

# Report of the Chapbooks Study Day

held on 24 October 2005 at the  
Victoria & Albert Museum

IN JANUARY 2005 THE BIBLIOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY contacted interested parties about the possibility of creating a checklist of chapbooks produced up to the latter part of the nineteenth century, to be eventually published by the Society.

A steering committee was set up and regular meetings have been held at St Bride Printing Library, London. In order to map the way ahead, and gauge public interest, a Chapbooks Study Day was organised by the National Art Library, Victoria & Albert Museum, and held at the V&A on 24 October 2005.

Professor John Flood, President of the Bibliographical Society, and John Meriton, Deputy Keeper of the Word and Image Department, Victoria & Albert Museum, were in the chair.

SIMON ELIOT, Professor of History of the Book in the Institute of English Studies, School of Advanced Study, University of London, and Deputy Director of the Centre for Manuscript and Print Studies there, discussed a number of issues during the first session of the day. He stressed the importance of chapbooks as a vital resource for the study of early-modern European popular culture. A chapbook 'long-title' catalogue with links to digitized illustrations would allow us to research popular culture, local history, and the history of images. All three subjects fit well with the government's policy of increasing 'access' and promoting 'heritage', and thus might make it easier both to attract funding and to promote the project. He identified six major areas requiring thought and planning:

1. We need to identify a set of characteristics that define chapbooks. Not every text will satisfy all the criteria but if a printed work displays a cluster of these characteristics then we can justify its inclusion;
2. We need to establish the main period of chapbook production so that we can set appropriate chronological boundaries for the catalogue;
3. We need to make similar decisions about the geographical scope of the catalogue (e.g. just UK imprints, or all works in the English language?);
4. We must learn all we can from existing projects concerned with chapbooks or other forms of popular literature, and make sure that any database we create is compatible with existing work;
5. We must approach funding bodies and societies (ARHC, MLA, Leverhulme, Bibliographical Society, etc.), and carefully tailor our applications to them;
6. Given the range of interests covered by chapbooks, we will need to find a number of institutions from different sectors (i.e. university, library, museum) to form a board to run the project.

DR GILES BERGEL, Visiting Lecturer and Research Assistant, Royal Holloway, University of London, outlined a working history of the chapbook, using the holdings of Harvard College Library as a case study. Points of interest included Charles Welsh and Charles Tillinghast's *Catalogue of English and American Chapbooks and Broadside Ballads in Harvard College Library* (1905); subsequent Harvard Library catalogues; and the collections of James Boswell and others held by the Houghton Library. Miscellaneous collections of chapbooks, like other forms of cheap print, were unusually persistent within larger collections. 'Chapbook' is an unsatisfactory description of the diverse range of materials held under that heading. Nor is the name of a collector, under which chapbook titles are typically organized, a good description; however, provenance is frequently of considerable historical interest, not least in tracing the history of the imputed form. The aim of a chapbook catalogue might be not so much to produce a catalogue of chapbooks, but rather to catalogue more fully those books historically known as chapbooks. A project might be permissive when accepting titles for inclusion, but prescriptive as to the minimum standard of their description. Existing generic and functional categories (such as the jest-book, criminal biography, metrical romance, household manual, and moral tract) might be usable initial parameters within which to place the chapbook.

BARRY MCKAY, Bookseller and independent book historian, proposed a working definition of the much used and abused term 'chapbooks'. The current literature provides conflicting definitions (John Carter, Fred Ratcliffe, Harry Weiss) and historical evidence points in different directions as well. In attempting to define what a chapbook is, one ought to take into account a number of characteristics. These will include books that were *usually* printed on a single sheet or part thereof; that were not *usually* produced to the most exacting standards; that were *usually* of an entertaining or informative nature, and were *usually* hawked by itinerant sellers rather than sold retail from a bookseller's shop. In producing a catalogue of chapbooks one would have to be inclusive rather than exclusive; to exclude all the small publications of all the various religious publishing houses would be erroneous. A catalogue of chapbooks should be a work that transcends the traditional boundaries of bibliographical reference material. A corpus of examples of popular prints, part of the visual culture of the British peoples, should also be included. In sum, a chapbook catalogue should adequately record what, in print culture terms, is arguably the single most important medium for the preservation and dissemination of British popular culture.

CARLO DUMONTET, Special Collections Bibliographer, National Art Library, Victoria & Albert Museum, offered some thoughts on the possibility of cataloguing chapbooks using the MARC format. This approach would allow the database to be hosted on a library server, and would facilitate the importation of bibliographical records from other library catalogues. The speaker stressed the importance of using internationally recognized cataloguing standards, and, in particular, praised the flexibility and comprehensiveness of the Art and Architecture Thesaurus.

MOIRA GOFF, ESTC Project Manager at the British Library, outlined chapbook coverage in the ESTC. Virtually all the British Library's holdings of pre-1801 chapbooks are recorded, as well as those held by many other contributors. More

chapbooks will be added as ESTC coverage is extended between now and mid-2007. ESTC catalogue records are compiled to international standards; future enhancements include full title and imprint transcription, and subject indexing of post-1700 as well as pre-1701 records. In autumn 2006 ESTC will, for the first time, be made freely available for information retrieval through the British Library's website. ESTC records can provide basic bibliographical descriptions and they indicate the location of many copies of surviving chapbooks. Links can also be made from ESTC records to digital images of chapbooks. These facilities, together with important ESTC developments over the next two years, mean that close cooperation between the ESTC and a chapbook project would undoubtedly benefit both sides.

EOIN SHALLOO, Rare Books Curator at the National Library of Scotland, introduced the Scottish Chapbook Project, an initiative of Glasgow University Library. The main outcome of the project to date has been the Scottish Chapbook Catalogue, an online database of chapbooks printed in Scotland. This database currently contains approximately 2,300 records from four institutions, with another 2,200 to be added in early 2006. Users of the catalogue can search in a variety of ways: title (including titles of ballads in chapbooks), date, printer, and place of publication. Ballads and songs represent a very relevant aspect of Scottish chapbook publishing, and it is consequently important to record their first lines/verses to enable different editions of songs to be compared and the transmission of texts to be studied. The speaker also stressed the importance of editorial control in any national project/database.

SHEILA O'CONNELL, Assistant Keeper, Prints and Drawings, British Museum, considered illustrations in chapbooks from an art historian's point of view. There is a growing interest in the bottom end of the visual art market and in popular iconography, and an illustrated on-line catalogue of chapbooks would be a valuable resource for scholars. Illustrations in chapbooks were often printed from woodblocks that were also used for illustrations in cheap ballads and broadsides. They remained in use for many decades, often appearing in contexts that were relevant only in the loosest possible way. An example is a block showing Henry II and Fair Rosamond dated on stylistic evidence to the early eighteenth century; it appears as an illustration to 'God save the King' on the title-page of a chapbook published by J. Marshall of Newcastle, who is known from bibliographic sources to have been active *c.* 1815–30. Chapbook publishers set no store by originality and there are many versions of the same images. In order to distinguish one from another, relatively high-resolution digital images will be essential. A standard 600 dpi was suggested, and it was also clear that, whenever possible, images should be made from originals rather than from reproductions.

ALEXANDRA FRANKLIN, Oriental Digital Surrogates Project Manager, Bodleian Library, proposed models for the iconographic indexing of chapbook illustrations. Digitization of all the pages in chapbooks containing illustrations and their indexing would significantly increase access to this body of popular imagery. The Bodleian Broadside Ballads Database ([www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/ballads](http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/ballads)), which provides this type of access to images, was described. The potential of existing thesauri for the description of illustrations and as aids to the cataloguer was discussed, in particular the Art and Architecture Thesaurus, the Thesaurus for Graphic Materials, and

ICONCLASS. None of the thesauri available was found to offer a tailor-made solution reflecting the specific nature of chapbook illustrations. The project might therefore contemplate two further solutions: (1) an in-house selective list of terms, and (2) a catalogue of specific cuts found in chapbooks, in the style of McKerrow and Ferguson's catalogue of title-page borders. A 'name' list of images might also include cuts associated with the illustration of particular stories even when appearing in chapbooks of different tales. Thesauri contain uniform terminology to make indexing and searching easier and consistent. If a wordlist specific to the chapbooks project is devised, publishing this list on the website of the database would help indexers and researchers to find appropriate terms.

THE DAY CLOSED WITH A PLENARY SESSION in which the issues raised were further discussed. It was finally agreed that a working party led by the Bibliographical Society should be set up to carry the Chapbooks Project forward.

CARLO DUMONTET