

CASE STUDY

The Literature of Printing

PRINTING, a subject close to the hearts of most bibliographers, provides a case study on how compilers plan their lists. Their decisions involve *materials* (what is the exact scope of the literature?), *audience* (for whom is the list intended?), *sources*: from what lists and collections were the entries gathered?, and *presentation* (how are their textures and structures conceived?).

Materials. What printing processes are covered? Letterpress is basic; engraving, lithography, and serigraphy are optional. Each requires printing surfaces, presses, and ink. Other graphic arts—writing, calligraphy, binding, illustration—may be included, each with distinctive manual and mechanical skills and aesthetic tastes. The scope is often limited geographically or chronologically, so as to focus on the crafts, industrial, or technological eras. Printing may also include publishing, so as to extend to include sales and promotion, inventory and distribution, copyright, criticism and reception, censorship, and dealings with authors and suppliers.

Book printing, involving literary texts, is basic. A bibliography may extend in scope to cover other genres, ephemera, juvenilia, private press books, maps, music, among them. The coverage may treat them in separate sections, or it may specifically exclude them, or tacitly assume to include them.

Several kinds of writings may be excluded:

—*Popularizations.* Writings on the joys of printing, of collecting, of studying books, all waste the experts' time by simplifying complex topics. Promotion and lore are important but compilers often assume that their readers may even resent their

inclusion. Amateur printing may be included, also juvenilia (i.e., books on “Ben Franklin the boy printer”).

—*Technical writings and ephemera*. Printers’ manuals, type specimen books, paper samples, tool-makers’ catalogues, crafts journals— issued in short press runs, to be used and discarded, often even hard to cite—are treasures to printing historians.

—*Analytics*. Printing is discussed in books and monographs, but also in periodicals. Collectors and librarians usually think of monographs, but printers and scholars often need articles, sections, reviews, and short notices.

—*Exemplars*. Some libraries collect, and some bibliographies cite, examples of the craft of printing, either for their historical importance or for their beauty and craftsmanship. Moxon’s *Mechanick Exercises*, Fournier’s *Manuel typographique*, and Cobden-Sanderson’s *Ideal Book* are important in both ways. There are also the delightful curiosities, the work of printers at play.

Audiences. Compilers usually think of one of four groups of readers:

—*Scholars*, historians of books and printing or of writing and reading, and other specialists who work with written evidence. Descriptive bibliography attracts them, Out of respect for the printer’s craft, or lack of skill.

—*Printers* and others who work in the crafts of the book, who study either the technical literature of their craft or the crafts of their peers. History is secondary, although the scholarly literature can catch their imagination as they ask where their specialty has been, and what earlier experiences may hold keys to their current problems.

—*General readers*, book lovers, amateurs with no scholarly ambitions, who want to learn more about how the books they admire, preferably in writings that are lucid but not too technical.

—*Collectors*, including librarians, looking for titles to acquire. The more serious the collector, the stronger the sympathy for scholars and printers and the less their affinities with general readers. Collectors, being scholars at heart, see the need for best evidence, and assemble the bibliographical history of their titles in as many editions as they can find. Respected book dealers become scholars and collectors as well, as important titles in the history of printing find their way onto their reference shelves for use in describing what they sell.

Sources. The bibliographies themselves – the most important ones and a selected examples of the others – fall into several categories:

E. C. Bigmore and W. H. Wyman's *A Bibliography of Printing* (1880-86), in a category by itself and at the head of the class, a vade mecum, with extensive annotations, a few of them small essays. A bibliography to be read as well as to be consulted. Obsolete but a rich source of the lore of printing history; a tottering but lovable grandparent.

—**Selective Lists.** The many examples include academic syllabi for courses that range from (as they never are but might be named, “printing appreciation” to printing scholarship), among them:

Paul A. Winckler's *The History of Books and Printing* (Gale, 1979). Of its 776 entries, 666 have annotated citations. Films, slides, and non-book materials are included; and societies, libraries, and dealers are listed.

Vito J. Brenni's *The Art and History of Book Printing: A Topical Bibliography* (Greenwood, 1984), with about 1,300 titles, arranged by broad subjects with detailed indexes.

Joseph Rosenblum's *A Bibliographic History of the Book: An Annotated Guide to the Literature* (Scarecrow, 1995). The title suggests a wide range of topics, but the coverage is mostly on printing.

Tanselle Introduction (2002), with upwards of 5,000 titles. The focus is on literary studies, but over half the titles relate to physical books.

—**Bibliographical Essays.** George Parker Winship's “The Literature of Printing,” *The Dolphin*, 3 (1938), 471-91, is among the classics.

—**Recommended Titles**, which honor the basic works. Among the examples are:

Joseph Sabin's *A Bibliography of Bibliography* (1877): over 1,000 titles;

The Washington Square College Book Club's *The Literature of Book Collecting: A Selective Bibliography*, by R. W. G. Vail (New York Univ., 1936): about 300 titles;

Hellmut Lehmann-Haupt, *Fifty Books about Bookmaking* (Columbia Univ. Pr., 1933; 2nd ed. as *Seventy Books about Bookmaking*, 1941; 3rd ed. as *One Hundred Books about Bookmaking*, 1949);

R. D. Pratt, *A Thousand Books on Books; A Selection of English Books on Book-Making, Book-Selling, and Book-Collecting* (Merrythought Pr., 1967);

Tony Appleton, *A Typological Tally* (Appleton, 1973): A bookseller's anthology, with 1,300 titles, not limited to typography.

—*Catalogues of Collections.* Several major printing libraries and numerous collections have promoted their collections by listing their holdings:

Saint Bride Foundation Institute – close by St. Paul’s Churchyard, the early home of the London book trade, and just off Fleet Street, long the home of the London newspapers – reflects the printer’s world through the eyes of William Blades and his several eminent successors, notably W. Turner Berry and James Mosley. (The collection, monumental in importance, is now, alas, closed.) Its *Catalogue of the Technical Reference Library* (1919) is an alphabetical author list (alas with no subject index: headings would define the nature not only of the collection but of the field itself, at least in 1919). The *Catalogue of Periodicals Relating to Printing and Allied Subjects* (1951) cites many ephemeral journals.

The Vereeniging ter Bevordering van de Belangen der Boekhandels in Amsterdam, the Dutch booktrade association, has issued a *Catalogus der Bibliotheek* (Nijhoff, 1920-34, four vols., with supplements, 1940-), notable for its broad scope and vast holdings.

The John M. Wing Foundation at the Newberry Library (Chicago), in its *Dictionary Catalogue of the History of Printing* (G. K. Hall, 1961; suppl., 1970), with a collection that reflects its history as reflected in the different agenda of its early curators: the incunabulist and later library educator Pierce Butler; the calligrapher Ernst Detterer; and the eclectic James Wells, whose tastes reflect those of his mentors, the Stanleys Morison and Pargellis. Its citations use library cataloguing codes of the 1930s–70s.

American Type Founders Company Library (now at Columbia Univ., New York), *The History of Printing from the Beginnings to 1930: The Subject Catalogue of the Libraries* (Kraus, 1980). Kenneth A. Lohf traces the history of the collection, built mainly by Henry Bullen in hopes of enlightening his colleagues, but largely dormant since the 1930s. The history of typography is emphasized as broadly defined.

Edward Clark Library (Edinburgh), much like the Wing Collection but smaller and focused on notable printing, with a *Catalogue* (Napier College, 1976) that will particularly delight printers themselves. P.J.W. Kirkpatrick briefly recounts its history; Frank P. Restall’s essay on illustration is valuable; but the great strength of the catalogue is Harry Carter’s superb annotations on typography, a model against which all other studies of typographic evidence should be measured.

The *Handlist of Books in the Library* of the Bibliographical Society in London (Oxford Univ. Pr., 1935), even in its day was more important for its auspices than its contents.

Among private libraries, Jackson Burke’s *Printing History, Forms, and Use* (Los Angeles, 1979): three dealer’s catalogues of the books of a notable book and type designer.

The Alida Roobvarg Collection of Books about Books: Six Catalogues and Index (Oak Knoll, 1981), in contrast, testifies to a book lover with little time or money to devote to her passion. Lectures, appreciative essays, and other pamphlets highlight the collection.

Many other bibliographies testify to the wide range of collections.¹

—**National Lists.** Vast and authoritative, they include:

Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature (“CBEL”; 1940), lists on “Book Production and Distribution” by Graham Pollard, also in the *New Cambridge Bibliography* (“NCBEL”; 1969-77), by Nicolas Barker, Terry Belanger, Peter Davison, D.F. McKenzie, James Mosley, and Ian Willison.

G. Thomas Tanselle, *Guide to the Study of United States Imprints* (Belknap Pr., 1973), with about 10,000 entries, classified as Basic Imprint Lists (by region, genre, and major author), Related Lists (copyright records, catalogues, directories), and Supplementary Studies (printers and publishers, general studies, and secondary material).

Geoffrey Wakeman, *The Literature of Letterpress Printing, 1849-1900* (Oxford: Plough Pr., 1986). British in coverage, and including processes other than letterpress.

Erdmann Weyrauch, *Wolfenbütteler Bibliographie zur Geschichte des Buchwesens im deutschen Sprachgebiet 1840-1980* (Saur, 1990). A vast and rich multi-volume compiled at the Herzog-August Bibliothek.

¹The *Bibliography of the History of Printing in the Library of Congress* (Springwater, N.Y.: Horace Hart, 1987-91) is surely one of the most unfortunate bibliographies ever compiled. The first vol., loose-leaf, is in two sections, one for about 3,000 “Premarc” titles, the other for somewhat over 1,000 titles catalogued after 1968 using MARC format. Most but not all of the latter were published after 1968. The criteria for inclusion are never specified, and I suspect it was determined (mostly, but not always) by Library of Congress subject headings with the word “printing” in them. There are still thousands of other titles in the Library that are not cited (most of classes Z 116-265, for instance). The “Preface” to vol. 1 may justifiably speculate that this collection is the largest in the country; one still asks for evidence. Each of the two parts is arranged by main entry. The interests of readers, one should have thought, would have justified the trouble to reconcile the Pre-MARC and MARC cataloguing. Vol. 2 has a title index and a subject index, based on the assigned subject headings and with reference to the numbered entries in the title index. Most of the titles in Tanselle’s *Guide to the Study of United States Imprints* (1973) are surely in the Library but missing here. Nor can one believe the prefatory claim that “all entires [sic] describe the books accurately” (see vol. 2, entries 1271, etc.). Vol. 2 ignores foreign accents.

In sum, the set is embarrassing, a quick production job meant for libraries with too much money but no expertise. In contrast, Alice Schreyer’s *The History of Books: A Guide to Selected Resources in the Library of Congress* (1987) has thoughtful essays on the holdings scattered through the library’s custodial units.

—**Periodical Indexes**, mostly addressed to specific audiences, e.g.,

Carolyn Ulrich and Karl K up, *Books and Printing* (New York Public Lib., 1943). For printers who practice and scholars who study the crafts;

The *Index to Selected Bibliographical Journals, 1933-1970* (Bibliographical Society, 1982), the so-called “Bodleian Index”, assembled (legend has it) by scholar-librarians on night desk duty. As a result, the policies for inclusion and citation are composite (which is to say that they seem very inconsistent), so that readers may find the list valuable, particularly if they know it well, having read through much of it.

John Feather, *An Index to Selected Bibliographical Journals, 1971-1985* (Oxford Bibliographical Society, 1991), a one-person addendum to the Bodleian Index above, and thus with consistent practices.

— **Indexes of Current Books and Periodicals**. For current awareness, scholars are guided by sources like the following:

Annual Bibliography of the History of Printed Books and Libraries (Mouton, 1973- ; now also online as *Book History Online*), which now subsumes Horst Meyer’s *Bibliographie der Buch- und Bibliotheksgeschichte* (“BBB”; Bad Iburg, 1982-2003), for readers in general, scholars in particular. The two coexisted for many years with a surprisingly small rate of duplication. Will the survivor be swallowed by general online periodical indexes? Many of its titles are in none of the likely swallows. Survival lies in working what business today sees as a “niche market,” finding titles that are both elusive and important to specialized readers, and citing them in contexts their readers will think of first. The *Book History Online* is now the best cumulative guide to what now exists.

The quarterly lists of “Current Publications,” in *The Library* (begun in 19-000), are designed for bibliographical scholars to scan. As a current awareness service, the lists continue a service formerly provided in the title below.

Rudolf Hirsch, later Howell J. Heaney, “Selective Check List of Bibliographical Scholarship,” annually, 1949-72, in *Studies in Bibliography*. The early lists were merged and published separately as *Selective Check Lists of Bibliographical Scholarship, 1949-1955* (1958), and *Series B, 1956-1962* (1966).

—**Bibliographies of Bibliographies of Printing**

Theodore Besterman, *World Bibliography of Bibliographies* cites several hundred titles under the heading, “Printing”, a few others elsewhere. Citations under several related headings are reprinted in two smaller reprints of extracted entries: *Printing, Book Collecting, and Illustrated Books: A Bibliography of Bibliographies*; and *Periodical Publications; a Bibliography of Bibliographies* (both Rowman & Littlefield, 1971).

Each of these bibliographies is useful for particular readers. Together they complement each other in ways that are learned through use. One learns to print on the job, along the way developing skills and techniques in some but rarely all of the specialties. One learns the history of printing by selecting titles from the literature cited in bibliographies.

Presentation. The compilers' decisions on scope define the literature. They do so, as usual, through their structures (i.e., arrangement of entries and indexes) and textures (entry practices, i.e., citations plus annotations). There is even a style manual specifically for compilers.¹ The basic considerations are:

—*Entry Practice.* Many casual lists ignore library cataloguing rules.¹ Citations can be simple, concise and sufficient when it is the annotations that guide the readers and resonate with the bibliography's special audience along the way. Some annotations prejudice and overwhelm general readers, but for specialists they are crucial. Lists of recommended titles are also for specialists: Burke and Roohvarg are for general readers and collectors. The library catalogues, Saint Bride in particular, also Ulrich and K up, are for printers and, increasingly, for historians of printing. (Catalogues of respected specialized libraries become lists of recommended titles in that the titles were selected for the collection with specialized readers in mind. Libraries often use the as selection tools – when the titles can be found – and scholars cherish them.) Most of the others are for bibliographic scholars. As for Bigmore and Wyman, much of its delight is due to its annotations, which are often complemented by illustrations.

—*Structure.* Most subject lists are classified. Besides helping readers, the arrangements establish the compilers' credentials. The usual options are:

¹In 1941, Douglas C. McMurtrie prepared a short *Manual of Procedure for the Compilation of a Bibliography of the History of Printing* in connection with his Public Library Omnibus Project, part of the American Imprints Inventory. It is very reasonable, a point of view from one whose energy was endless and his erudition deep; but it is still one point of view, to my knowledge used only once, in McMurtrie's translation of Friedrich Lorenz Hoffmann's 1852 *Bibliography of Materials on the History of Printing in Italy* (Chicago Club of Printing House Craftsmen, 1941).

- . by date, from Gutenberg to the present;
- by geographical area, usually with the local first;
- by process, from papermaker and typographer to reader;
- by genre, books, next periodicals and articles, then other forms.

Most lists blend the options. The best of them are those that look convincing, i.e., with categories that appear to be logical and look homogeneous. A few of the options are seen on the facing page.

Classified lists and indexes are for specialists, who delight in being led to think about the scope and structure of the topic. Knowing a certain title, they “triangulate” to find related titles. They love to learn from schemes, and pick fault with them. (Alphabetic sequences they find dull, but they use them. Chronologies fascinate them.) Name indexes are obviously needed in classified lists. Subject indexes may follow either the formularies of thesauri, or the colloquial terminology of readers and experts, which the thesauri seek to reconcile.

Also much welcome are conspectuses, arrangements of entries by elements other than the main sequence. Computers can provide for these easily, but displaying the elements usually requires ingenuity.

What then is the bibliography of the literature of printing? All of these titles, along with many other lists and the titles in them. The prospect of a single online system doing all that they do is unlikely. These works call for the expertise of those who know printing and its bibliography: they also help create the topic and its scope. As the field changes, bibliographies will contribute to and reflect the ongoing redefinition. One can never read the same book or use the same bibliography in the same way twice, and if two bibliographies should ever cover exactly the same topic, one of them is superfluous.

STRUCTURES OF BIBLIOGRAPHIES OF PRINTING

Besterman *World Bibliography*

History and Technique of Printing
General; followed by geographical subdivisions
Printed Books

General; followed by geographical subdivisions
These entries are for bibliographies, not writings, and appear under "Printing." Relevant citations appear under other rubrics, i.e., "Bibliography," "Book Collecting," "Illustrated Books," and "Publishing and Bookselling," as well as genres like "Ana" and "Condemned books"

Brenni

Reference Works (by genre)
History and Techniques (by process)
Machinery and Materials
Book Printing (by period)
[Special Topics] Maps, Mathematics, Medicine, Music, Religion, Science, Hebrew, Private Presses, Printers' Marks, Forgery, Fictitious Imprints
Calligraphy, Typography

CBEL

The plan below is a composite, based on Graham Pollard's lists on "Book Production and Distribution" in the first three vols. and adapted by his successors in the *New Cambridge Bibliography*.

"Accessory Crafts", incl. Paper, Handwriting, Ink, Typography (or below), Evidence and Methods
Printing, incl. Graphic Processes and Style, Illustration, Book Binding (or above or below), also Particular Printers
Distribution, (i.e., The Book Trade) incl. Copyright, Author Relationships, Publishing, Retailing, Importing, Special Genres, Periodicals and Lists; also Activities in the Provinces, Scotland, Ireland, Wales and Overseas
Collections incl. the Antiquarian Trade, Book Collecting, Libraries and Librarianship

Rosenblum

Resources (Bibliographies, General References)
Technical Aspects (Writing Surfaces, Ink, The Alphabet, Typography, Printing, and Book Design, Illustration, Bookbinding)
History (General, Antiquity, Middle Ages, 15th, 16th/17th, 18th, 19th/20th Centuries, America)
Miscellaneous Subjects
Book Collecting, Bookselling, Private Presses

Tanselle *Guide*

[Imprint Lists] A. Regional; B. Genre; C. Author
[Related Lists] D. Copyright Records;
E. Catalogues; F. Book-Trade Directories
[Supplementary Studies] G. Individual Printers and Publishers; H. General Studies; I. Checklists of Secondary Material

Tanselle Syllabus

Scope & History of Bibliography. Allied Fields.
Bibliographical Reference Works & Journals.
Printing & Publishing History. Descriptive Bibliography. Paper, Typography, Ink, and Book Design. Illustration. Binding. Analytical Bibliography

Ulrich & Kùp

Background: Records before the Printing Press; Paleography, Illuminating, and Calligraphy; History of Printing, History of Bookbinding
Physical Elements: Printing Types. Design, Layout, Typography. Printing and Shop Practice. Illustration and Prints. Processes of Reproduction. Ink. Materials and Practice of Binding.

The World of the Book: The Author and the Manuscript. Publishing. Advertising. Book Trade. Bibliography. Collecting. Libraries.

Appendix: Varia (Directories, Indexes, Yearbooks). Associations, Organizations, Societies. House Organs

Vereeniging

1. Introductory (Encyclopedias, Lexicons, Journals, Societies, Directories). 2. Technique of the book. 3. "*Geschiedenis*" (topical, geographic subdivisions) 4. Bibliography (Miscellaneous, General, National, and Subject Lists) 5. Book Trade. 6. Librarianship. 7. Legal (incl. Copyright and censorship). 8. Periodicals

Winckler

General Bibliographies
General Information Sources
Materials and Techniques in Graphic Communication (Printing Surfaces, Alphabet, Type, Binding, Illustration)
The History of Books and Printing by period
Nonprint Media (Films, Slides, &c)
Periodicals and Annuals
Associations, Societies, and Clubs
Libraries, Museums
Book Dealers

DRAFT