Sir Joseph Banks' Natural History Catalogue

Harold B. Carter gave the Society of Indexers a lecture sponsored by the Britain-Australia Bicentennial Committee on this work: its full title, Catalogus Bibliothecae Historico-Naturalis Josephi Banks Baroneti, 1796-1800.

Joseph Banks was President of the Royal Society for 42 years, presiding over 1,300 Fellows. Beyond his personal influence and his scientific writings he has left posterity his library; not only the many volumes on all aspects of natural history—and more—collected throughout his long lifetime and available to scholars throughout that lifetime in Banks' house at 32 Soho Square. The library was renovated in 1791 and the columns numbered in roman, the shelves arabic, quartos below, duodecimos above; not only his books, but also a five-volume catalogue, under the authorship of Jonas Dryander, librarian of the Banks library and curator of the Banks collections. And it was on more than just the Banks catalogue that Mr Carter spoke—indeed, he spoke of Banks the man and Banks the scholar, Banks' houses, friends, associates, wife, Swedish acolytes, even Banks' gout stool. And the Banksian Breakfasts, shared by other scientists and scholars among the rich collection in the library.

But it is the catalogue, and even more so the index to the catalogue, that attracts the ardent indexer. Five volumes were printed from the nine volumes interleaved in manuscript. Zoology, volume 2, has 962 sections; botany, volume 3, is the most systematic and accessible; volume 1 consists of 'Scriptores Generales', volume 4 of Mineralogy; and there is the Supplementum et Index Auctores, published at the end of the project, in 1800. At 2,446 pages in all, the catalogue contains about 21,000 entries, the works of some 6,000 authors writing mainly in German and Latin. Entries are not just titles (for there are only about 6,000 printed books included): the rest are papers unpublished and from periodicals. The first two decades of the nineteenth century, which the catalogue does not cover, saw a tremendous explosion in the printing of scientific works, and of scientific journals, so that Banks' library eventually had 240 periodicals complete from their first volume.

Entries give full name of author; title; pagination; place of publication; format. For papers the entries include abbreviated title, volume, number, pages—but no date! Dissertations, written in Latin, give pages, place and format. The arranging for the printer was done by Jonas Dryander, the librarian/curator, who was paid £60 a year, from 1792 to 1800, aided by Samuel Toerner and Frederick Schulzen. Charles Koenig was assistant to Dryander from 1801 to 1807, when work on the Catalogue continued, but was unpublished. The index contains full, explicit workable entries, distinguishing books and papers. 250 sets of the catalogue were printed by William Bulmer and sold through George Nicol, bookseller. It is the first subject classification of literature in the natural sciences, and a complete bibliography of writings on natural history to 1800. No mean feat, and just in time. Could it have been done twenty years later, after twenty years of explosive printing?

Banks' library, some 7,000 volumes, came to the British Museum on his death, and though integrated into the collections is still heavily used. To this day it remains one of the most useful repositories in which to delve for a full search in the literature before 1800 of the plant, animal and earth sciences and the geographic explorations of Western Europeans. Many of the volumes, alas, show this use and are in desperate need of conservation, especially as Banks bought the titles he wanted, whatever their state.

A modern reprint of the catalogue became available 20 years ago, and is still usable for hunting the pre-1800 literature.

M.C.

The Centre for Bibliographic Management

The Centre for Catalogue Research at the University of Bath has celebrated ten years of research that began with enquiries into the content and presentation of library catalogues, particularly with the help of automation, and went on to widen its scope to cover bibliographic data management in general.

At the Third National Conference on Online Public Access to Library Files, organized by the Centre in September 1987, it was announced that from 1 November 1987 the Centre would be known as the Centre for Bibliographic Management. From 1977 the Centre has been funded by the British Library Research and Development Department, and many of its reports have been issued as BL R&D reports.

M.P.