

NewSPRAT

Newsletter of the Scottish Printing Archival Trust
Issue No 7

SPRAT: the first 10 years

Our first AGM took place within the (then) Napier Polytechnic, Edinburgh on 29 November 1990 but our date of birth was really 11 April 1989 when the Trust's application for full Charitable Trust status was approved.

Our first task was to consider the best means of implementing our objectives and a Research and Training Unit of Edinburgh University ("Scotland's Cultural Heritage") agreed to provide a Report on their feasibility and the way ahead. Our aspirations were confirmed as acceptable and it was suggested that an initial "taster" exhibition should be held to publicise the Trust's aims. This took place in May 1990 at Edinburgh's Central Library over a period of six weeks after its opening by Magnus Linklater the then Editor of "The Scotsman". An accompanying book on Edinburgh's printing past was produced thanks to donations of materials and production facilities since when further books have been produced relating to the printing histories of the other major centres in Scotland: Glasgow, Perth/Dundee and Aberdeen and the North in our "Reputation for Excellence" series. A poster "Rules and Directions for Printers in 1721" has also been printed for sale and it, together with the books, have provided income to offset the Trust's administrative costs and other expenses.

We have managed to liaise with many outside organisations in our quest to preserve our printing history in Scotland and continue to do so. It is, however, unfortunate that one of our main aims – to provide a permanent archive – has not come into being despite many efforts to that end, notably in our membership of the Scottish Museums Council for a period, and in discussions with local government and

LEEL. It is hoped, however, that the development of an archive facility may, in conjunction with the existing Edward Clark Collection – all at Napier University – yet see the our aims being achieved. The SPRAT Collection of a variety of artifacts, books and other papers collected from interested persons has already been donated to either the Clark Collection (mainly books/papers) or to the City of Edinburgh Museum.

We continue to provide an information/directional service to those interested, to produce this our annual newsletter and to liaise with any person or organisation sympathetic to and interested in our work.

SAPPHIRE Project

Work on the Nelson Project (see *NewSPRAT* No.6) has continued with the interviewing of further ex-Nelson staff in addition to a reunion gathering of past employees held on 14 December, 1999 at Napier University's Craighouse Campus. This was attended by 18 workers (male and female) when reminiscences were recorded and a number of pieces of ephemeral material collected.

A start has also been made in the interviewing of staff from Napier's Department of Print Media, Publishing and Communication and this work should continue through 2000.

The project has been reconstituted as a joint collaborative one between Napier University and Queen Margaret University College with David Finkelstein (QMUC) and Alistair McCleery (Napier) as joint directors. It appears also that the Advisory Board has been re-titled as the Advisory Panel and that its representation has been increased by adding new members from the University of

Strathclyde (Callum Brown); University of Aberdeen (Ian Beavan) and the Booksellers' Association (Bill Bauermeister).

SPRAT Trustees decided at their September Meeting to withdraw from membership of Sapphire's Advisory Panel (previously its Advisory Board) and a letter of resignation has been submitted which indicates their disagreement with this recent policy and other decisions taken by the Sapphire principals.

It is hoped to mount a 'Nelson' Exhibition at Edinburgh's Huntly House Museum during August 2001.

SPRAT Collection

The storage of the above has now been effected to the Edward Clark Collection and/or City of Edinburgh Museums with in the main books, manuals and other papers being kept with the Clark Collection and other main artifacts being stored by the City. It is the intention that any future items donated or procured will be similarly allocated. Final listings are in course of preparation and items identified for disposal will be dealt with in due course, probably by re-direction or sale. (see also *NewSPRAT* No. 5, page 2)

Publications Received

The following items of possible interest to NewSPRAT readers are taken from recent issues of the Friends of the National Printing Heritage Trust NEWSLETTER (England & Wales):

The third Earl of Stanhope brought out his iron hand-press (first version) 200 years ago now. These presses were widely used by book and newspaper printers in the early years of the nineteenth century; indeed, until other iron presses such as

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the Albion, Britannia and Columbian were invented. It is understood that few have survived there being, probably, not more than 20 such presses remaining throughout the world.

The NPHT's 'Inventory of Printing Items in Museums in the United Kingdom' which was printed in 1997 and is out of print is expected to be reprinted during 2000. Scottish Museums listed are: Biggar Museum Trust; Dundee Industrial Heritage Museum; Royal Scottish National Museum, Edinburgh; Callendar House Museum, Falkirk; Robert Smail's Printing Works, Innerleithen (National Trust for Scotland); Dick Institute Museum, Kilmarnock and Old Printing Press Shop, Nairn)

Hopes were rising (November 1999) for a Museum of Printing in Wales to be based at Gwasg Gee (the long-established printing office of Gee in Denbigh).

SPRAT Developments

Discussions have taken place between SPRAT and Napier University in regard to the Trust's future development and funding. Major aspects are: uncertainties over Napier University's PMPC Department future; problems relating to SAPHIRE structure; general funding and Trustee numbers (including consequences of retirement intentions of Chairman and Secretary).

It was agreed that the Secretary approach the Dean of the appropriate Napier Faculty with suggestions which might lead to the University's greater involvement in the Trust's work, bearing in mind its increased activities in the field of printing heritage and archives. It appears that Napier is sympathetic to playing an "umbrella" type role under which SPRAT would operate as at present but with the assistance of PMPC in practical matters such as administration, storage, technical information provision and advice, outside liaison and general support services. Napier Library would also be involved in connection with recent (and future) donations from the Trust (SPRAT Collection) to the Edward Clark Collection.

Meetings have taken place with the Dean (see above) and, more recently, with Dr

Sheila Lodge, the HoD, PMPC, who is also an ex-officio Trustee of SPRAT.

The present position is that SPRAT has nominated two additional Trustees (Mr Peter Morrison: ex-Waddie and Co., and Mr H. Bernulf Clegg: ex-Geo. Waterston and Sons Ltd) with Napier a further two (Bill Watson and Peter White: both Napier staff members). Mr White has, regrettably, had to decline in consequence of his taking early retirement and the matter of his replacement is currently under consideration as a result.

"A Reputation for Excellence": SPRAT Publication

Publication took place in April 2000 of the fourth title in the series. This volume covers Aberdeen and Inverness also the majority of towns graced by a printing office (often alongside a newspaper provision) in the northern half of the country. As such, it will be of interest to local inhabitants and those having connections with the towns and areas covered: Aberdeen, Arbroath, Coupar Angus, Dingwall, Elgin, Forfar, Fort William, Golspie, Inverness, Montrose, Nairn, Oban, Peterhead, Stornoway and Wick together with the islands of Orkney and Shetland. Copies should be available from major booksellers in Aberdeen and Inverness and, possibly, local museum outlets but can, also, be obtained direct from SPRAT at £5.00 per copy (orders to J.C. Keppie, Hon. Sec., SPRAT, at 5 Abercorn Avenue, Edinburgh EH8 7HP: Telephone 0131-661 3791) with payment cheques (see also page 4).

Britannica Bold

This is the title of a play by Bill Dunlop which relates the story of the Edinburgh women who typeset the monumental Encyclopaedia Britannica in 1908. It is based on the book "Britannica's Typesetters" and was shown at the city's Netherbow Theatre from 16 – to 24 June, 2000, as part of Edinburgh's Millennium celebrations.

The women's story was also covered in a lecture by the book's author, Sian Reynolds (see above), which described her research. This was held in Edinburgh's Central Library on Monday, June 12 as

was an accompanying exhibition which brought together material and information relating to Edinburgh's printing past supplied by the Library's Collections, Southside Association Heritage Group, the Scottish Printing Archival Trust and others.

The Southside of Edinburgh's typographical past was also explained in a guided walk held on June 13 that explored the legacy of Edinburgh's printing industry which had a particularly high concentration of firms in the area e.g. Nelsons, Neills, Pillans & Wilson, Darien Press).

VIDEO RELEASE: The Craft of Letterpress Printing

Since The National Trust for Scotland opened Robert Smail's Printing Works in 1990 at Innerleithen in the Scottish Borders (see page 3) as a working print museum many thousands of visitors have been privileged to witness how printing was produced in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. A visual record of this museum and the crafts practised within has now been produced.

This video programme was primarily commissioned and produced to assist in the training of future demonstrators at the working museum in the crafts of hand-setting of type and the operation of a range of magnificent old letterpress machines. In this way the craft skills of the compositor and letterpress printer will be able to be passed on and perpetuated through coming generations.

However, this well produced video is also an invaluable educational resource for scholars of print and, indeed, anyone interested in the history of print. Filmed entirely in the working print museum and using the existing skilled staff to demonstrate their skills it provides a quite unique visual record.

The video, with an approximate running time of two hours, is supported with an accompanying manual outlining the craft skills of both the caserom and letterpress print room and also includes a useful glossary of print terms for reference.

Copies (and sale price) available from The National Trust for Scotland, 5 Charlotte Square, Edinburgh

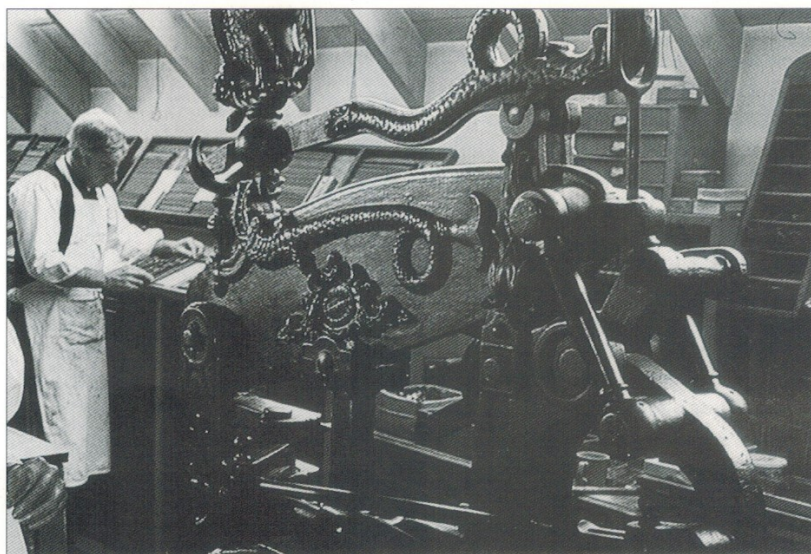
Robert Smail's Printing Works – where letterpress lives on

The National Trust for Scotland has saved for the nation many grand castles and humble cottages, breathtaking countryside areas and tranquil gardens. It has also saved Robert Smail's Printing Works, in Innerleithen, from going the way of so many Victorian letterpress printing works and being broken up for scrap. If it had not been for Maurice Rickards of the Ephemera Society alerting the Trust to the danger, a unique example of printing history might have disappeared without trace.

Innerleithen, in the middle of the nineteenth century, was a busy town benefiting from the booming textile industry and from the many visitors to the nearby St Ronan's Wells, where the local spring water was said to be good for the health. Smail's printed many of the labels used in the textile trade as well as the day-to-day requirements of the inhabitants and merchants of the town.

In 1857 Robert Smail opened for business, selling boots, books, stationery and fishing tackle and within ten years had equipped his premises in the High Street with printing equipment. His three sons eventually entered the business and one of them travelled throughout Scotland in the search for printing orders. Robert's grandson, Cowan Smail, continued printing until he retired in 1986, aged 76. Cowan, who attended a printing course at Heriot Watt College in Edinburgh, did not discard the tried and tested methods of his father and grandfather. Incredibly, even in 1986, Smail's had no hot metal typesetting machinery. Every piece of type was set by hand from the case, as it still is.

Luckily for posterity, the Smails were meticulous in keeping their printing records. A copy of every job printed was pasted into a large guard book and marked with the date and number of printed copies. There are fifty bulky books dating from 1876 through to 1956 at Smail's, now kept in controlled conservation conditions, providing a record of the life of the community. Thousands of print jobs such as dance tickets, concert and events posters, advertising leaflets, textile labels, police reports, letterheadings, order



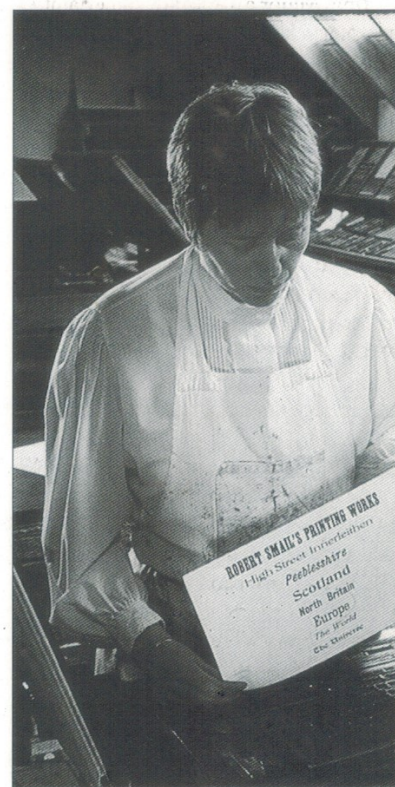
Photograph: National Trust for Scotland

forms, funeral intimations, hymn sheets, menus, County Council assessment rolls, chemist's prescription labels, calendars and postcards contain invaluable information about the life and times of a Scottish community through eighty years. There are also bound copies of Smail's newspaper *The St Ronans Standard* from 1893 to 1916. The tradition of keeping printed copies is still being carried on as new printed work is done daily.

The printing works today looks much as it was when the Trust acquired the business, although the buildings have been thoroughly repaired and restored, and include a reconstruction of the water-wheel which once powered the machines. These, ranging from a large 100-year-old 'Wharfedale' flat-bed to a little 'Arab' treadle machine were in some cases repaired and in others simply overhauled so that they can continue to be used to print, demonstrating for the visitors. The most ornate machine is the 'Columbian Eagle' handpress, still used in the caseroom for proofing. There is a large guillotine, metal and wooden setting sticks, wooden quoins, cases upon cases of well-worn founder's type, rack after rack of scratched wooden poster type, racks of standing jobs, lead cutters, brass rules, stock blocks, everything needed for the letterpress printing process. Visitors can set type and see the results being proofed.

Smail's shop sells printed products, in-

cluding a guidebook. The works is open to visitors from Good Friday to Easter Monday and 1 May to 30 September, Monday–Saturday 10–1 and 2–5; weekends in October, Saturdays 10–1 and 2–5, Sundays 2–5 (last admission 45 minutes before closing, morning and afternoon). For more information ring (01896) 830206.



Photograph: National Trust for Scotland

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Obituary: Jack Osborne

The news of Jack's sudden death in May 1999 was received with great regret and sadness as his enthusiasm for and involvement in SPRAT's work was well known to all concerned with Scottish Printing Heritage affairs. He became a Trustee of SPRAT in 1997 shortly after his retirement from W. and R. Chambers since which time he has made a considerable contribution to our work particularly in regard to the production of NewSPRAT and our "Reputation for Excellence" series of titles.

His general education was obtained at Leith Academy from where he went to Thomas Nelson & Sons, Edinburgh as an apprentice Compositor. Thereafter, he spent time with Lindsay & Co. Ltd. before moving, eventually, to R.&R. Clark Ltd. as a Compositor. He gained experience here as both an Order and Costing / Estimating Clerk and as Assistant Works Manager. He joined Darien Press Ltd. in 1963 as Assistant to the General Manager being promoted to Works Manager the following year. The integration of Darien Press with T. & A. Constable (and others) in 1966 led to his appointment as Works Manager of the amalgamated companies and he was promoted to the Board of Directors in 1969 as Production Director. He was made Works Director in the following year.



Jack Osborne

The major upheavals which took place in the Edinburgh book printing industry in the 1980's resulted in his moving to Edinburgh publishers W. & R. Chambers Ltd. where he became Production Director which post he held until his retirement.

Jack was the holder of the prestigious City and Guilds of London Institute's Full Technological Certificate in Typography also the Full Technological Certificate in Printing. He served on various Scottish Print Employers Federation Committees

and was Chairman of the Local Printing Efficiency Group from 1968 – 1971. In addition, he acted as a local examiner for the C. & G. of London Institute (practical work) for a number of years.

He will be greatly missed not only by his SPRAT colleagues but also by the great number of friends he had accumulated during his years in printing and publishing: this was evidenced by the huge turnout for his funeral service at Edinburgh's Mortonhall Crematorium.

For Sale

Illustrated booklets:

"A Reputation for Excellence" series

Vol 1. *A History of the Edinburgh Printing Industry*

Vol 2. *A History of the Glasgow Printing Industry*

Vol 3. *A History of the Dundee and Perth Printing Industries*

Vol 4. *A History of the Aberdeen/Northern Counties Printing Industries*

Each volume priced £5.00 incl. post and packing (overseas extra)

Poster:

Rules and Directions for Printers (1721)

Price £5.00 incl. post and packing (overseas extra)

Production of NewSPRAT

This seventh issue of the SPRAT newsletter is typeset in Times. The scanning and sizing of illustrations was done using

Adobe Photoshop; pagination was done using Adobe PageMaker on an Apple Macintosh platform.

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Paper for this edition has been supplied by Harvey's Ltd, Loanhead, Edinburgh. Our thanks go to Mr T Domke for arranging this at such short notice.

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If you feel you can contribute to our development in any way please contact the Secretary at the address given below

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