

Introduction

In 2010, a thesis was submitted to the School of Library and Information Studies in University College Dublin as part of my MLIS on examining the cherished Ladybird books published from 1940 to 1980. Exploring the publishing history, it questioned whether it was feasible for the series during this period to be catalogued according to rare book standards by examining the metadata used for this collections held in selected university libraries in the UK and Ireland. For a feasibility study, it was my objective to compile a descriptive catalogue of Ladybird Books from 1940-1980 in an attempt to aggregate bibliographic information regarding the early works of Ladybird Ltd that have previously been scattered across a variety of sources into one single resource.

These collections form part of the cultural heritage but they can only transmit that heritage when they are adequately accessible. In the case of Ladybird books from the mid twentieth century, they have become increasingly popular for collectors in recent years. However, for libraries and research studies, they remain curiously under-regarded, poorly documented and misunderstood. To rectify this, 5 academic library catalogues from Ireland and the UK were examined to compare and evaluate any non-conventional problems associated with standard bibliographic entries of Ladybird books from the period 1940-1980. Results showed that there was an inadequate recording of the necessary 500 Notes field for these books with some inconsistencies in the required Series field that gave incomplete and misleading information about the item being described.

In resolving any areas for concern in the library catalogues and to eradicate uncertainty regarding what has been published by Ladybird during these years, this thesis endeavoured to create a complete bibliographical tool in the form of a descriptive catalogue, the aim of which revealed a cultural and historical influence to determine whether or not this early Ladybird series is deserving of curatorship according to a rare book collection. Previous work had been done in UCD by Christine Ryan on constructing bibliographic information for the Bartlett Collection of the early Puffin Series held in the Church of Ireland College of Education (CICE) in 2004, which provided recognition and better classification for Puffin books as a learning resource.

Thus a descriptive catalogue focussing mainly on information provided in the 500 Notes field for this study may hopefully serve as a starting point in building official descriptive records of a first edition Ladybird Book collection for a public or research library in the UK or Ireland, which may function as a potential cultural learning resource.

Methodology

According to some in the publishing business, it takes quite a while to know how many books the publisher has actually sold (Lamb, 1998: 167). Therefore, the prime basis for the compilation of a catalogue for this thesis is because it has been acknowledged by the editorial director for the company, Douglas Keen, that Ladybird Books Ltd did not keep many records of the books they published at this time in the later years of the firm, nor was book production organized or researched before (Mullin. 2002). However, this loss of company records for many firms during the Second World War, which has seriously hindered book historians, can be attributed to patriotic sacrifices to waste-paper drives.

As a result of this fact, many newspaper or magazine articles concerning Ladybird Books, are ambivalent regarding an exact figure of production output during this period with regular estimations of 1000 in one to over 2500 titles in another. However, the most comprehensible and substantial work that has been researched on this collection, is the work of bookseller Robert Mullin and the team of The Wee Web (Mullin. 2002), who states that between 1940 and 1980 Wills and Hepworth/Ladybird Books, published 63 different series, collectively containing 663 books. Whether this can be taken as fact or not, one may never know as it is impossible to know how much was produced. Nevertheless, after examination, there appears to be some errors in the number of titles according to Mullin (2002). It appears that there are rather 613 titles between 1940 and 1980 as some of the titles listed by Mullin (2002) are published two or three years subsequent to 1980. Therefore 613 titles formed the body of the catalogue.

During the production of each of these series, Wills and Hepworth produced a catalogue of titles to appear at the back of each first edition book in that individual series, while in later standard editions this was modified as just a 'title list' often with reprinted titles from later years added in sporadically, making the list unchronological and mismatched. These were only available if one wrote to Ladybird requesting the free catalogue or list. In writing to Ladybird Books Ltd, I requested if the series catalogues were still available for perusal. Unfortunately, none of the catalogues produced during the period under review exist today.

Consequently, the assemblage of a complete descriptive and illustrated catalogue of first edition Ladybird books in contrast to a title list published during and after each series offers increased utility and identification of these books. In the recording of bibliographic information of the physical history and binding information of the book for this catalogue, the requirements differ significantly from the needs of the user for whom the catalogue is merely the key to the contents of the collection.

In establishing how best these books should be catalogued for this study, 5 web-based catalogues were investigated to discover which records of Ladybird books displayed the much needed 500 Notes field in default single record displays. The catalogues examined were academic library catalogues from the U.K. and Ireland. It should be noted that since these libraries are most likely to have an OPAC, the sample chosen for this study is not necessarily representative of catalogues in general. From surveying these records, this gave me an indication of what areas needed to be revised in the compilation of a descriptive catalogue for this book collection.

Not displaying the 500 field may hide the only field that differentiates the item from other items in the collection. Failure to display certain elements of description such as the 500 field may give users incomplete or misleading information about the item being described. Using the 300 field for Physical Description is simply not enough for older materials. It is a significant issue, with the importance given to this type of information by users highlighted by the results of a study conducted by the University of Toronto in 2002. (Carlyle & Timmons, 2002: 195). For librarians the 500 and related fields retain an acknowledged importance, especially in the cataloguing of rare books, but beyond this, these fields offer great benefit to users when searching.

To gain a professional understanding and knowledge of descriptive records for older books, I entered a search term for Ladybird books from 1939 onwards in the International League of Antiquarian Books (ILAB) database on 13 June 2010 to see if these books may be considered as antiquarian books. This search retrieved 125 hits. The earliest record retrieved was the very first book that appears in the catalogue in this study entitled *Bunnikin's Picnic Party* (1940). Unfortunately, few illustrations were available which thwarts classification due to various reprints. The latest title to appear in this database is from 2007. Although the database does not make MARC displays available to users, it was clear from the substantial binding and physical history information that the descriptions were of a standard that adequately identifies and compliments these vintage books. It was this high standard of descriptive information provided in this database that presented me with the format for the catalogue in my study.

Another reference tool used for this thesis was the [Copac National, Academic, and Specialist Library Catalogue](#) (2008). A search of Ladybird books from 1939 onwards resulted in 7115 hits entered on 15 June 2010. Although the descriptions in the Notes field was limited compared to the ILAB database, this provided my research with the correct layout design of the field titles and to correctly reference punctuation especially in the 245 Title field and the 300 Physical Details field.

The CURL Minimum Standards for Bibliographic Records (2003) was consulted for the updates in bibliographical standards especially in Section B for Post 1800 imprints on 16 June 2010. In the case of very rare books in the catalogue, the code "rbgenr" for rare book genre was adopted in the records Note field.

The field entries used in the catalogue include:

- Title
- Author
- Publication
- Physical Description
- Series field
- Notes field

In some instances, depending on the title, Edition Statements and Translations have been included as separate fields from the Notes field for better clarification.

Critically there is no one resource or online database that provides a complete catalogue of all 613 front cover illustrations and this has become one of the aims of this study as well as providing a complete catalogue of these books during the period under investigation.

Outcomes of Creating the Catalogue

The outcome of carefully completing a total descriptive catalogue for Ladybird publications from 1940 to 1980 has revealed a great deal about whether the vintage children's book should be catalogued descriptively in the dual disciplines of Curatorship and Children's Literature. Some books that were crucial to the successful realisation of the complete catalogue have proved frustratingly difficult to locate. Therefore, 4 out of the 613 books in the catalogue have been excluded. The contents of the catalogue should be valuable for all those interested in early children's literature regardless of whether the complete collection is available to them or not. There is no claim that this catalogue is at all without its errors or that this is the single method or approach in making this a more renowned collection of early children's books. No doubt the reader should find some errors contained within. However, from undertaking this project I have answered certain key questions relating to this feasibility study.

In terms of why these books should be given a 'rare book' status, the answer has been proven in the literature review regarding these books in the physical composition and format of the books. Also the fact that they contain material that by today's standards would be considered non-PC with illustrations depicting the style and sentimentality of a recently bygone era, constitute these books as what is now regarded as 'rare books'. For example, a good edition of the Well-Loved Tales Series 606d's 'Cinderella' (1964) accompanied by its original dust-wrapper can fetch up to £300 (Birtles 2004) on eBay and competition can be fiercely intense among collectors.

Accordingly, these books should be treated as such in an appropriate library rather than allowing this historical collection to remain undocumented. Perhaps this collection may be taught as one of the modern children's book collections in the multiple LIS disciplines of Children's Literature, Rare Books Curatorship and Book History.

References

- Birtles, J. 2004, "Ladybird Books Provide Early Learning in Investment", *Independent on Sunday*, 26 Sept., [Online] available at http://www.theweeweb.co.uk/ladybird/independent_interview.php (accessed 28/5/2010).
- Carlyle, Allyson and Timmons, Traci E. 2002, "Default Record Displays in Web-Based Catalogs", *The Library Quarterly*, Vol. 72, No. 2, Apr, pp. 197-204.
- Lamb, Wendy. 1998, "Strange Business: The Publishing Point of View", *Signal*, No. 87, Sept, pp. 167-173.
- Mullin, R. 2002, "A Ladybird History", The Wee Web [Online] available at http://www.theweeweb.co.uk/ladybird/ladybird_history.php (accessed 20/5/2010).

Mullin, R. 2002, "Interview With Douglas Keen", The Wee Web [Online] available at http://www.theweeweb.co.uk/ladybird/douglas_keen.php (accessed 28/5/2010).S

Stevenson, Iain. (2010) *Book Makers: British Publishing in the Twentieth Century*. London, The British Library.