

12-15-2017

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Robert Betteridge
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Recommended Citation

Betteridge, Robert (2017) "Robert Burns in Print at the National Library of Scotland," *Studies in Scottish Literature*: Vol. 43: Iss. 2, 328–334.

Available at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl/vol43/iss2/30>

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**ROBERT BURNS IN PRINT
AT THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF SCOTLAND**

Robert Betteridge

When the programme for this symposium began to emerge I thought that to go too far into the specific bibliographic details of some of the rarer items held here at the National Library of Scotland may run the risk of overlap with some of the other papers. So, with that in mind I decided to look into the acquisition by the Advocates Library and the National Library of some well-known, and some lesser known, editions.

It perhaps goes without saying that the National Library's holdings of the works of Robert Burns are extensive, particularly for the period covered so far by the new bibliography. A search of the English Short Title Catalogue with Robert Burns as author produces the results shown in Table 1 for the libraries indicated:

Library	ESTC Burns holdings
Aberdeen University Library	3
Bodleian Library	15
British Library	52
Cambridge Univ. Library	9
Edinburgh Univ. Library	4
Glasgow University Library	12
Mitchell Library	6
National Library of Scotland	61
St Andrews Univ. Library	2

Table 1: Robert Burns holdings in ESTC (March 2017)

Only the British Library comes close to matching the National Library's total. However, do not believe everything you read in the ESTC. Aside from showing us that the Mitchell Library could do more to make its holdings known online, it would also lead us to believe that the University of South Carolina does not hold a Kilmarnock edition, which of course it

does in the G. Ross Roy Collection.¹ Furthermore, engraved music such as the *Scots Musical Museum* has a poor history of ESTC matching, though this is perhaps as much to do with that particular work's complicated bibliographical history as anything else. Also clouding this issue are the large number of chapbook and broadsheet items that, for want of any date, are catalogued with an imprint date of circa 1800. Nevertheless it highlights the importance of the National Library as a centre for Burns research and I look forward to seeing how the Library's 19th-century holdings, particularly items such as chapbooks, can contribute to the continuation of the bibliography.

In 1925 when the Faculty of Advocates gave the non-legal contents of its library to form the National Library of Scotland, Robert Burns had been in print for almost 140 years. However, considering the vast number of editions published, it can be seen that the Advocates Library was not a great collector of Burns, despite since 1710 being able to claim copies of works deposited at Stationers Hall. In the Advocates Library catalogue issued in 1867, it took only two pages to record the entries for Burns, totalling just 30 editions.² This was a rather small proportion of what was available: by the time Egerer reached the year 1867 he had already recorded 697 editions, admittedly some of those beyond the territories covered by legal deposit. However, the 1867 Catalogue shows that the Library had acquired important, if of course sometimes flawed, posthumous editions such as Currie (1800), Cunningham (1834), Chambers (1851) and the *Poems ascribed to Robert Burns* (1801); this last entry has an annotation that it is bound with *The Fornicators Court*, which Egerer dates to 1823, suggesting that the *Poems Ascribed* was acquired sometime after its 1801 publication date. On page 796 we find Cromek (1810) at the top of the page and Lockhart's *Life* (1828). So, the library had some essential pieces in any serious collection of Burns, but was by no means collecting comprehensively.

As we can see from this catalogue, the Advocates Library never owned a Kilmarnock edition; indeed none of the libraries then able to claim a copy through legal deposit possess a copy that was received through that privilege. Despite the verso of the title leaf recording that the work was

¹ [But cf. Elizabeth Sudduth, *The G. Ross Roy Collection of Robert Burns* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2009), 20-40, which lists some 52 Burns titles for 1786-1800, many in multiple holdings, and a further 15 undated Burns chapbooks catalogued as "1800"; almost all, of course, also in NLS. Ed.]

² Samuel Halkett, *et al.*, *Catalogue of the printed books in the Library of the Faculty of Advocates*, 7 vols. (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1867-1879), I: 795-796. The library's annotated copy is available online at: <http://digital.nls.uk/advocates-library-catalogues/pageturner.cfm?id=103467137>.

entered at Stationers Hall, one can imagine Burns (or Wilson) preferring to keep control of all copies in order to maximise the return on his work. Perhaps surprisingly, it was not till 1950 that the National Library acquired a Kilmarnock, though that was a spectacular copy with the original wrappers bound in, and was happily followed by another in 1964.

It is presumed that the entry for “Mr Alexander Brown, Advocates Library, Edinburgh” found on page xi of the list of subscribers in the first Edinburgh edition of *Poems, chiefly in the Scottish dialect* accounts for the Advocates Library’s copy, rather than a personal copy for Brown who was the Keeper of the Library at the time. Despite this likely 1787 date of acquisition, the book does its best to fool us into thinking it was a 19th-century acquisition. This ‘stinking’ Edinburgh edition, now kept at shelfmark H.28.d.15, is clearly stamped Adv. Bib. on the title page in a form found in 19th-century accessions. However, when investigating the accession of any book in the Library’s collections, particularly one that has been rebound, as this one has, it is also worth checking the gutter margin of the first page of the text proper, i.e. after any preliminaries. Here the book is also stamped with the Adv. Bib. stamp but a closer look reveals a washed out ex libris of the style used in the later 18th century: a handwritten “Lib. Bib. Fac. Jurid. Edin.,” the shortened form of “Ex Libris Bibliothecae Facultatis Juridicae Edinburgi” that is also often found on front flyleaves.

My guess is that the book arrived as expected in 1787 in the original paper-covered boards, and that it was properly bound only at a later date, perhaps not until the 1820s, when a lot of rebinding was done with little or no care taken to preserve any matter outside the text block.³ At this point the original gutter ex libris was washed out and any fuller ex libris, possibly with a year of acquisition, and perhaps a shelfmark was lost. The book was then stamped with the contemporary Adv. Bib. stamp and placed at shelfmark H which the Advocates Library used as a “special collections” shelfmark. This tells us that at some point the Advocates Library recognised their earliest edition of Burns as a significant book. The fact that it has been subsequently rebound by the National Library may suggest it received considerable attention and wear from Faculty members who were allowed to borrow many of their Library’s books. I could add here that, in my experience, early 19th-century bindings done for the Advocates Library are notoriously weak and can often be seen with detached boards so it is not surprising that the book has been rebound. So, the Advocates may not have gone out of their way to acquire editions of Burns and, with no other 18th-century edition available, this volume appears to have been

³ This is anecdotal evidence based on my own experience.

their go-to copy of the *Poems*. Till 1819, it was their only one-volume Burns, and they didn't get a third till 1858.

Both the Edinburgh edition of 1787 and Currie had certainly been acquired by 1807, as they appear in the catalogue supplement issued at that date.⁴ They are shelfmarked [Ak].6.20 and [Ak].6.21 respectively, which could suggest that the *Poems* were acquired much closer to 1800 than 1787, but relying on the logical application of shelfmarks is not necessarily to be trusted when we find that [Ak].6.19 is an 1807 edition of the works of Robert Fergusson.

Burns material placed at shelfmark H includes the aforementioned *Poems ascribed* which is bound with an 1823 *Fornicators Court* showing that it couldn't have arrived before then. The 1819 Ayr edition of *Poems and Songs* bears no stamp at all but has the watermarked date 1832 on a flyleaf suggesting that it was bound for placing at H sometime in, or shortly after, that year. It is extremely tenuous, given the lack of any evidence beyond my speculations, to suggest that Burns was being given special treatment within the Faculty by the 1830s but, if so, it shows a level of recognition within the Advocates Library that mirrors the wider Burnsomania of the early 19th century. However, looking again at the 1867 catalogue we see that Cromek's edition, at the top of the page and placed at shelfmark [Ai].5.15, was not moved to shelfmark H, which tells against any universal apotheosis of Burns within the Advocates Library. Cromek remains at this shelfmark today, one that was used by the Faculty to shelve works on Scottish poetry and song.

Table 2 shows the Kilmarnock and first Edinburgh editions held by the National Library. It records the 20th-century acquisition of the two Kilmarnock editions in the Library's collection and, with the exception of the previously discussed "stinking" copy at H.28.d.15, the relatively recent purchase, donation and deposit of the first Edinburgh edition in both its states. Of particular interest here are the RB.s.791 proof copy with amendments thought to be in the hand of William Creech and the Acc.10981 copy in which the names omitted in the text are supplied in Burns's hand.

Though the H.28.d.15 "stinking" edition of the *Poems* is the only example of Burns's own work to arrive in the Advocates Library prior to the 19th century, he did manage to sneak in by other means. The next major item to be acquired was Grose's *Antiquities*, which was accessioned

⁴ Alexander Smellie, *Catalogue of the Library belonging to the Faculty of Advocates, Edinburgh. Part the third* (Edinburgh: Smellie, 1807), 75. The library's annotated copy is available online at: <http://digital.nls.uk/advocates-library-catalogues/pageturner.cfm?id=103467135>.

EDITION	ACQUIRED	METHOD
Kilmarnock, 1786:		
F.7.d.32	30 December 1950	Purchase
RB.s.65	6 June 1964	Donation
Edinburgh "skinking"		
L.C.1533	1926	W. R. Reid bequest
NG.1168.e.22	18 August 1961	Donation
Edinburgh "stinking"		
H.28.d.15	Presumed 1787	Subscription
L.C.1534	1926	W. R. Reid bequest
RB.s.791	30 July 1979	Purchase
JRM.576	1981	J.R. MacDonald donation
RB.s.1509(1)	17 February 1989	Donation
Acc.10981	2000	Deposit

Table 2 – Acquisition of Kilmarnock and first Edinburgh editions held by the National Library

in 1792, as can be seen in the Library's ex libris inscription. Here, in the gutter margin of the same volume, is the abbreviated form that was washed out of the Edinburgh edition of the *Poems*. In the same year the Earl of Buchan's *Essays on the lives and writings of Fletcher of Saltoun and the poet Thomson*, containing Burns's *Address to the Shade of Thomson*, was published, and by 1796 this too had found its way to the Library. In a similar vein, the Advocates Library also acquired a copy of Davie Sillar's *Poems* of 1789 containing Burns's preface and the *Statistical Account of Scotland* with Burns's letter in volume 2, but these look to have been acquired in the 19th century.

It is perhaps a little unfair to the Faculty to mention only accessions up until the issue of the 1867 catalogue, but this was the last catalogue produced before 1925, and there is little to note other than the steady arrival of works of Burns and Burnsiana issued between then and the gift of the books to the nation. It is only with the establishment of the National Library of Scotland that the serious retrospective collecting of Burns began. It is of course to be expected that the National Library, given its higher public profile as a focus for donations and its remit to collect works by Scots, would be a more assiduous collector of the nation's Bard. However, there are some works acquired by the Advocates Library in the 1867 to 1925 period worthy of note including: The Kilmarnock Popular Edition of 1871 edited by William Scott Douglas; the first full printing of the *Common Place Book*, privately printed in Edinburgh in 1872; the

notorious facsimile of the Kilmarnock Burns produced by Bell & Fowler in Edinburgh in 1913 which bears no information within the volume itself to suggest it is a facsimile and which was addressed by Ross Roy in 1965;⁵ one of the so called “1827” editions of *The Merry Muses*, identified as being printed in 1881, again thanks to Ross Roy, in his 1986 *Burns Chronicle* article.⁶ The Advocates Library it seems took a fairly light view of the book’s risqué status and had it nicely quarter-leather bound with their stamp on the front board. Judging by the fine condition of the binding it does not appear to have been heavily consulted, a status that the National Library maintained by placing the book at the φ [*phi*] shelfmark: the locked cupboard where anything of an illegal or controlled nature was kept. Remarkably it was only relatively recently, around ten years or so ago, that this shelfmark was reviewed and the book was released to a more accessible special collections shelfmark. The Library’s four other “1827” editions all came to the Library after 1925: the 1903 was donated in 1939, the 1905 was bought in 1972, the 1872 was bought in 1972, and the 1920 came from Lauriston Castle, about which more follows.

One can also pick out, more or less at random as I have done here, works not recorded by Egerer such as *Burns selected poems* (Oxford, 1889), with an introduction by J. Logie Robertson. Egerer records two other frequently reprinted selections by the same editor, in Walter Scott’s Camelot and Scott Library series in 1887 (Egerer 841, p. 262), and in the Oxford Standard Authors edition of 1904, the latter with the rather terse note that, despite being re-issued another seventeen times, “The text is not what it should be. It will not be noted again” (Egerer 935, p. 281). Showing that by the end of the 19th century the Advocates Library was keen to purchase Burnsiana is the 1898 *Bonnie Jean*, printed in New York by the Raeburn Book Company, which contains enough of Burns’s work to have merited Egerer’s inclusion. Something of a novelty, and perhaps understandably not recorded by Egerer, though its rarity suggests he may have been unaware of it in any case, is a reworking of “Holy Willie’s Prayer.” In this poem Willie is the German Emperor Wilhelm I. The 4 page, 17 verse satire on the Franco-Prussian war was presumably printed in 1871, though certainly not at Versailles, and closely follows the form of Burns’s original, keeping much of the wording and retaining the standard

⁵ G. Ross Roy, “Some Notes on the Facsimiles of the Kilmarnock Burns,” *The Bibliothek*, 4:6 (1965): 241-245; and cf. Allan Young and Patrick Scott, *The Kilmarnock Burns: A Census* (Columbia, SC: Scottish Literature Series, 2017), Appendix III, 174-180 (p. 177). .

⁶ G. Ross Roy, “The ‘1827’ Edition of Burns’s Merry Muses of Caledonia,” *Burns Chronicle*, 4th ser., 11 (1986): 32-45.

Habbie form. Certainly, to my mind, this is a work that would merit inclusion in the new bibliography.

In reviewing Egerer's *Bibliography*, Ross Roy stated, among many other deficiencies, that his "own collection contains over seventy editions unlisted by Egerer."⁷ It is no difficult task to sift through the National Library's catalogue looking for similar works. However, to sit on a large collection and note what has been missed is an easier task than to begin a list from scratch. Despite its faults, we are lucky to have Egerer's work on which to build.

The formation of the National Library itself in 1925 was the occasion for major advances in the Library's holdings of Burns. Most notable of course was the fulfilment of John Gribbel's wish that the Glenriddell Manuscripts be deposited in Scotland's national library, but the Library did very well in printed items too, as benefactors were drawn to support the Library. The first recorded donation to the Library came from Sir Henry Keith Avonholm of Hamilton on 26 October 1925 when he presented a copy of the 1793 two-volume Edinburgh edition that had been given by Burns to Agnes McLehose, after the poet wrote to Creech requesting copies for "a few Great Folks whom I respect, & a few Little folks whom I love."⁸

Though this gift has a touching provenance with a clearly documented history, more significant, particularly for Burns bibliography, was the bequest of the Lauriston Castle collection. This was the library of Edinburgh businessman William Robert Reid who bought Lauriston Castle in 1903 and built up his collection with the assistance of his friend John A. Fairley. Fairley was an expert on chapbooks and his collection was bought by the Reid Trustees and incorporated into the Lauriston Castle collection. In all over 150 items by or containing work by or relating to Burns came to the Library from Lauriston Castle. As well as providing the Library with its first 'skinking' Edinburgh edition the bequest provided a wealth of chapbooks in rare editions by Brash & Reid and Stewart and Meikle as well as many appearances of single poems and songs in chapbook compilations that will be of interest to Burns bibliography. Indeed, these are among the items to which a bibliographer will have to turn if he or she is to provide a more complete bibliography than was ever attempted by Egerer.

National Library of Scotland

⁷ G. Ross Roy, in *Modern Philology*, 64: 4 (1967): 357–361 (p. 358).

⁸ Robert Burns to William Creech, February 28, 1793, in G. Ross Roy, ed., *Letters of Robert Burns*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), II: 185.