‘DURKAN & ROSS’ AND BEYOND

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For any member of staff of the National Library of Scotland involved in the acquisition and cataloguing of early printed books, *Early Scottish Libraries* by John Durkan and Anthony Ross¹—often referred to as ‘Durkan & Ross’—soon becomes an indispensable work of reference. Listing, by order of owner (in three sequences: bishops, other individual owners, institutions) all printed books known to its authors as having been in Scottish ownership before the Reformation, this is one of the first aids one reaches for when struggling with an early, possibly Scottish, signature written in a pre-Reformation printed book. With the help of ‘Durkan & Ross’ and, indeed, frequently of John Durkan himself, many inscriptions have been identified in existing or newly acquired NLS stock or sometimes in books being considered for purchase. In this way ‘Durkan & Ross’ has been continually refined and expanded with reference to the holdings of NLS, a process that has happened also in other libraries.²

‘Durkan & Ross’ is certainly an ever-growing working-tool, and at a guess its growth is not slowing down, but rather accelerating. Reference tools of this kind can acquire a life of their own, but it would be wrong to assume that it is merely this inward-looking use of ‘Durkan & Ross’ for its own enlargement which is providing the impetus in the search for more data. David Pearson, in his useful

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¹ J. Durkan and A. Ross, *Early Scottish Libraries* (Glasgow, 1961); expanded from *IR*, ix (1958), 5-167.

pamphlet on provenance indexes,3 which, by the way, describes 'Durkan & Ross' as 'an invaluable work for which there is no English equivalent', not only documents the comparative lack of available provenance indexes but also illustrates growing interest in this area of bibliographical studies. He is certainly correct about this. Catalogues of early printed books or manuscripts now routinely have provenance notes and indexes; if not, reviewers want to know why not. Moreover, there is increasing interest in including both notes on and the indexing of provenance in machine-readable library catalogues, which should eventually bring to our attention a larger number of items from a larger number of sources, enabling listings such as 'Durkan & Ross' to be expanded. This enhanced status of provenance information is most appropriate at a time when the Leverhulme Trust has made a handsome grant for research towards A History of the Book in Britain, which Cambridge University Press has agreed to publish, in six volumes.4 This is not to say that the projected History has stimulated provenance studies; it may be, rather, that students of provenance have provided ready support for the idea of the History. If more British bibliographers are now interested in studying provenance than was previously the case, it could be partly because in the light of the achievements of retrospective British bibliography—most notably the machine-readable Eighteenth-Century Short Title Catalogue (ESTC)—they see less scope for enumerative bibliography.

In a prefatory note to Early Scottish Libraries the editors wrote that the work was 'intended to serve as a pilot list which will be extended from time to time, as research continues, by the publication of new material in The Innes Review', and also commented: 'It is hoped eventually to list manuscripts as well as printed books, and to extend the chronological limits of the survey backwards into the earlier middle ages'. In 1978 The Bibliothèque published its first supplementary listing, and the editor invited further contributions, noting that 'ownership inscriptions recorded in these articles will be incorporated in due course in a future

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4 Part of the Leverhulme Trust grant is being used to support a research programme (Research Fellow: Margaret L. Ford) to record British ownership of books and manuscripts 1400-1557. For a brief report see Publishing History, xxix (1991), 69-70.