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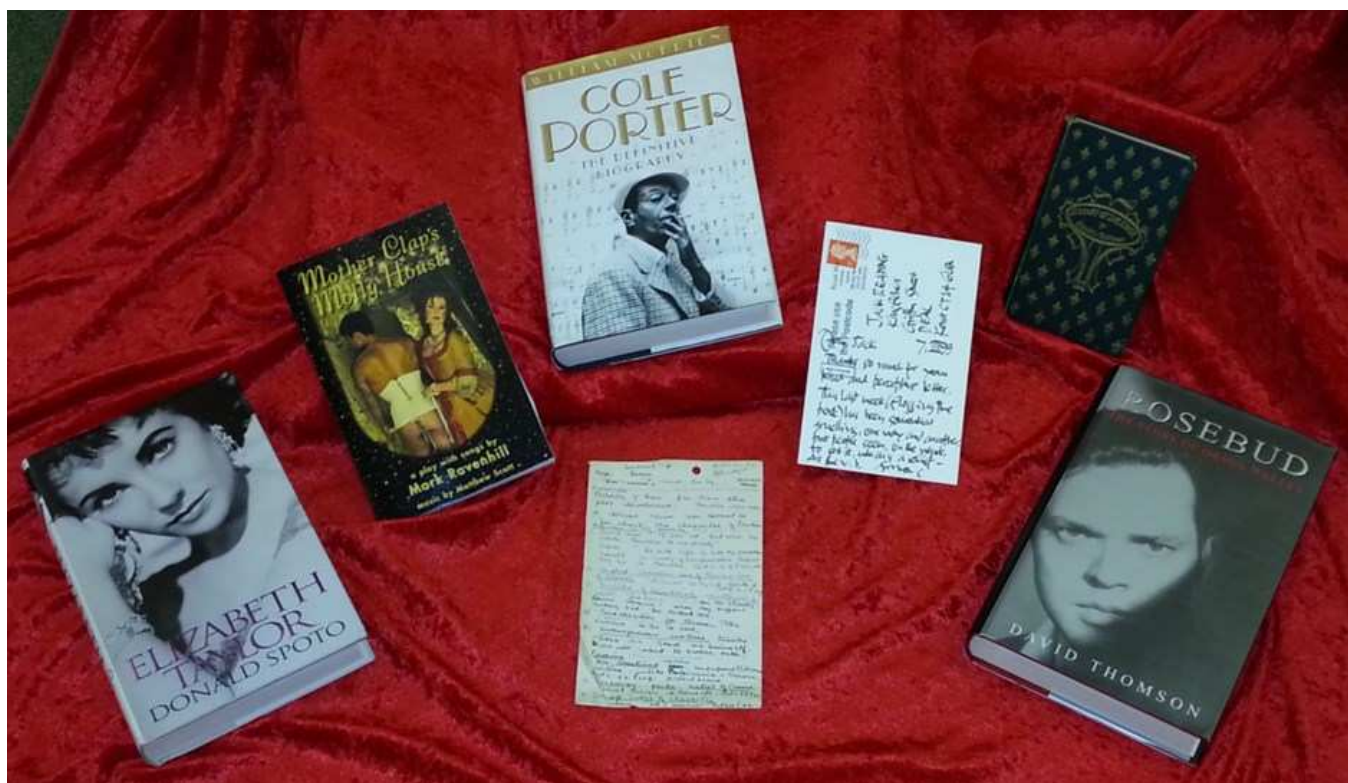
Something Old, Something New: Rare Books and RDA

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In 2013, the University of Kent transitioned to RDA from AACR2 across its entire lending collection. However, only some elements of RDA were introduced to our rare book bib records. These were the content, media and carrier fields, and the move from the 260 to the 264. This was done on a macro level, meaning that our Special Collections records were left predominantly in AACR2. Moving forward, this would not be sustainable, and to unify our regular book stock with our rare book material, we needed to create a cataloguing process to encompass RDA and DCRM(b).

Adapting our existing records and ongoing cataloguing of our standard stock has been straightforward, but implementing this to our rare book cataloguing has been an uphill struggle. The main reason for this is that no real decision has been made in the wider library community about how to move forward with RDA and DCRM (b). Another reason for this difficulty was that our multiple collections had all been catalogued inconsistently in the past, so we had very little to work from to form a functional and sustainable process.

Special Collections and Archives at Kent consist of a variety of material from nationally and internationally significant collections. We only use RDA to catalogue our book material however, so this affects our British Cartoon Archive and Special Collections the most. The BCA is largely made up of original artwork, but has a library of books about cartoon and caricature attached to it. Special Collections contains a selection of book and archive based material, our strengths lying in Victorian and Edwardian theatrical history, the history of science and literature.



© University of Kent: Books and ephemera from Special Collections at the University of Kent

Recently, Kent has had a new lease of life within its archives, from the inception of new collections, to brand new storage and reading room facilities. But discoverability isn't just about a physical presence; part of enabling discoverability of our collections involves the effective use of cataloguing. Our users would be most familiar with the way RDA surfaces through our regular stock, so it made sense for us to work with RDA to improve the discoverability of our rare material.

We deliberated for some time about whether we should create a policy and guide to provide a clear outline of how we would undertake this. We held off in the hope that a final decision would be made that would have a wider community impact.

Rochester Cathedral Cataloguing Project: a catalyst for change

A high-profile collaborative project between the University of Kent and Rochester Cathedral was on the horizon, requiring us to make a decision sooner rather than later.



Flickr: 'Rochester Cathedral -2' by bvi4092 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>

In early 2013 the Heritage Lottery Fund awarded the Cathedral a grant of £3.55 million to make its "hidden collections" more accessible to the public and researchers and to refurbish the medieval library. With its collection of approximately two hundred pre-1701 and 2,500 volumes dating 1701-1901 that had never been catalogued to currently recognised standards, part of the deliverables of the project were to create and add catalogue records for these books and manuscripts using standards MARC21 and RDA/DCRM(b).

With a projected period of six months to complete cataloguing of the collection, and significantly less time to develop and implement a cataloguing policy for it, we felt the urgency of such a decision bearing down on us.

Kick-starting the process for change

We started by forming a working group of colleagues from across the metadata and special collections and archives teams. We felt this collaborative approach would complement the aims of developing a bespoke policy for such a culturally significant collection, due to the range of specialisms being brought to the table. The team consisted of the Senior Library Assistant from Special Collections, bringing knowledge of the University's special collections; the Senior Library Assistant from Metadata, contributing cataloguing advice; the Librarian from Canterbury Cathedral, with expertise in rare and ecclesiastical books and manuscripts; and Josie and Rachel, who specialise in cataloguing the rare and special book collections at the University of Kent. Initial discussions centred on the impact of RDA across all collections, including affiliated cathedral libraries, and how this would affect the standard of cataloguing required for these, whilst keeping in mind our recent move to the Resource Discovery System Primo, and the affect this would have on our global discoverability.



© University of Kent: The working group (L-R, Jane Gallagher, Josie Caplehome, Rachel Dickinson, Tony Whitehurst)

After much discussion between all those involved, we decided that a practical approach would be to divide all valid MARC21 values, from the leader, right up to tag field 994, into thirds, sharing an entire bibliographic record between the three cataloguers. We began to build the ultimate bibliographic record template to cover every eventuality. We considered every field, looking at the potential use within our cataloguing. This helped us to decide whether the field would be necessary, how we could use it to support a hybrid standard, and how to implement this at a practical level so that it would be beneficial to users searching through our specialist material. This involved all three of us learning new information, as prior to our work, Kent had never had a specific rare book cataloguing expert.

We each produced a set of guidelines for the sections we took, and then we amalgamated them to form one document, set out numerically with examples. The goal was for the final draft of this to be used for training new staff in the art of rare book cataloguing in the future.

We regrouped with the original task force to present this work, inviting the manager for the Rochester Cathedral Cataloguing Project to join us.

We had faith in our own work, but we asked the group for brutal honesty in order to establish if our guidelines were feasible, achievable and sustainable, all the while keeping the timescale of the Rochester Cathedral project in the forefront of our minds. The feedback was very positive, and with some minor adaptations, the three sets of guidelines were edited into one staff user manual. This was expanded to include appendices and glossaries to improve understanding of rare book terminology and to support future staff training.

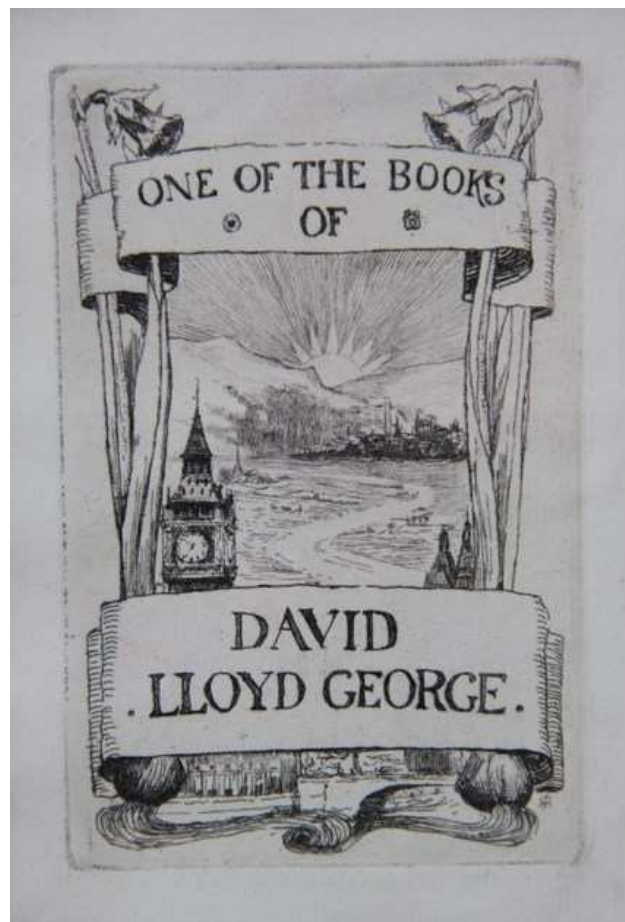
From our initial discussions, through to the last day of editing and printing our guidelines, we spent around three months on the whole process, which was undertaken around all other business.

Implementation

We began to implement our decisions into cataloguing the collection of former Prime Minister David Lloyd George, which was partially catalogued some decades ago. It felt like a good place to start because it lacked essential metadata, as well as the additional detail required for rare book cataloguing. We then ran comparisons between what had existed before and the improvements that had been made as a result of this process. We found some very clear benefits to using an RDA and DCRM(b) hybrid.

Replacing the 260 with the 264, which allows repetition with relevant indicators, has led to clearer labelling of specific elements of the book production process. Used in collaboration with Primo, it has allowed our users to better identify the information they need, thus limiting unnecessary handling of our items.

The 264 can be used effectively in conjunction with 700 fields. The ability to use limitless 700 fields alongside a wide range of relator terms, is a huge benefit for rare book cataloguing. We are able to freely express any relationship to the work from booksellers, printers and binders, to illustrators, engravers and cartographers. A user searching for a specific engraver would not have benefited from previous practice as this would not have been included in the metadata. We can also use it to trace former owners as far back as we evidence for, tracing the journey the book itself has made through its lifetime.



Extension of abbreviations as well as replacement of Latin terms such as 'et al' is often viewed contentiously. However, user experience should always take precedence, and this change has been beneficial to students not only searching our catalogue, but extracting metadata for citation purposes. With the inception of Primo, it has also been hugely beneficial to our external and potentially global audiences, with whom we can share clear metadata that doesn't require specialist knowledge of cataloguing practice. In an age of clear and instant information, this element of RDA allows straightforward communication of key facts.

Taking inspiration from RDA, we also made changes to how terms such as 'polyglot' were used at Kent. Although we still use these terms, we now expand them to include the specific languages and how these are structured within the text. This is particularly useful when the 008 language field limits you to specifying only the term 'multiple languages' without further descriptive options.

Additionally, we now code the 040 to reflect the cataloguing standards we have developed for our special and rare book collections which appears as ‡a UkCyUK ‡b eng ‡c UkCyUK ‡e rda ‡e dcrcmb

We followed on from implementation by inviting rare book cataloguers from Lambeth Palace Library to meet with us. The aim of this was to share our work and seek review of it through the experience and expertise they hold in this field. Their positive feedback about our improvements was extremely welcome. It is great when, after a period of concentrated effort, the result is ratified. Suggestions they made have been added to our policy and are now being implemented across all collections, including the Cathedrals.

Our vision is ambitious, but why not?

We want to continue to review and improve all metadata, and not rest on how we do things today. We should always be thinking of tomorrow and how the metadata we create will benefit future library users and rare book cataloguers. For instance, we are already reviewing our recent work and are creating a series of wiki pages which allows improved access for staff training and support resources.

We want to continue to build-upon all existing relationships with our partners. The next phase of the Rochester Cataloguing project will see us training volunteers at the Cathedral in basic cataloguing. This is necessary as these volunteers will run the library without the support of an in-house librarian. The end of the project will not signal the end of Kent's relationship with the Cathedral, we will continue to support the volunteers in their work.

Ultimately, we want to be a centre that's known for good practice and excellence, a place from which we can reach out and offer support to other institutions, much like the support we have received from Canterbury Cathedral and Lambeth Palace.



References (Photographs)

1. University of Kent Special Collections books and ephemera © University of Kent
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3. The working group © University of Kent
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