Revealing the Hidden Collections: Current Progress and Future Plans

Brief description of the paper
This paper provides an update on progress towards extending the coverage of online catalogues, with a particular focus on Special Collections material.

Action requested
Approval of recommendations

Resource implications
Yes. Some costs will be absorbed in existing workflows while the remainder will be financed through funded (internal and external) project work.

Risk Assessment
Risk assessment is not addressed in the paper, but there is a reputational risk to research and learning in the University if all of our collections are not properly disclosed.

Equality and Diversity
Does the paper have equality and diversity implications? No

Freedom of Information
Can this paper be included in open business? Yes

Originator of the paper
John Scally, University Collections
Edinburgh University Library Committee

REVEALING THE HIDDEN LIBRARY COLLECTIONS: CURRENT PROGRESS AND FUTURE PLANS

Purpose of Paper:
• To report on progress made in extending the coverage of library online catalogues and to survey some of the material which is not yet represented in online catalogues.
• To seek support in prioritising some of the remaining work to be done, particularly around collaborative projects and grant applications.
• To recommend a more realistic approach to elements of the work to be done, using volunteers and new methods of listing and cataloguing, particularly in the area of Special Collections.

1. BACKGROUND
Since the 1970s libraries have made major advances in producing records of library materials for online catalogues. This has been achieved across the main holdings of books, archives and manuscripts, though the focus of attention has been on general collections material (current and non-current). A number of external reports have tracked the progress and pitfalls experienced by libraries in this area of activity and made recommendations about how to continue the process or at least maintain the momentum\(^1\). Most external reports reveal significant progress in general collections while showing patchy success in rare books cataloguing and even less gains made in the more challenging area of manuscripts and archives.

When looking at the progress made in bringing online records of library resources held in Edinburgh, the pattern follows that of other major research libraries, in that general collections, in both the Main Library and the sites, now have extensive coverage online. This has been achieved through a mixture of special funding (Guardbook Retroconversion project, for example) and mainstreaming retroconversion activity into workflows. Significant progress has also been achieved through specific project funding, such as that available through RSLP (Research Support Libraries Programme), Heritage Lottery Fund Britain in Print (Pre-1700 Books), the AHRC Carmichael Watson project (Gaelic manuscripts), the Pilgrim Trust (Gilchrist Collection), and via College and school funding (e.g. the Funk Donation concentrating on the New College collections).

Nevertheless, and despite these obvious successes, the sheer scale of the collections at Edinburgh, and the fact that they continue to grow, means that a continued focus on the Library’s hidden collections is necessary. This paper seeks to outline some of the areas where a focus on cataloguing and listing will result in key research resources being brought online and thus more available for teaching and research. The Paper also suggests that we should be more realistic in our approach to this challenge, using volunteers and new methods of listing and cataloguing to speed up the process.

2. THE GENERAL COLLECTIONS

Context
Most of the library general collections are now catalogued online. This has been achieved through a combination of targeted retroconversion work, specially-funded projects such as Research Support Libraries Programme (RSLP) and support from the Main Library Redevelopment Project (MLRP).

\(^1\) British Library (2007) Full Disclosure; Uncovering Hidden Resources (RIN, 2007) ; Taking Our Pulse (OCLC, 2010), see bibliography for further references.
Priorities
Of the remainder of the work to be done, the two main priorities are:

- Catalogue the remaining 30,000 books in the Older Dewey Lending Collection (47,000 volumes) of which 17,000 have been done
- Catalogue the Music Lending Scores Collection c. 3,000 items.

It is estimated that this work will take 18-24 months. Following completion, attention will be focussed on addressing the cataloguing needs of some of the remaining discrete collections not already fully online, such as New Zealand Studies collection, Centre for African Studies collection and the more extensive East Asian Studies collection. Some of these collections may need special or dedicated funding.

Survey
During the next 12 months, we will survey the general collections in the Main and site libraries to confirm these figures, and to assess the remaining general collections to be catalogued.

3. THE RARE BOOK COLLECTIONS

Context
The University of Edinburgh has an internationally important collection of rare books. “Rare books” includes anything printed before 1850\(^2\) or anything printed in the care of Special Collections for other reasons. The Rare Book Collections held by the Main Library consists of 400,000 such books with an additional c100,000 held at New College Library\(^3\); the only larger collection in Scotland is that held by the National Library (c.800,000 volumes). User demand for these collections has more than doubled since the opening of Centre for Research Collections (CRC) in 2008 and high-quality acquisitions are being made every year which are immediately catalogued online.

Cataloguing situation for the Main Library Collection: current position

- About 150,000 items have no online records of any kind, and are either completely unlisted or listed only in the typescript Guardbook catalogue.
- About 50,000 records created during early retroconversion work are sub-standard and need to be upgraded.
- Many of the online records were not added to international union catalogues such as the English Short Title Catalogue (ESTC). This is now standard practice.

The result is that over half of the 400,000 rare books in the Main Library are not described to a standard that makes them fully accessible online for research and teaching. Taking a conservative estimate (20 minutes per book), it would take one cataloguer 45 years to get through the offline deficit of 200,000 rare books.

Framework for change and resourcing
Since appointment in 2008, the Rare Books Librarian has established a Rare Books Cataloguing Group, which has produced a manual for cataloguing, based on the new standard Descriptive Cataloguing for Rare Materials (Books) (DCRM(B)). Extensive training has been given and a programme of quality control is being implemented.

\(^2\) Initial discussions have commenced about moving this date to 1900. There are a number of implications, not least the fact that roughly 55,000 vols fall into the date range, 1851-1900.

\(^3\) An extensive project is currently underway to address the cataloguing of the remainder of the New College Library rare book collections generously funded by the Funk Donation.
A priority list of collections to be catalogued has been drawn up. These include the library of Adam Smith, the incunabula (books printed before 1501), the Auden Collection, Hugh MacDiarmid’s library, the Tovey Collection (Music), the pamphlets of William Speirs Bruce and James Geikie, Edinburgh medical theses and our vast 18th century holdings from the era of legal deposit (1710-1837) – covering subjects from poetry to polar exploration.

Increasing Capacity

- The Rare Books Librarian, in collaboration with academic colleagues, will continue to refine the priorities for cataloguing and seek external funding via appropriate grants and pursue philanthropic support.
- Additionally, CRC volunteers and student interns should be trained up to create basic catalogue records and perform routine amendments, following templates and clear guidance; this would free up the dedicated cataloguer(s) to concentrate on cataloguing rare books to a high level. This process has been piloted and is proving productive.
- The Acquisitions & Metadata Services Manager will continue to seek opportunities to increase the level of cataloguer resource allocated to Special Collections. It is anticipated that significant additional resource can be allocated once the bulk of the general collection retrospective cataloguing work is concluded in approximately 12-18 months.

4. THE MANUSCRIPT AND ARCHIVE COLLECTIONS

Context

It is recognised internationally that one of the most challenging set of materials to be brought online are the Manuscript and Archive Collections (Dooley, OCLC, 2010). Special Collections has over 5,000 linear metres of such material with each collection presenting its own set of demands as regards listing and cataloguing. In Edinburgh these materials cover a vast array of subjects including the papers of major Scottish Enlightenment figures, the papers of 17-20th century scientists, as well as subjects as diverse as medical history, middle-eastern studies, theology, Gaelic and Celtic studies. The largest single component is the University’s own archive which extends to around 750 linear metres. The collection continues to grow with recent additions including the Roslin Institute archives and later in the year those of the ECA.

Cataloguing Situation: current position

- A more realistic approach has been adopted in the past few years where collection-level records (text describing the entire collection) and immediate sub-levels are presented online while eschewing the need for detailed cataloguing unless this is part of project-driven work.4

- Currently, 70% of the collection is described online in collection-level records, though this short description can often cover a fairly vast group of material, such as that of William Ewart Farvis (35 linear metres) or the Records of Thomas Nelson and Sons Publishers (80 linear metres).

- More detailed catalogues exist for all or parts of some collections, largely due to external project grants, including the Papers of Sir Archibald Geikie (1851-1935), Murchison family papers (1771-1935), Papers of Percy Johnson-Marshall (1931-1993) and the Carmichael Watson Collection (18th-20th century).

4 Championed in the USA, the approach relates to a ‘more product, less process’ (MPLP); Greene, Mark A.; Dennis Meissner (2005). “More Product, Less Process: Revamping Traditional Archival Processing”. American Archivist 68: 208–263.
Case Study: The Laing Collection

Acquired in 1878 and running to around 80 linear metres (about eight times larger than the John Murray Archive at NLS), the David Laing collection is the University Library’s most significant manuscript grouping. It covers most areas of human endeavour: literature, history, philosophy, science, medicine and law. There is a collection-level description and summary level descriptions, calendars of charters, all of which provide some guidance on the material but they are narrow in coverage.

Framework for change and resourcing

- Recent years have seen an increase in successful applications for external funding which have allowed detailed cataloguing to be done on some collections. For example, the current AHRC funded (£500,000) Carmichael Watson project (Gaelic manuscripts) will result in an extensive online catalogue, transcriptions and contextual descriptions. These projects are normally collaborations between Collections staff and academic colleagues. We will continue to pursue these opportunities in partnership with academic colleagues, some currently planned applications include Scottish political papers, genetics, and psychology.
- CRC volunteers and postgraduate student interns are now being deployed to create lists of parts of collections using specially designed XML templates, thus freeing up time for Archivists to concentrate on more detailed listings and collection-level records.
- Work has commenced on a major project proposal to catalogue the Laing collection. Although at the early stages, this is planned to be a five year project which will build on the technical infrastructure and standards developed since 2005.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Library Committee is asked to approve the current and future approach to revealing the library’s hidden collections:

a. The work in general collections will be pursued through existing workflows except for those discrete collections which require separate project funding. A survey will be conducted over the next 12 months to assess the remaining work to be done in General Collections (including site libraries).

b. Following completion of the major general collections projects, some of the effort from the main Cataloguing Team could be directed towards relevant and prioritised Special Collections work.

c. For Special Collections we will continue to pursue externally funded grants for research and cataloguing work in partnership with academic colleagues.

d. In parallel, effort will be concentrated on a large-scale five year project to catalogue the Laing Collection. Funding will be sought with assistance from the Development Office with a focus on Trusts and Foundations.

e. More realistic approaches to cataloguing Special Collections will be continued and developed, using postgraduate students, interns and volunteers.

----

John Scally, Director of University Collections, with input from,
Elize Rowan, Manager, Acquisitions & Metadata Services
Arnott Wilson, Head of Special Collections,
Joseph Marshall, Rare Books Librarian,
Grant Butters, Deputy University Archivist

5
Bibliography & References


British Library (2007) Full Disclosure website. Available at: www.bl.uk/about/cooperation/fdhome


Research Support Libraries Programme. Website available at: www.rslp.ac.uk