

## The Location Register of English Literary Manuscripts and Letters: a second project

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The first project of the Location Register of English Literary Manuscripts and Letters covered British and Irish literary papers of the twentieth century and has been extensively described in professional and other journals.<sup>1</sup> The project has been based in the Library of the University of Reading, and uses the British Library's services to store, maintain and update its database. A conventional two-volume catalogue, produced directly from the database, was published by British Library Publications earlier this year.<sup>2</sup>

The second project of the Location Register will cover literary papers from the period 1700-1900. Like the first project, it has been allocated a five-year research period and will be entirely independently funded.

Although the funding target for the second project, of just over a quarter of a million pounds, has still not been reached, by the end of 1987 enough money had been committed for a decision to be taken that the second project could follow on directly from the first without any break. Continuity of staffing and working practice was thus assured, although contracts have been issued initially for only two further years and fund-raising efforts must continue, both in Britain and abroad.

The decision to build on the success of the first project by proceeding to cover the two earlier centuries was taken in the course of 1987 by the management team - a Working Group appointed by the SCONUL Advisory Committee on Manuscripts. The decision followed consideration of a feasibility study prepared by Dr James Edwards, formerly archivist of the University of Reading, and wide-ranging discussions, notably with Professor John Horden, founding editor of the *Index of English Literary Manuscripts*, who subsequently accepted an invitation to join the Working Group.

Whereas the first project was breaking entirely new ground, in that no systematic listing of any kind existed for twentieth-century literary papers, the second project aims to survey territory which is less uncharted. It was important for the Working Group to be sure that a location register for literary papers of the period 1700-1900 would be meeting a genuine new need and not duplicating existing research. It is instructive in this regard to compare the terms of reference of the Location Register and the *Index*. The Location Register includes all literary writers, regardless of their merits or their reputation,<sup>3</sup> and provides a summary listing of all their papers in the British Isles. The *Index* restricts itself to 'major' authors of the sort who are taught on university courses, is primarily interested in manuscripts (not correspondence or personal papers) and gives detailed textual descriptions of manuscripts whether in the British Isles or elsewhere in the world. There

are good working relations between the research teams of the two projects, based on the sure knowledge that each has an important role to fulfil.

In July 1987, SCONUL's Advisory Committee on Manuscripts organised a symposium at the British Academy on 'English Literary Manuscripts: finding and using the sources', with speakers from the Location Register, the *Index* and the world of literary biography.<sup>4</sup> One of the keynote speakers, the Location Register's first project head, James Thompson, made the point that the project had, after five years, developed its own momentum and its own network of contacts and that this in itself partly justified keeping it alive and up-to-date. Certainly, the continuing existence of the team at Reading, even though they are now working principally on earlier centuries, has the great advantage of maintaining the database for the twentieth century, revised (where necessary) and current.

There are now two separate but compatible databases maintained from Reading. One, covering the twentieth century, is large, almost complete and almost identical at present to the two-volume published version. The other, covering 1700-1900, is much smaller but is growing week by week. Interesting options are now under consideration concerning the future on-line availability of the first database and, eventually, the second. Negotiations are under way with both the British BLAISE-LINE service and the American RLIN network.<sup>5</sup> We dream of a future where a searcher at a single terminal will be able to key in the name of a chosen author, and the computer will, searching across a variety of databases, produce locations of that author's papers in the British Isles, the United States, Canada and elsewhere.

Interest in the project in the United States and Canada has been considerable, and in the last twelve months the project's senior research officer has presented progress reports at the annual conferences of the Society of American Archivists (New York, September 1987) and the American Library Association (New Orleans, July 1988). Regular contact is maintained with North American archivists and with projects like *American Literary Manuscripts* and CANLIT - both of which are also looking at the possibility of on-line availability through RLIN.

Research work is now well under way on literary papers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is too early to present any general report on findings, but particular research problems, not all of which had been foreseen, are worth noting. To take one example, difficulties have arisen from the widespread practice in earlier times of giving sons the names of their fathers, nieces the names of their aunts and so on. In scanning lists for the twentieth century, if one finds a reference to, say, Dorothy M. Richardson, John Masefield or John Drinkwater, one can fairly easily ascertain that the reference is to the author. There is no such security in the earlier period. One has constantly to check: which Thomas Bowdler? which Thomas Hood? which Benjamin Hoadly? which Charles Burney? Even such distinctive names as Capell Lofft (there are father and son) or Alicia Lefanu (aunt and niece) have to be investigated carefully.

These new challenges are welcomed, however, and the Working Group and its research team are confident that in due course the second Location Register will prove to be as valuable an aid to research as the first has proved.

<sup>1</sup> For example, David C. Sutton, 'A highly original paperchase', *Times Higher Educational Supplement* (5 April 1985), 13; David C. Sutton, 'The Location Register of Twentieth Century English Literary Manuscripts and Letters: a report on progress', *Archives* (October 1987), 82-84; notes in *TLS* (4 March 1983), 214; *British Book News* (January 1983), 3; *American Archivist* (Summer 1983), 344-345; *Museums Bulletin* (January 1983), 192; *Aslib Information* (February 1983), 53-54; *Journal of the Society of Archivists* VII (5) (April 1984), 328.

<sup>2</sup> *Location Register of Twentieth Century English Literary Manuscripts and Letters* 2 volumes, London, 1988.

<sup>3</sup> The first project includes entries for authors like Marie Corelli, Amanda M'Kittrick Ros, Ethel M. Dell, Ian Fleming and James Blish (creator of *Star Trek*).

<sup>4</sup> See the reports of the symposium in *The Times Literary Supplement* (10 July 1987), 742, and in this *Journal*, VIII (4) (October 1987), 316-18.

<sup>5</sup> See D. Reed, 'The RLIN AMC format: an experiment in library-compatible archival data automation', this *Journal*, VII (7) (April 1985), 450-455.