articles in many general interest magazines, but no real scholarly journal in the UK before the *Transactions of the Bibliographical Society* was started in 1892-93.¹² The newly-founded Bibliographical Society considered the publication of papers and monographs as one of its most important functions from the very beginning of its existence. The energetic first Secretary, W. A. Copinger,¹³ was a familiar figure in the library world of late 19th-century England, and saw that there was a need for regular publication in a rapidly expanding field. He was also well-acquainted with J. Y. McAllister, the Secretary of the Library Association, who was the editor of an existing periodical called *The Library*. McAllister and Copinger persuaded their respective organisations to bring these two journals together for their mutual benefit. An ever-increasing percentage of librarians had little or no interest in historical bibliography (though they certainly did not include McAllister himself), while the combined journal, and with slightly altered terms of reference, was ideal for the members of the Bibliographical Society.

This separation of bibliographical and librarianship journals proved to be permanent. *The Library* was unique as a serious British journal in the broad field of historical bibliography for several decades, but in the middle of the 20th century a few even more specialised journals were founded. The most innovative was *The Book Collector*, which was first published in 1952. It had developed out of a number of bookish periodicals dating back to the 1930s, but under this title it developed its characteristic ethos of scholarship and pleasure. It offered a new and unique medium for articles on bibliographical scholarship with

¹² Francis 1949.

¹³ Guppy 2004 (accessed 02.02.2018).

a bibliophilic orientation. Two other relative newcomers deserve a mention. The *Journal of the Printing Historical Society*, first published in 1965, and *Publishing History* (from 1977) are both peer-reviewed to the highest standards and excel in their respective fields. Interestingly, two of the three (*JPHS* being the exception) have survived as commercial rather than learned-society publications, although with very sympathetic publishers.

The literature of librarianship has gone down its own road. Although even in the late 20th century some of the professional journals continued to carry occasional historical papers and papers about the curation of historic collections, in the middle decades of the century several important library journals were initiated. First in the field was *Library Review* in 1927,¹⁴ which gradually evolved into a formal academic journal with research-based papers, opinion pieces and book reviews. It was always, however, intended to be accessible to practitioners as well as the very small academic LIS community. It was not until after World War Two that it had any British competitors.

Library and Information Science as an academic discipline and as formal professional training and education, developed very slowly in the UK.¹⁵ The School of Librarianship at University College London, founded in 1919, was unique until after World War Two. Some diploma programmes were offered in colleges, but it was not until the 1960s that Bachelor's and Master's degree programmes were initiated in a number of other universities and polytechnics. Gradually a small academic community developed, but even at its high point in the 1980s there were never more than about 150 academic staff in the field. Some, but by no means all, were active researchers looking for outlets for their publications. The *Journal of Librarianship* was founded in 1969 to cater for this market; it was initially published by the Library Association although not with any great enthusiasm on the part of the Association's then-leaders. Its success was largely due

¹⁴ Since 2018 re-titled *Global Knowledge, Memory and Communication*.

¹⁵ Bramley 1969.

to the commitment and hard work of its founding editor, Edward Dudley, significantly an educator as well as a librarian and – what was almost as important – something of a maverick and iconoclast. In 1990 it was bought by Bowker, became the *Journal of Library and Information Science*, and remains arguably the most prestigious and probably the most important British journal in the field.

The development of the journal literature reflects the development of the discipline itself. At the same time, the literature also facilitates the further development of the discipline. These general truths are very neatly illustrated by two other important mid-20th century titles. The first issue of the *Journal of Documentation* was published in 1945 by ASLIB;¹⁶ it was intended to be a forum for scholarly publication in the new but rapidly developing field of information science. The first issue include endorsements from some very distinguished scientists, including some who had been pioneers in using information in the conduct of then recently concluded World War. Four years later, ASLIB began to publish a second journal, *ASLIB Proceedings*, which was, as its name suggest, an outlet for less formal or less fully developed papers. Both are still published, and still have complementary roles. *JDoc*, as it universally came to be known, played a key role in the evolution of information science in the 1950s and 1960s.

One important landmark in the development of information science in the UK was the foundation of the Institute of Information Scientists in 1958, led by a group of librarians who found that neither ASLIB nor the Library Association met their needs. The driving force of the organisation in its early years was Jason Farradane who was a key contributor to the first issue of *Information Science*, the Institute's peer-reviewed journal first published in 1962. This became the *Journal of Information Science* in 1979 and is still published under that title.¹⁷

JOLIS, *JDoc* and *JIS* are all fully peer-reviewed to the highest

¹⁶ <<http://www.emeraldgroupublishing.com/products/journals/journals.htm?id=jd>> (accessed 05.02.2018).

¹⁷ <<http://journals.sagepub.com/home/jis>> (accessed 05.02.2018).

standards and are the principal British outlets for research papers across the whole spectrum of LIS. Ever since 1945, however, and particularly in the 1960s and 1970s, there has been a proliferation of lesser journals, many of them practitioner-oriented carrying discussions of current professional issues, reports of action research projects and fieldwork and so on. These journals although perhaps not commanding the same respect among academics (and the assessors of research excellence) are an important part of the fabric of the profession. In the last 10 to 15 years many of them have moved to electronic publication, and indeed in some cases have been replaced by Web-based forums, discussion groups and e-lists. All of the formal journals are now also available electronically, including in almost all cases, complete back-runs, although many are subscription based.

This paper has focussed specifically on *British* journals, but there are of course English-language LIS journals published in many other countries. Most obviously, there are those from the United States, including some with the same international standards of excellence as the leading British journals. There are others from Australia, New Zealand and Canada, and from countries, most of them in the British Commonwealth, which still use English as their professional language. These include India and Pakistan, and many countries in Africa. A consideration of the world-wide English-language literature of LIS is beyond the scope of this paper, but any discussion of the British literature has to be seen in this context.

Even from this brief study of the British literature of the field, it is clear how the discipline and its literature have developed together. The continuation of LIS as a recognised and identifiable field of scholarly study, in addition to providing the intellectual underpinning of professional practice in the information professions, depends on the continued availability of high-quality outlets for research results. It is this which is provided by the literature discussed in this paper, giving the study of journals a far greater importance than might superficially be supposed. At the same time, both the bibliographical and LIS journals have proved their capacity for longevity and their

ability to maintain high standards even when they have passed from learned societies or professional bodies into the hands of commercial publishers. They are a testament to the health of the disciplines which they serve.

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Abstract

La biblioteconomia come disciplina accademica e come base della formazione professionale si è sviluppata molto lentamente nel Regno Unito. La classificazione libraria inizia con l'Illuminismo quando bibliotecari e studiosi cominciarono a stendere le prime liste dei volumi a stampa con gli *Annales typographici* di Maittaire (1719-41). In Inghilterra, Thomas Frognall Dibdin (1776-1847) coniò la parola *bibliomania* per descrivere il fenomeno che contribuiva a promuovere certi tipi di libri come oggetti della moda. Anche se la bibliomania si dimostrò una moda passeggera, influenzò la direzione futura della bibliofilia, con caratteristiche che ancora sopravvivono in tutto o in parte. Nel regno Unito, solo tra la metà e la fine del XIX secolo, inizia la storia delle pubblicazioni periodiche e della biblioteconomia professionale; storia che viene raccontata fino ai giorni nostri.

Bibliofilia; Bibliomania; Regno Unito; Riviste bibliografiche

Library and Information Science as an academic discipline and as formal professional training and education, evolved very slowly in the UK. The study of books develops as a product of enlightenment; librarians and scholars began to develop the lists of the early printed books with the Annales typographici of Maittaire (1719-41). In England, Thomas Frognall Dibdin (1776-1847) coined the word bibliomania to describe the phenomenon that was contributing to promote certain types of books as objects of fashion. Bibliomania proved to be a passing fad, but it influenced the future direction of bibliophily, and some actually still survive in whole or in part. Between mid- to late-19th century the continuous history book-related and professional librarianship journals in the United Kingdom began; history that is told up to the present day.

Bibliophily; Bibliofilia; United Kingdom; Bibliographical Journals