THE LOCATION REGISTER OF TWENTIETH-CENTURY ENGLISH LITERARY MANUSCRIPTS AND LETTERS: A REPORT ON PROGRESS

BY DAVID C. SUTTON
University of Reading

The establishment of the Location Register project at Reading University was widely reported a few years ago.[1] Considerable interest has been shown in the project's use of computers,[2] and in its interim findings.[3] As the fifth and final year of the project's first phase draws to a close, this article presents a resume of the Register's history and aims, with a survey of some of its findings and its future prospects.

The need for a register of locations of literary manuscripts has been strongly felt for some years. As long ago as November 1972 Michael Holroyd and Paul Levy, on behalf of the Strachey Trust, floated the idea in *The Times Literary Supplement*. At first the proposal was treated with scepticism and even hostility. The *TLS* received several defensive letters arguing that the National Register of Archives covered literary manuscripts as much as they needed to be covered.

The Strachey Trust continued to press its case, however, and in 1979 it received powerful support. SCONUL (the Standing Conference of National and University Libraries) organized a major conference on literary manuscripts which heard Philip Larkin's magisterial paper 'A neglected responsibility: contemporary literary manuscripts' (later published in *Encounter*). This conference set in train the moves which led to the setting up of the Location Register project at Reading in 1982, with such influential sponsors as the Arts Council, the British Library, the Leverhulme Trust, the Strachey Trust, the British Academy, and the British Council.

Inclusiveness

The Location Register includes all types of papers (from manuscripts, typescripts, and correspondence to laundry bills and annotated menus) of all types of literary authors. No attempt is made to separate out 'canonical' or 'serious' writers. The literary papers of Ethel M. Dell, Marie Corelli, and James Blish (creator of 'Star Trek') are listed alongside those of Pound, Eliot,

[1] For example, notes in *TLS* (4 March 1983), p. 214; *British Book News* (January 1983), p. 3; *American Archivist* (Summer 1983), pp. 344–45; *Museums Bulletin* (January 1983), p. 192; *Aslib Information* (February 1983), pp. 53–54; *Journal of the Society of Archivists* (April 1984), p. 328.
[2] David C. Sutton, 'A computerised union catalogue of literary manuscripts', *Program* (April 1984), pp. 170–73.
[3] David C. Sutton, 'A highly original paper chase', *Times Higher Education Supplement* (5 April 1985), p. 13.

Joyce, and Beckett. Writers for children, like Alison Uttley, Beatrix Potter, and Arthur Ransome, are particularly well represented.

'Twentieth-century' is interpreted as broadly as possible, to include any author who lived in any part of the century. Writers like Kipling and Hardy, who belong to both the twentieth and the nineteenth centuries, are included in full, but so are such quintessentially Victorian figures as Meredith (d. 1909), Swinburne (d. 1909), McGonagall (d. 1902), and even Wilde (d. 1900) and Ruskin (d. January 1900!).

A similarly broad view is taken of what constitutes 'English' literature. Authors who adopted British or Irish nationality (James, Eliot, Donleavy) are included, but so are those who renounced theirs (Auden, Charteris, Levertov). Immigrants, refugees, and writers with close links with the British Isles all find a place, so that the Register is enriched by the presence of authors like Rabindranath Tagore, Wole Soyinka, Dennis Brutus, Buchi Emecheta, and C. L. R. James.

Findings

Philip Larkin's 1979 paper was pessimistic: he feared that most twentieth-century British literary manuscripts had already departed for libraries in North America. The researches of the Location Register give rather more grounds for optimism.

Of course, there are British authors who original papers are mostly in American libraries: John Masefield, Evelyn Waugh, John Lehmann, V. S. Pritchett, and C. S. Forester, for example (all in Austin, Texas); Iris Murdoch and Angus Wilson (in Iowa); J. R. R. Tolkien (in Marquette University, Milwaukee), Dorothy M. Richardson (at Yale), and so on. A great deal of material, however, does remain in the British Isles. There are splendid, and growing collections in our major national and university libraries. Collections like the John Wain archive in Edinburgh University or the Samuel Beckett archive in Reading University compare with any in the world. And, above all, there is an increasing recognition of the importance of modern literary papers and an interest in building up collections.

Archivists and keepers of special collections in Britain are now much more likely to have some sort of collecting policy, to solicit gifts, and to welcome unexpected donations of modern literary papers. The growing collections in public and university libraries fall into three main groups:

(a) papers of prominent local writers (Virginia Woolf at the University of Sussex, Adrian Henri at the University of Liverpool, Helen B. Cruickshank at the University of Stirling, Alan Brownjohn in Lewisham Public Library, Edward Carpenter in Sheffield Public Library);

(b) collections of writers who have for various reasons been 'adopted' by a particular university or its library (Samuel Beckett and G. S. Fraser at Reading, Gavin Ewart and Anthony Thwaite at Hull, Barbara Pym at the Bodleian, William Plomer at Durham, Norah Hoult at Trinity College Dublin);

(c) accumulations of miscellaneous papers, some of which are particularly appropriate (the original of Tony Harrison's 'Newcastle is Peru' is in the University of Newcastle Library, for instance), but many of which are quite random.

Another encouraging sign is that more libraries now seem prepared to take the risk of acquiring papers of comparatively young writers — like the poetry manuscripts of Tom Paulin, Paul Mills and Paul Muldoon recently bought for the Brotherton Collection, Leeds, or those of Andrew Motion acquired by the University of Hull. This is, of course, the sort of risk that American repositories have always been prepared to take.

Publication

The Location Register's findings about twentieth-century literary authors will be published by the British Library in the summer of 1988. All the information collected is stored in machine-readable form, and could be sorted to produce a variety of microfiche catalogues or, indeed, processed to make the Register available as an on-line data base. For the present, however, the publishers have decided that a traditional book-form publication would be the most acceptable and accessible way of making the information available, and publication will be in two large volumes.

The Future

The success of the first five years of the project has encouraged its Advisory Group to seek funding for a second five-year phase (running from 1988 to the end of 1992). This second phase would have three main objects:

(1) to survey and list British holdings of British literary manuscripts for the earlier period 1700–1900;

(2) to maintain and update the project's existing data base of information about twentieth-century British literary manuscripts;

(3) to investigate the possibility of mounting the Register as an on-line data base at some time in the 1990s.

The criteria established for the first phase would be carried forward into the second, so that there would be comparatively little overlap with the detailed but highly selective *Index of English Literary Manuscripts*. The Location Register would, for instance, aim to include all of Dale Spender's *Mothers of the novel: 100 good women writers before Jane Austen*. But whether or not the second phase gets under way, the success of the first phase is assured and its original advocates have been vindicated.