



NewSPRAT

Newsletter of the Scottish Printing Archival Trust
Issue No 2

Major blow to SPRAT funding

Telephone intimation that our application for another year of grant funding from Edinburgh District Council had been unsuccessful after three years of support came as a real blow to our Trust.

While we were aware of a different procedure pattern we had not expected to have our claim rejected. We have, after all, worked together with council officials in what we saw as a service role in assisting its Recreation Department to project what was one of Edinburgh's major industries and one, in our view, with tourist potential. At the same time we have become a reference point for queries regarding our printing past. We have been

happy to handle this work on the assumption that we were assisting Edinburgh's information provision facilities. Sadly, our services do not seem to have been assessed in that light, on the grounds that our work – under their new rules and procedures – is not sufficiently community orientated.

The Trust will now look to other sources for funds to meet its basic cost requirements – this matter was discussed at its autumn/winter meeting 1993. Plans to develop a SPRAT-initiated Scottish printing heritage exhibition at Edinburgh's City Arts Centre have, as a result of the above, been scrapped – at least for the foreseeable future.

Of making books there is no end....



....and much study is a weariness of the flesh

Seminar News

Aberdeen University's Department of Special Collections and Archives will be holding a seminar on the History of the Provincial Book Trade from 12 to 14 July 1994. It will be hosted by the Aberdeen University Library which takes its origins from the foundation of the University (King's College, founded 1495; Marischal College, founded 1593) and has in its collections over one million volumes acquired by gift, by purchase, by copyright deposit and by exchange.

The provisional title is 'The Provinces and their Books: Aspects of Distribution, Readership and Production'.

Good news for NewSPRAT

The first issue of *NewSPRAT* has been well received. This good news has led our trustees to decide on the production of further issues for what was originally a pilot venture only. Reactions from libraries, interested organisations and individuals have been both positive and complimentary, and responses have been coming in from print heritage bodies and others not only in the UK but also the USA. This 1994 *NewSPRAT* is expected to be sent out in the early spring. It is hoped that our distribution list will steadily increase, bringing with it more contacts and improved prospects for the development of our work.

Current Developments

- Exhibition in Glasgow of the city's printing history with an accompanying publication.
- Reconstruction of membership/sponsorship prospects in light of the withdrawal of EDC funding.
- Possible introduction of 'Friends of SPRAT' or similar.



Two of the earliest braille transcribers

THE SCOTTISH BRAILLE PRESS

BRAILLE printing began in 1891, a few years after the first braille book was published in Britain by the British National & Foreign Blind Association, nowadays known as the Royal Institute for the Blind. Since then the Scottish Braille Press has grown to become one of the world's leading producers of reading material for the visually impaired.

Paper had to be soaked thoroughly the day before printing

In the 1890s each word had to be punched dot by dot on brass plates which were then sent to hand-operated presses that often called for the combined strength of two men to turn the lever which set the press in motion. Paper had then to be thoroughly soaked the day before printing and left to dry overnight, so as to have the right degree of moistness when going through the presses. Sewing was, of course, also done by hand, the common needle being the only aid available to the worker.

Bearing these conditions in mind, it is not surprising that the total output of braille literature should have been so limited, and the resources of the press were concentrated almost entirely on the production of a few books essential to the education of blind children.

Treadle transcribing machines, introduced just before the First World War, were the first major development in braille production. This immediately led to a

considerable acceleration in the process of embossing books and magazines, and with the advent of powered printing presses, which followed shortly afterwards, braille printing had indeed entered a new area where more choice of literature was available. Although it was still pitifully restricted, it was the first real step in the march of progress.

Thirty years later, the treadle machine was replaced by modern machines powered by electricity and capable of embossing 6,000 characters per hour; printing presses able to attain much higher speeds were introduced, and the old, slow process of hand-sewing gave way to the electric stitcher.

Side by side with these technical developments, production methods have been completely re-organised with a consequent step-up in the efficiency and productive capacity of the workers. All these factors have combined to bring about a considerable increase in the total output of braille literature. Therefore, production of braille books and periodicals has steadily increased, leading to a dramatic improvement in the variety of publications available in braille over the past seventy years.

Computer-assisted braille system

Nowadays, as well as printing material for other organisations including the RNIB, the Scottish Braille Press publish their own books and magazines covering a wide range of subjects including sporting events, cooking recipes, knitting patterns, health and diet information, and also issues which

concern young people today. Each month a book is chosen from the best-sellers' list and transcribed into braille. These are very popular among blind readers.

At the Scottish Braille Press the production of braille is carried through almost entirely by blind and visually impaired persons, the only sighted employees being necessary for reading and clerical duties.

Because of the exceptionally high costs of producing braille and the limited funds available to the Press (being a charitable organisation), investigations began in 1982 into methods of producing more braille while extending job opportunities for disabled people. After assessing the company's requirements, the Press installed a computer-assisted braille system for the production of braille plates.

The needs of the blind are no different from the needs of sighted people

Text is input by typists using terminals and stored in the computer. The text is then translated using a specially written computer program and embossed or printed onto paper for proof reading purposes. It is then embossed on to zinc plates at high speed. The computer in the print room is fitted with a speech synthesiser so that it can be operated by blind members of staff. Although the older method of transcribing braille on zinc plates is also still used at the Press, expansions in computerisation seem inevitable, leading to increases in production capacity which in turn create more jobs.

The Scottish Braille Press are currently committed to persuading organisations that the needs of the blind and visually impaired are no different from the needs of the sighted population. By introducing literature into formats suitable to the visually impaired, organisations would broaden their target market considerably, informing the blind and visually impaired members of the population that a wider choice of published information can be right at their fingertips.

Melanie Duncan Marketing Manager

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30 Years Ago

Lanarkshire: Lord Craigton, Minister of State for Scotland, will open the new works at Hamilton for Gilmour & Dean Ltd on 25 September.

Glasgow: John McGavigan & Co. Ltd have moved their production plant into a new factory at Woodilee Road, Kirkintilloch.

Edinburgh: Andersons (Edinburgh) Ltd, the wholly owned subsidiary of Charles Letts & Co. Ltd, hope to move into their new factory at Thornybank, Dalkeith, early in the New Year. Ultimately some 250 persons will be employed, mainly in the production of the well-known Letts diaries.

History of Monotype

Monotype Typography Limited, formerly a division of The Monotype Corporation plc, became a separate limited company in 1992 and was successfully acquired by its management team in February 1993. It has announced its intention to publish a history of Monotype in what is its centenary year of 1997. The Special Projects Manager in charge of the history project, Mr Andrew Boag, is anxious to trace material of historical interest, particularly any relating to the history and development of the company at both the Fetter Lane Office and Salfords Works; the development of international business; employees; events; and machine and library development. Examples include photographs, special promotional material and publications, mementos, etc. All items will be acknowledged unless specifically donated, and all material sent should be clearly marked 'Monotype History'. It should be sent as soon as possible to Andrew Boag, Monotype Typography Ltd, Perrywood Business Park, Salfords, Redhill, Surrey RH1 5JP.

DID YOU KNOW...?

that complaints, by John Knox and other reformers, of the high cost of Bibles imported from England resulted in the first Scottish production, the *Bassandyne Bible*. To finance the project, every parish in Scotland had to contribute five pounds. The contract was given to an Edinburgh printer Bassandyne, and his partner Arbuthnot.

that the first attempt to censor the press was made in 1551 when it was decided that nothing could be printed without a licence.

that in 1622, Bishop Forbes of Aberdeen persuaded Edward Raban to move from St Andrews with his types to establish the first printing press in Aberdeen. Raban was appointed by the Town Council at a salary of £60 Scots, and every scholar attending the Grammar School had to pay him 8d quarterly.

that William Smellie, printer to Edinburgh University, edited the first edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* which was printed in Edinburgh in 1771.

that the first *Dundee Directory* was published in 1783 by Thomas Colville. Its full title was the *Dundee Register of Merchants and Trades* and consisted of 72 pages.

that James Ballantyne attended the grammar school in Kelso with Walter Scott and, like Scott, became a lawyer. It was also when he became the editor of the *Kelso Mail* that he established his first practical connection with printing. In 1802, he moved to Edinburgh where, at Paul's Work, he printed many of Scott's writings.

that the *Glasgow Advertiser and Evening Intelligence* which started in 1783 was renamed the *Glasgow Herald* in 1802. The paper continued under this name until 1992, when the 'Glasgow' was dropped. It is possibly the oldest national newspaper in the English reading world.

that Robert Clark, founder of the famous book printers R&R Clark Ltd was an outstanding golfer. He won the gold medal of the R&A Club at St Andrews in 1864, at that time the premier award in golf as the amateur championship had not yet been inaugurated.

National Printing Heritage Trust

Contacts between the NPHT and SPRAT continue to develop. The English organisation can operate legally in England and Wales only but it is believed to have support from both Scotland and Ireland for its 'Friends of the NPHT'. SPRAT intends to implement a similar 'Friends of SPRAT' membership in due course, when it will invite applications not only from those based in Scotland but also from elsewhere in the UK and abroad. We are anxious to maintain good relations with our sister body down south and to this end already exchange our respective newsletters. Any donations of archival material, clearly relevant to England only, should be referred to: Dr Derek Nuttall, Hon. Editor, NPHT Newsletter, Langdale, Pulford Lane, Dodleston, Chester CH4 9NN. Our hope, otherwise, would be that items of specifically Scottish interest would be referred to the SPRAT Secretary at the address given on page 4.



The team of 2nd year BA Publishing students who have been involved in the production of this second issue of *NewSPRAT*

Requests for assistance

Are you, or were you, involved in the printing industry? If not, perhaps someone you know is, or was, and could help us in our search for suitable artifacts, memorabilia of all kinds – particularly photographic, company histories and other material – and stories of interesting times and individuals. We are also hoping that it will be possible to arrange for taped reminiscence sessions (audio and video).

We are anxious to ensure that we stem the flow of items of printing interest to the dustbins of Scotland (sadly, much has already gone) and to encourage firms and individuals to contact us before disposing of anything. While it may be possible to house certain basic items of machinery and equipment (as and when we acquire premises) the size of early printing equipment does make the acquisition of any large items unlikely. We would, however, be very interested in photographs and/or videos.

Correction

The reference in our first issue to Aberdeen's first printer as Edward Rabin was incorrect in so far as his surname is concerned. We are indebted to Mr Harold Watt, previously Managing Director of the Aberdeen University Press but now retired and living in Cambridge-shire, for advising us that it should read 'Raban'. A memorial tablet to Edward Raban exists in the church of St Nicholas and was placed there by the Guild of Master Printers of Aberdeen in 1922.

Printing Museums

Contact has been made with a recently opened museum of print in Cumbria (The Printing House, 102 Main Street, Cockermouth) which has kindly agreed to put on sales display our booklet on Edinburgh printing history and our poster. Some of their presses originate in Scotland, including a Columbian from Edinburgh and an Albion from Elgin. It is hoped to feature this working museum in a subsequent issue of our newsletter.

We have also been made aware of the Hot Metal Museum which is located in the Heritage Complex at Elsecar, near Barnsley, in Yorkshire. This is a private collection of mainly letterpress equipment which is kept in working order and regularly demonstrated by the proprietor, Geoffrey Willis.

The above are, of course, in addition to the now well-known Robert Smail's Printing Office, Innerleithen (National Trust for Scotland).

It is understood that Mr Desmond Field has been compiling a list of the contents of both public and private museums connected with printing and the related trades, and that about half of the sixty questionnaires sent out have been returned – all from south of the border.

For sale

1. Illustrated booklet *A Reputation for Excellence* published in conjunction with SPRAT's exhibition on Edinburgh Book Printing History (1990). Price £3.50 incl. p&p.
2. Poster: Rules and Directions for Printers (1721). Price £3.50 incl. p&p.

Both items are still available from the secretary at the address on this page.

Production of NewSPRAT

This second issue of the SPRAT newsletter is typeset in Bookman. The typesetting, scanning and sizing of line illustrations were done on an Apple Macintosh system. The photographs were reproduced in the Scottish Colour Centre. The newsletter was printed on a Heidelberg GTO 2-colour machine.

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Correspondence

If you feel that you can contribute to our development in any way please contact the Secretary. We welcome correspondence for a possible regular column in the Newsletter which would also include items of interest and photographs (Trade Unions' recollections are particularly sought).

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Do you recognise any of these faces from long ago? It was taken of staff from the Darien Press Ltd Edinburgh in the late 1950s. If any of them are familiar to you, please contact us at the above address.

