AN EARLY WHEATLEY CATALOGUE
THE 1866 CATALOGUE OF THE BOARD OF TRADE LIBRARY

A Note by K. A. Mallaber*

One of the few files on the Board of Trade Library which have survived from the 19th century contains some interesting papers on the production of the printed Catalogue of the Board's Library which was published in 1866.** Since Wheatley was a cataloguer, and since the papers contain what must be one of the very few extant financial estimates for work of this type, it seems worth reproducing the documents in The Indexer and adding some comments on these and on the finished catalogue.

In 1860, the Board of Trade decided that it ought to have prepared and printed a catalogue of its valuable library. There was already a manuscript catalogue, but as there seemed from the surviving minutes and correspondence no question of merely revising and printing the manuscript catalogue, this must have been either incomplete or unsatisfactory in other ways. The earliest letters to Wheatley and J. R. McCulloch*** describing the type of catalogue required do not seem to have survived, and the first document is Wheatley's estimate for cataloguing the Library. This is dated January 26th, 1861, and is addressed to Edgar Bowring, Librarian of the Board of Trade. The estimate runs as follows:

Mess. Wheatley present their best respects to Mr. Edgar Bowring and beg to send him the following estimate of the probable extent of the Library of the Board of Trade. They will undertake to make the Catalogue on the plan required, complete and ready for press at the charges given below, on these estimates of the number of works:

Should the number of works and references prove to be less they will make a proportionate reduction in their charges; but if greater than they have calculated, they will make no additional charge for the excess.

The Catalogue would be made with the greatest care possible as to correctness in language, arrangement, etc.

The work would occupy about six months from its commencement.

Estimated Number of Volumes (exclusive of the Parliamentary Report Room) ... ... ... ... ... 20,660
Estimated Number of Separate Works, in the above number of volumes, inclusive of about 3,500 Tracts ... 11,854
Cost £
Cataloguing the above 11,854 works at 12/- per 100 ... ... ... ... 71 2 —
Making Index to ditto of authors' names, with short titles, and cross-references to all connected Subjects throughout the Catalogue, probable number of entries 14,000 at 4/- per 100 ... ... ... ... 28 — —
99 2 —

To Edgar Bowring, Esq., etc.
Jan. 26 1861.

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* Based on part of a paper read at a Discussion meeting on December 11th, 1969.
*** J. R. McCulloch, 1789-1864, political economist, was Comptroller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office from 1838-1864. Among his writings were: Principles of political economy, 1825; Dictionary of commerce, 1832; The statistical account of the British Empire, 1837; and, from the librarian's point of view his most important work—The literature of political economy, 1845, reprinted by the London School of Economics and Political Science in 1938 as No. 5 in their Series of Reprints of Scarce Works on Political Economy.
Memo [added by E. Bowring]

To this sum would be added the small expense of cataloguing the new books that may come in during the time the Catalogue is being prepared.

The cost of correcting the press by Mr. Wheatley (which will not be great) will have to be added.

E.B.

On January 29th, 1861, J. R. McCulloch wrote to James Booth, the Permanent Secretary of the Board of Trade, as follows:

H. Ms. Stationery Office
29th January 1861

Sir,

I beg to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of 28th Instant in regard to the printing of a Catalogue of the books in the library of the Board of Trade: And with respect to this matter I would beg to state for the consideration of the Lords Commissioners of the Privy Council for Trade

That I entirely concur in the expediency of printing the Catalogue referred to; and that I shall be most happy to give every little assistance in my power to effect the same.

I believe that you say that you think that a sum of £100 will suffice for the composition of the Catalogue— That, however, is not a matter with which I am officially concerned— I shall be glad when you send me the M.S. of the Catalogue to order it to be printed; but this is all I can do in the matter. In no instance do we interfere with the production of the Reports or Papers sent to us to be printed— And there is no room or ground of any kind for making this case an exception.

Perhaps, however, you will be good enough to allow me to say that I should think that £100 is much too low an estimate of the sum required to produce the Catalogue in question. I take for granted that in compiling it you wish to make it creditable to the Board of Trade, and worthy of the collection to be catalogued, & if so I should apprehend that £350 or £400 would be much nearer the mark. In my apprehension the Catalogue should be what the French would call raisonné, that is, it should be divided into classes, the works in these classes being arranged alphabetically.

Thus, the various works on Maritime Law should be brought together under one grand division—& then subdivided into the different heads of 1. General Treaties: 2. Ships: 3. Freights: 4. Masters and Crews: 5. Marine Insurance: 6. Registration and Transfer of Ships, and so on, with heads for the Manning of Ships and Impressment; Neutrality; Right of Search, etc., etc. The scheme of such a Catalogue would first have to be decided upon, and then the different heads filled up, a miscellaneous head being reserved for those which it might be difficult to classify. A Catalogue of this sort, were it properly executed, would be of the greatest utility. Everybody would see, at a glance, what works might be consulted; and what is of hardly less importance the defects of the collection would become obvious.

But if you arrange the books in alphabetical order, it will require a study of the entire Catalogue to say what it possesses in any one Department or sub-Department: And most likely you will be going on making purchases of books for Departments that are already well supplied, at the very moment that other Departments are but scantily supplied, or have no books.

It would be easy to expand these hurried and offhand observations; but you will easily see what I mean, and that is sufficient.

If you adopt, as I hope you do, the plan of a classified Catalogue, it will be necessary that it should be wholly compiled and finished before any portion of it is sent to press.

Unless you classify the Catalogue your pamphlets will be little better than lumber. But if you classify them under their proper heads, and arrange and bind them chronologically they will be most valuable.

When anything curious is catalogued it should be accompanied with an appropriate bibliographical notice.

Such is a brief sketch of what I think your Catalogue should be. To execute it properly is a task for a man of talent and a good bibliographer, & ought to be properly remunerated.

I have, etc.,

J. R. McCulloch,
Comptroller.

This letter was not very well received in the Board of Trade, and the Deputy Librarian, W. M. Bucknall, then wrote the following memorandum to the Librarian:

The amount (£100) suggested to Mr. McCulloch in the letter of the 28th Inst. was based upon the Estimate of Mr. Wheatley who was recommended as being thoroughly acquainted with all matters connected with the compilation of Library Catalogues. Mr. Wheatley had every opportunity given to him of forming an accurate judgment and the nature of the Catalogue which was required was most fully stated to him.

Nothing could be more desirable, viewed from the literary or bibliographical side of the question, than the class of Catalogue of which Mr. McCulloch suggests a plan for adoption & in
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realities the system which has been proposed will be, I think, more nearly in accordance with Mr. McCulloch's views, than he seems to imagine.

The base of Mr. McCulloch's suggestion is that the Catalogue of the Library should be a 'Catalogue Raisonné'—works being collected under the subject and again appropriately subdivided. This is in effect the leading idea of the method which it has been proposed to adopt, and such deviations as might be necessary from Mr. McCulloch's plan, are those alone which the practical working of the Library renders desirable.

The Library of the Board of Trade partaking as it does of more than an usually special character, contains in several of its Departments an extremely large number of works; Taking for example the subjects, Trade & Commerce & Political Economy, probably the largest sections in the Library, it might become necessary were the works arranged precisely in the manner suggested by Mr. McCulloch, that many pages should be searched through before finding the work required, as there are many books the character of which it is impossible to define with anything approaching accuracy or to place in subdivisions which shall be commonly accepted as their correct places.

Experience has shown that the nature of the references constantly made to this Library are more of a special than of a general nature. Thus for example where one person wd. desire to know what works we had on Trade, 20 would seek information upon some distinct branch of it, e.g. Indian Trade, American Trade, Austrian Trade, French Trade, and to these or corresponding 'heads' they would be guided by a well arranged system of cross references on which the utility of the Catalogue will greatly depend & to the exactness and copiousness of which every attention will be paid.

The 'subject' system which has been employed for several years past in the M.S. Catalogue, is as nearly as possible identical with the system of a Catalogue Raisonné, but for the sake of convenience the works are indexed under their special heads instead of appearing as subdivisions of the great departments, the cross reference acting as the guide from the 'Genus' to the 'Species'.

The classification of the works themselves which has been further adopted, remedies to a large extent the difficulties which usually arise from a merely heterogeneous arrangement. Thus as far as space will permit, all works relating to International Law have a separate position or section allotted to them. Copyright & Patent Law again, the two being further subdivided respectively. Examples might well be multiplied but the above will suffice to show the arrangement.

W.M.B.
31.1.61.

Bowring then minuted James Booth, the Permanent Secretary, as follows:

As to Mr. McCulloch's notion of what our Catalogue ought to be, see Mr. Bucknall's Memorandum annexed. Mr. McCulloch utterly mistakes our intentions, assumes that we are going to have a bad Catalogue because we put the cost of compiling it at not much more than £100 (we having told him nothing in our letter as to the nature of the Catalogue) and proposes a Catalogue Raisonné which is very much what we intend to make by means of a complete system of cross references. In a private letter to me, he absolutely proposes that our Catalogue should be a Catalogue not of the books we have, but of the books we want—the most Irish kind of Catalogue that I ever heard of.

As to the cost of compiling the Catalogue, Mr. McCulloch refuses to undertake it out of the Stationery Office funds, but requires that we should pay for it ourselves. He then goes on to say that we ought to spend not £100 on it, but £350 or £400. I am not prepared to recommend that we should spend so large a sum out of our Contingencies, as I consider such an outlay utterly unnecessary; but as it is of the highest importance that we should have the Catalogue, I think that we ought to spend the smaller sum spoken of—Mr. Wheatley's Estimate of £99-2-0 to which must be added the small expense of cataloguing the new books that may come in during the time the Catalogue is being prepared, and also the cost of correcting the press—making a grand total of say £120. I believe that we can spare the money, but should object to a special sum being taken in our Estimates.

The only question is, whether if we agree to the outlay out of our Contingencies it is necessary to ask for the Treasury sanction to such outlay. I should have thought not, but it has been intimated to me that this would be more likely by the Treasury.

E.A.B.
31.1.61.

The Permanent Secretary, however, thought that the Board ought to obtain the sanction of the Treasury, and the President, Mr. Milner Gibson, having also been consulted, this sanction was obtained on February 26th, 1861. So much for the surviving documents, and for the way in which Gladstone's candle-ends were looked after.

It will be noted that Wheatley quoted 1½d. for cataloguing each work and ½d. for each author and title reference. He estimated that
there were 11,854 works, and that there would be 14,000 index references, making a total of 25,854 entries. At his estimate of six months to complete the catalogue and assuming 60 hours' work a week, he was in fact proposing to prepare entries and references at the rate of one every 3½ minutes on average, or to deal with 170 works in a ten-hour day (of a six-day week). He may, of course, have been intending to employ a team of cataloguers, four, say, of whom each would have had to deal with 42 works per ten-hour day and also find time for the final editing and all the other incidentals. He might well have been proposing to pay the four cataloguers £20 each for their six months work, leaving the remaining £19 2s. 0d. as his profit. A salary at the rate of £40 a year may be compared with a civil service Third Class Clerk's salary of £100 a year at this period.

From a careful sampling of the actual catalogue, I estimate that there were finally about 13,400 main entries and references, and a further 7,400 author/title entries, making a total of 20,800, or 5,000 less than Wheatley's estimate. It should be noted that despite Wheatley's estimate of about six months (plus time for printing) made in 1861, the Catalogue was not published until 1866. The size of the edition, judging by the H.M.S.O. warrant number on p. 648, was the surprisingly low one of 25 copies. I have not discovered exactly what payment was made to Wheatley or when it was made, but there must surely have been some heart-searching by both parties to this bargain.

Finally, the actual quality of the finished cataloguing hardly bore out the high-sounding principles of the Catalogue Raisonnéé so well expounded by Bucknall and McCulloch in the documents reproduced above. The following entries may be quoted as typical of the classification and sub-arrangement. Under 'United Kingdom. 1. Historical, Political and Social Works' there are two pages of entries for books, arranged in chronological order of date of publication, followed by a further 6½ pages of entries for pamphlets sub-arranged in a similar way. Under 'India, East. 6. General Works in foreign languages' there are 2½ pages of entries in no readily discernible order. Under 'Indies, West' there are three pages of entries, and under 'Ireland' four pages, both sets in complete disarray. For the catalogue of a library whose main strength was probably in Commerce, the thirteen pages of entries for books and pamphlets under the heading 'Commerce' and in no sort of sub-order at all, is perhaps the final comment on the gap between theory and practice. As far as descriptive cataloguing is concerned, it is only necessary to quote the following entry under the main heading 'Land':


It looks sadly as if Wheatley may have been learning his trade at the expense of the Board of Trade.

One further comment may be in order. At the end of the very year in which the Catalogue was published—1866—a Committee reported that the Board of Trade Library was much too large for the needs of the Department, that it should be reduced to the size of the Departmental libraries common in other Departments, and that, on the retirement of the present librarian, the new librarian's salary should be reduced. Four years later, in 1870, another committee was set up to enquire whether the Board of Trade Library should not be made into a library for the whole of Whitehall. But it recommended instead that the Library should be completely abolished, despite the protests of the Board of Trade representative. However, the Foreign Office Librarian offered to take charge of the Board of Trade Library, and it was then moved en bloc to the Foreign Office where it remained under lock and key for over 30 years before it was passed back to the Board of Trade to be united with the new modern library which had had to be created after 1870. So much for the publicity supposed to be created by the publication of catalogues!