

## The archives of the Worshipful Company of Stationers

Modern versions of archival publications central to publishing history—and their indexing—are reviewed by Michael Robertson in *Microform Review* 3 (2) 1990. The records are those of the Company of Stationers,\* described as ‘the most powerful craft guild of printers and booksellers in Europe from the later sixteenth century to the beginning of the eighteenth. Its early membership consisted of a few large Capitalists in books—the master printers—together with their journeymen and apprentices, as well as bookbinders, typefounders, papermakers, and even “makers of writing tables”. It supervised entry into the trade, controlled wages and working conditions, regulated copyright, and fixed retail prices for books.’

The Company was instrumental in establishing legal requirements for publishing, especially copyright provisions. Its archival documents are thus of major importance in the history of publishing:

‘Before publication, publishers were supposed to enter the titles of their books in the Company’s Entry Book. Having started out as a way of registering cash received, an entry soon came to constitute a permission to print. Although it is estimated that perhaps only two-thirds of books published were registered in this way, the entry book thus became, over the course of the centuries, a unique contemporary record of published matter, unparalleled in any other European country. From 1709–10 until 1923, the Entry Books formed the official record of copyright and legal deposit. The Company’s financial and other records, too, constitute an unrivalled source for research not only in publishing history but in social history as well.’

Now these valuable old papers have been made available in modern forms, and to some degree indexed. We quote in full the concluding pages of Mr Robertson’s review.

\*

A previous microfilm publication of the Entry Books up to 1800, made by University Microfilms in 29 reels in 1950, was incomplete, and was photographed out of chronological order. The publication, in 1986, of the present microfilm edition of almost all of the Company’s records represented a major event in bibliography and the history of publishing, and was the climax of a series of initiatives by the Bibliographical Society. The microfilm

publication has now been followed by a guidebook, *The Stationers’ Company archive*,† which includes a historical introduction; a glossary of terms; catalogues and registers of the archives; and indexes. Myers describes how, for most of its history, the Company seems to have shown scant interest in its records or in their cataloguing and preservation, and to have been unaware of their value. Parts were left scattered through various attics and damp cellars, and intermittently either guarded with jealousy from the eyes of scholars or lent out to bibliographers and then lost for forty years.

The microfilm reproduces not only the entry books for 1554–1842 (28 of the 115 reels), but also the Company’s membership records and Court minutes to 1922 (42 reels); Charters and Ordinances to 1902; records of the English Stock from 1603–1924 (this was a Stationers’ publishing venture specializing in profitable titles, wound up in the 1960s); and various other records related to the Company, including some connected with the Stationers’ School. The two final reels reproduce a series of indexes and abstracts of the records, compiled at various dates and for various sections of records.

In *The Stationers’ Company archive*, Myers lists items in the archive in the same sequence as on the microfilm—reel numbers given in the margin—and includes brief bibliographical descriptions and notes of previous publication or transcription, and of published studies of the items concerned. The major part of the book (pp. 82–332) is taken up with a detailed register of the miscellaneous ‘Supplementary Documents’ which are microfilmed on Reels 97–112, together with an index (compiled by Peter Isaac) of names contained in these materials. Appendices are concerned with earlier lists and catalogues of the archives.

A ‘General Index’ (to the catalogue of the documents, not to the documents themselves) concludes the book. In addition to the names and book titles mentioned in the catalogue, it has excellent longer subject entries on various topics (e.g. almanacs, apprentices, the English Stock, Livery, paper, printing, seditious and libellous books, taverns). The entry for ‘Loit, Henry Frank’ enables one to locate on the microfilm, should one wish, that gentleman’s sonnet ‘To the Plane Tree in Stationers’ Hall Court’, pasted inside a Clerk’s Address Book for 1863–81.

One can have nothing but admiration for the skill and endurance which have enabled Myers to bring this vast,

\* Myers, Robin, ed. *Records of the Worshipful Company of Stationers, 1554–1920*. 115 microfilm reels, 35 mm. Chadwyck-Healey Ltd., Cambridge Place, Cambridge CB2 1NR, UK. 1986. £5900.

† Myers, Robin. *The Stationers’ Company archive: an account of the records, 1554–1984*. Winchester: St Paul’s Bibliographies, 1990. ISBN 0-906795-71-0. xlviii, 376 pp. £65 (if purchased separately from the microfilm collection).

complex archive under a semblance of order. However, a number of details remain as irritations. . . . Would it not have been possible to include on the microfilm the entry books for 1842 onwards, which were removed to the Public Record Office in 1916? Or the copy of the missing List of the Livery for 1783 held by the Bodleian (p. 40)? When the analytical catalogue of the Muniment Room only takes up 62 pages of the book, would there not have been space for long titles, rather than short ones, for printed matter?

A major problem is represented by the attempt to compile a catalogue of both the archive and the microfilm edition simultaneously. Dozens of minor items listed in *The Stationers' Company archive*, forming an integral part of the archive and listed under the implicit heading of a marginal reel number, are described as 'not filmed', with no reason for this being apparent. This is often a shame: one would have liked, for example, to see the '12 summonses & bun lists' for Cakes and Ale for Ash Wednesday that are listed (p. 153) as contained in archive box 'Feasts and Ceremonies, excluding Barge, 1677-1905'. Omissions are sometimes unannounced: the 'Decree of Starre-Chamber . . . 1637', listed in the book as appearing on Reel 71, is not there. Reel 113, Part XI (not seen), begins with two 'volumes omitted from earlier sections': a ledger for 1907-9 from Part VIII and a Share Book for 1901-57 from Part IX. In the book, there is no mention on p. 61 that the ledger for 3 Dec 1907-June 1909 is not on reel 79, but on reel 113 instead; while on p. 71, the marginal note indicating Reel 113 against the Share Book for 1901-57 misleadingly suggests that all the other items between that mark and the mark for Reel 90 are to be found on Reel 113 as well; in fact they are still on Reel 89. Yet another way of treating the problem of discrepancies between film and archive is found on p. 67: an item is described as 'Wrongly filmed in Section IV', while in the corresponding section of the catalogue (p. 53), there is merely a cross-reference, 'See . . . p. 67 below', with no indication being given to the user of the microfilm at that point that the material belongs to a different part of the archive.

A 16-page 'Index to Liber A of the Records of the Worshipful Company of Stationers', dated 1902, appearing at the front of Liber A on Reel 71, is listed in the *Archive* (p. 53) as having been superseded by Pearson's Index of 1980 (filmed on Reel 115), but it is not treated as an independent bibliographical item that appears on the microfilm. There are unexplained minor discrepancies between the caption titles on the microfilm and the titles of items in the *Archive*: the item 'Stationers' School Charities etc. and Wood Street Estate, Ledger 1858-1910' has the word 'Ledger' omitted in the book; the following item, with the date '1908-1910' in the microfilm, is described only as 'Another, 1908' in the book. On Reel 71, for 'By-Laws passed by the Court, 5 October 1681; transcript, c1794', the book has the date '1687'.

In some sections of the catalogue, the standard bibliographical reference numbers from Pollard and

Redgrave's *Short-title catalogue... 1475-1640*, or from Wing's *Short-title catalogue... 1641-1700*, are given, where appropriate, for printed materials microfilmed; in others they are not. The book lists (p. 51) a volume of 'Orders, Rules and Ordinances' without its Wing number (O 403)—although there are three other items with the same title on the same page—and sows possible confusion by giving it the date '16 Feb 1677/8', although this date comes from the verso of the title page and not from the title page itself (which has '1678'). This sense of blurring extends to the collection's title itself: the microfilm reels have a start frame reading 'Records of the Worshipful Company of Stationers 1554-1920', while the book silently changes the title and alters the closing date.

There is thus a need for a separate, exact and full bibliographical description of the items on the microfilm edition to complement the catalogue of the archive (the 25-page spiral-bound list of captions accompanying the microfilm is not adequate). In addition, the user of the microfilm edition will soon come up against its greatest problem: the fact that the various indexes provided on Reels 114 and 115 are not reproduced in paper form in the book, necessitating arduous rewinding and reloading of film on the microfilm reader for each item or series of items searched, even for the most efficient of index users. In addition, no single index currently available covers the content of the archive as a whole. There is an epoch-making task ahead for a dedicated team of indexers: the creation of a single, comprehensive index of names, titles and subjects for the entire archive.

MICHAEL ROBERTSON

---

### Johnson's dictionary

'Though no book was ever spared out of tenderness to the author, and the world is little solicitous to know whence proceeded the faults of that which it condemns . . . ' Thus wrote Dr Johnson of his *Dictionary of the English language* (1755). Although not expecting any vindication for its faults, Johnson did point out that it was compiled without learned assistance, without patronage and without an academic atmosphere in which to work, but amidst the rough and tumble of daily life in London. This two-volume work is the first example of what may be termed a dictionary in the modern sense. It is now republished in a facsimile edition by Longman, one of the publishers of the original edition. (*A dictionary of the English language*. 2 vols, leather bound. Longman, 1990, £195.)

P.B.