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Scottish Archive of Print and Publishing History Records

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SAPPHIRE, Edinburgh

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ABSTRACT: 'It's important that we remember the past is not just dry facts and statistics but also the detailed lives of real people. SAPPHIRE aims to give a voice to these lives.'

The Scottish Archive of Print and Publishing History Records (SAPPHIRE), an initiative with Napier University as lead and Queen Margaret University College as main collaborative partner, is an oral history project which aims to record the social, economic and cultural heritage of the Scottish printing and publishing industry in the 20th century.

Undertaken in partnership with a number of Scottish organizations, its results are providing a better understanding of an important and overlooked part of Scotland's heritage. Outcomes of the project include a permanent oral history archive stored at the Edward Clark Collection at Napier University, and exhibitions and publications on the history of the printing and publishing industry. The development and current activities of SAPPHIRE are described and reviewed.

Introduction

The importance of the print and publishing industry to 20th-century Scottish economic, social and cultural development has been often acknowledged but little researched. Well into the 1960s, the Scottish print industry accounted for a labour force of between 5,000 and 7,000 people in Edinburgh alone, before national and international market forces, corporate take-overs and economic factors caused many businesses to cease trading or streamline their Scottish operations. While major holdings of print material and documents relating to the industry in earlier periods exist in various archives throughout Scotland, there are major gaps in knowledge of 20th-century activity. This period was one of great change in the printing and publishing industry. However, there are few written autobiographies, histories of firms, or oral histories of the men and women employed in it.

Background to SAPPHIRE

This fact was brought home to the co-editors of the 20th-century volume of the *History of the Book in Scotland*, Dr David Finkelstein and Professor Alistair McCleery of Queen Margaret University College and Napier University respectively, when they began initial surveys of potential material and contributors available for the planned volume in late 1996. Papers, ledgers, and other archival material existed for some of the major Scottish publishing and printing firms, a few of which have been dug into and used by enterprising and determined individuals. However, there was much that was missing, and much lost information that dry ledgers and business letters did not and could not reveal. Hidden behind the skeletal paper trails of financial activities that do survive are untold and unrecorded stories of human activity upon which the reputations

'Of the Making of Books there is no end'

SAPPHIRE

and profits of such firms have been built. A major gap exists in our knowledge of the impact of the industry in the 20th century, a gap that grows larger as time passes. This gap is that of the social history of those who worked in the field, the living memories of Scots who witnessed and adapted to changes in print technology, industry, and labour conditions during the past century.

This is particularly true in an era that has seen an increasing dependence on unrecorded and ephemeral means of transacting business – telephone calls and electronically generated messages have sped up human activity but left few traces behind. Likewise, while there has been a corresponding demand for new work skills and practices as technology advances and changes patterns in the workplace, there have been few attempts made to record and document such changes as they take place. Equally, the industry has suffered from a distinct lack of profile in past Scottish economic and social history research. Established sound archives, for example, have few recordings of the wide range of activities one finds in surveying the business of producing and disseminating books: areas such as papermaking, printing, bookbinding, and bookselling.

With all this in mind, Dr David Finkelstein took up the challenge of establishing a project that would address this gap. Between Jan. and May 1997, a group of educational, professional, and non-commercial organizations with interests in preserving and promoting Scotland's printing and publishing heritage was contacted to establish the framework of and advise on the remit for what has become SAPPHIRE, the Scottish Archive of Print and Publishing History Records.

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Structure of SAPPHIRE

SAPPHIRE was initiated and developed in collaboration with a number of individuals and organizations with experience in the printing and publishing industry, oral history, and heritage preservation. That structure is reflected throughout many aspects of the project, from the creation of the archive to the final dissemination of collected material. The Advisory Panel, for example, is made up

of a body of individuals with experience in the printing and publishing industries (including Lorraine Fannin of the Scottish Publishers Association and William Bauermeister of the Edinburgh Booksellers Society), and in the areas of oral history and Scottish ethnology (including Dr Margaret Mackay of the School of Scottish Studies, The University of Edinburgh; Helen Clark, Keeper of Social History at The Museum, of Edinburgh; Iain Beavan, Special Collections and Archives, University of Aberdeen; Dr Callum Brown, Scottish Oral History Centre, University of Strathclyde; and Dr Heather Holmes, former Research fellow of SAPPHIRE). Their role is to advise and assist the project on such matters as project set-up, location of potential contacts, and general shape and scope of the work undertaken. The co-ordination of the Advisory Panel and the project itself is undertaken jointly by Co-directors Dr David Finkelstein, Media and Communication, Queen Margaret University College, and Professor Alistair McCleery, Scottish Centre for the Book, Napier University.

Project development

SAPPHIRE is a consortium with Napier University, Edinburgh as the lead institution and Queen Margaret University College, also in Edinburgh, as its collaborative partner. The project is based jointly at both institutions. SAPPHIRE is committed to recording and preserving the social, economic, and cultural history of the Scottish printing and publishing industry in the 20th century. It aims to create a permanent oral and social history archive and database on the industry within the Edward Clark Collection at Napier University. The bulk of the material in the archive is recordings of personal reminiscences of former and current employees within the print and publishing industry. The oral and contemporary material is enhanced by the collection of ephemera such as trade literature, photographs, and relevant memorabilia.

SAPPHIRE work practice and collecting policy

SAPPHIRE aims to create an archive using

best practice. Methods have been established to ensure the creation of archivally sound materials that would be easily accessible and at the same time allow for full protection of the material collected. Paperwork has been developed to achieve these ends, covering all aspects of the work, from creation of material, to processing and end use: these include fieldworker forms, release forms, record sheets for photographic material, processing forms, guidance sheets for transcription, and movement sheets. Sound recording material has been chosen that would fit the criteria laid down in the project. All recording work is undertaken on Mini Disc (MD). Editing facilities are available at both field level and within the project room on a MD desk. MD masters are copied and listening copies, together with transcription copies, are made available on analogue tape. Printed summaries and full transcriptions of oral recordings are also provided. Photographic material, created from fieldwork or as photographs con- tributed by informants, is to be made available as digitized images, at both high- and low-resolution rates, and as both master and working copies. Videos are retained as masters and as edited copies.

Former projects

Spreading the printed word: Thomas Nelson and Sons

SAPPHIRE has recently completed a study of Thomas Nelson and Sons. The chief reason for creating a specific record of the working lives of the staff at Nelsons was the firm's pre-eminence in Scottish printing and publishing in the 20th century. Nelsons was the largest employer in the print and publishing industry in Edinburgh, itself the print capital of Scotland. Established at the West Bow in 1798, the firm came to be regarded as the 'foremost' firm in the Edinburgh print and publishing scene, until its closure in 1968. It also had an inter- national reputation and standing, with offices located in London, Paris, New York, Toronto, Melbourne, and Johannesburg; in the 1950s an office was established in West Africa. Production focused on school texts,
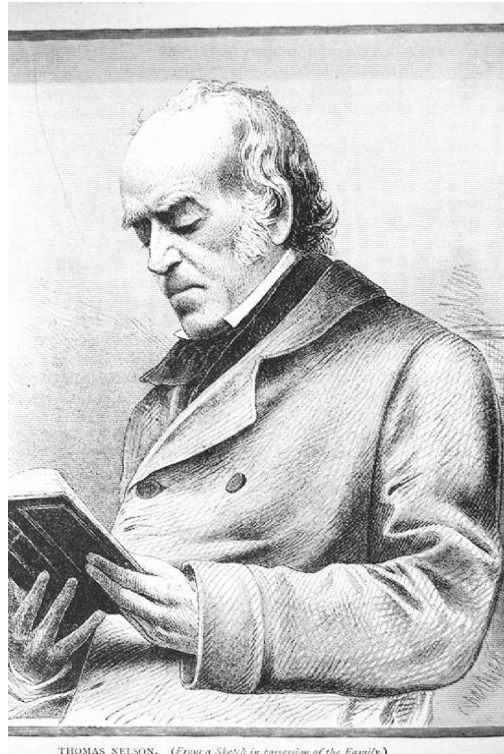

Figure 1 Thomas Nelson.

children's books, classics (reprints of classic fiction out of copyright), religious publi- cations, biblical atlases, and general titles. The firm was unique in a number of ways: it undertook all stages of book production, and therefore encompassed all the major trades as well as some minor ones such as artistry and design. Before the outbreak of the Second World War it was at the forefront of developing new and leading edge machinery and establishing sophisticated production methods to increase work productivity. John Buchan wrote of Nelsons in his auto- biography *Memory Hold-the-Door* (1940) that

> We were a progressive concern, and in our standardised Edinburgh factories we began the publication of cheap books in many tongues. On the eve of the war we must have been one of the largest businesses of the kind in the world, issuing cheap editions of every kind of literature not only in English, but in French, German, Magyar and Spanish, and being about to start in Russian.

Nelsons was the largest employer in the print and publishing industry in Edinburgh

Likewise Nelsons had a progressive outlook towards social welfare provisions, establishing a number of welfare schemes and social institutions for its workforce. Employment was very much a family tradition, with brothers and sisters, extended family, and members of different generations being employed in the firm, most of whom lived in the South Side of Edinburgh.

Collection work began with reunions of ex-employees, which brought together employees from separate areas of the firm: one meeting focused on clerical and office workers from departments such as Wages, Export, Educational, and Management; another drew together individuals from the production side, including bookbinding, composing, and reproduction. Recordings of reminiscences took place at all gatherings. In addition SAPPHIRE conducted over 40 recorded individual interviews, each of 2–3 hours duration, with former Nelson employees. These interviews helped to fill in the gaps of the existing skeletal history of the firm. To complement these interviews a range of photographic and ephemeral material was collected. These include a range of photographs illustrating the social activities of the firm, such as dances, sporting events, and annual outings. A range of ephemeral material has also been given to the project by Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd at Walton-on-Thames, including a photographic album of the royal visit to the firm in 1948, the rifle club minute book, and newspaper cuttings. The information gathered was used as the basis of an exhibition, 'Spreading the Printed Word: Thomas Nelson and Sons' which was hosted at the Museum of Edinburgh between Aug. 2001 and Jan. 2002 and is currently travelling around various venues throughout Britain. The exhibition launch coincided with the publication by the SAPPHIRE team of *Thomas Nelson and Sons: Memories of an Edinburgh Printing House*, published by Tuckwell Press as part of their Flashbacks Series.

Current projects

Bringing the Page to Life

SAPPHIRE has recently received funding

> *Employment was very much a family tradition*

Figure 2 Papermaking in the Edinburgh area.

(from the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Pilgrim Trust, Gordon Fraser Charitable Trust, the Russell Trust, and John Lewis plc) to support its new project 'Bringing the Page to Life: Papermaking on the Water of Leith'. 'Bringing the Page to Life' will be the first sustained and focused attempt to record the oral and social history of the Scottish papermaking industry, which was a major employer in a number of districts in Scotland. It will focus on the Water of Leith, which with a number of mills was an important centre for papermaking in the Edinburgh area. A feasibility study has already brought forward 21 prospective interviewees who worked in various mills on the Water of Leith. It is hoped that these interviews with the men and women who worked in this industry will provide valuable insights into the relationship between the papermaking industry and the communities on which they were based. The research will culminate in an exhibition on the history of the papermaking industry at the Water of Leith Visitor Centre in early 2004, and the publication of a book on the history of papermaking to coincide with this exhibition.

Photographic project

SAPPHIRE has undertaken a visual recording of significant sites and workplaces related to Scottish print culture, including printing, publishing, and bookselling sites and workplaces. This photographic project is recording aspects from craft production and specialized work practices and techniques to mass production methods and techniques. It also aims to present exteriors and interiors of relevant buildings, company logos, work groups, work processes, and other aspects of print culture activity. These will be made available in the form of a CD-ROM and further funding will be sought to make them available online on a searchable database.

Prominent figures in the print and publishing industry

This initiative has undertaken to interview prominent people who have played a significant role in shaping the printing and publishing industry in Scotland. Recent interviews include John and Robert Bartholomew of Bartholomew Publishers, Edinburgh; Alan Waterston of Waterston's Printers, Edinburgh; and William Kay of Kay's Bookshop, Edinburgh.

Future projects

During the establishment of SAPPHIRE a number of key areas in the history of the Scottish printing and publishing industry were identified to form focal areas for the archive collection, providing not only detailed case studies but also wide-ranging coverage of the industry. They will investigate areas such as bookselling, technological change, and the role and history of trade unions in the industry. Case studies will include firms such as Blackie and Son, Collins, and Aberdeen University Press.

Dissemination of archival material and access

While the work of SAPPHIRE has resulted primarily in the creation of a permanent archive, its material has also been disseminated in a number of ways to maximize access. Every endeavour has been made to make the results of the research of SAPPHIRE available to interested parties. In addition to publications and exhibitions previously mentioned, the archive is catalogued and access is available through SAPPHIRE's website at www.sapphire.ac.uk to digitized elements of the archive. The catalogue allows material to be accessed and cross-referenced by such fields as name of interviewer, interviewee, firm where employed, and department. Interested parties can also apply to SAPPHIRE for a password to access full transcripts of the Thomas Nelson and Sons interviews online and find out about the aims and objectives, project development, current projects, funding and grants, staff, and links to other oral history projects. Recent press interest in the exhibition 'Spreading the Printed Word' has also resulted in widespread awareness of the work of SAPPHIRE.

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