

THE MANUSCRIPT COPYING PROGRAM IN ENGLAND

IT WAS the mass bombing of London early in the war that impressed upon us the seriousness of the danger to important collections in English libraries. During eight months of "phony war" many collections had not been evacuated or adequately protected before explosives and incendiaries rained from the sky.

With the fall of France various individuals and organizations in this country became concerned about the problem. It remained, however, for the American Council of Learned Societies to take the first constructive step to preserve some of these treasures. Early in the summer of 1940 Dr. Waldo Leland called a meeting in Washington of those most interested to discuss possible methods whereby copies of books and manuscripts in danger of destruction could be brought to this country. After various procedures had been reviewed, it was agreed that microfilm offered the greatest promise in that it was inexpensive, small in bulk, could be processed rapidly, and allowed duplicate copies to be made at a low cost. At the conclusion of the meeting the Committee on Microcopying Materials for Research was appointed. Later it was made a permanent committee of the American Council of Learned Societies.¹

During the summer Dr. Kellar circularized historians with a view to determining their wants and needs. The "want list" compiled as a result of this circularization assumed amazing proportions. It showed full recognition among American scholars of the value and importance of English manuscript holdings and of American needs for copies of them.

In the fall the Rockefeller Foundation generously provided a sizable grant for the specific purpose of copying, in England, manuscripts in danger of destruction through bombing. With the program a definite reality, the appointment of a Sub-committee on Selection,

¹ The committee originally had the following members: Chairman, Keyes Metcalf, Harvard University; Secretary, Vernon Tate, the National Archives; Archibald MacLeish, Library of Congress; Herbert Kellar, McCormick Historical Association; and George Schwegmann, Library of Congress. This committee was later renamed the Joint Committee on Microcopying Materials for Research of the National Research Council, American Council of Learned Societies, and American Council of Education, and the following new members added: Evan J. Crane, Ohio State University; Thomas P. Fleming, Medical Library, Columbia University; Harold W. Jones, Army Medical Library; W. H. Kenerson, National Research Council; Mark A. May, Institute of Human Relations, Yale University; Donald J. Shank, American Council on Education; and Irwin Stewart, Washington, D.C.

under the direction of Dr. Kellar, gave assurance that the needs of all fields of scholarly interest would be considered. For the first time a long-cherished dream, whereby copies of the important manuscript collections would be available in this country, became a possibility. The plan was to deposit microfilm negatives in the Library of Congress where they would be available for duplication to any accredited scholar at a very low cost. The Modern Language Association through its Rotograph Series had followed such a plan with considerable success, but the scope and number of manuscripts covered was limited, whereas this program contemplated the copying of whole collections!

In January, 1941, the committee appointed University Microfilms of Ann Arbor, Michigan, to undertake the actual microfilming of the materials selected by Dr. Kellar's committee. This firm already had cameras operating in English depositories, so that the work could be started with a minimum of delay. Further, Mr. Arundell Esdaile, formerly secretary of the British Museum and president of the British Library Association, kindly undertook to approach the custodians of the numerous collections for the support and co-operation so essential to the success of the project. Needless to say, the reaction of the English librarians was all that could be hoped for, and almost without exception enthusiastic support was assured.

The staff of the Early Modern English Dictionary at the University of Michigan, representing the needs of the modern language scholars in the United States, was drawn into the task of selection. In less than two weeks this staff designated over five thousand manuscripts of particular interest in various fields—medicine, science, law, music, history, philology, and literature. Selection in all instances was guided by both the importance of the manuscript and its availability in contemporary reprints. If a reprint was available the manuscript was not selected for copying. Shortly after the completion of the choices just described, the Committee on Selection submitted approved lists.

Additional camera equipment was purchased and shipped abroad as rapidly as delivery could be made. Fortunately all reached England safely. Limitations on the supply of equipment, however, made it impossible to operate in libraries other than those having large collections. These were the British Museum, London, and its evacuation center, the National Library of Wales at Aberystwyth; the Bodleian Library at Oxford University; the Public Record Office,

London, and one of its evacuation points; and the Cambridge University and College libraries.

The raw negative film is purchased in England and processed there. After inspection it is delivered to the American Embassy in London and shipped to the Library of Congress by diplomatic pouch. The hundred-foot reels are numbered consecutively and are shipped in lots of five. In this way it can be determined if any are lost in transit. Such an accident has happened but once, and missing rolls were later replaced.

The scope of the original project was extended considerably after work was begun. The original grant from the Rockefeller Foundation to the American Council of Learned Societies of \$30,000 was later increased by an additional \$100,000 and the project expanded correspondingly.

The committee has planned a broad program designed to bring to this country a representative selection of manuscript holdings touching on many fields of scholarly interest. Some indication of the wide variety of material to be included can be gained from a few examples taken from the "want lists" submitted. It should be realized that each of the lists may contain as many as a thousand or more manuscripts. In most instances the practice has been to copy the series or collection in its entirety. On order, for example, are the following items from the Public Record Office: 105 Pipe Rolls, or declared accounts of the Pipe Office; Colonial Office Papers, Classes 5, 10, 24, 29, 38, 43, 72, 124, 128, 153, 166, 195, 218, 224, 227, 254, 259, and 326, all relating to the North American colonies; the Amherst Papers of the War Office; records of the Chancery (charter, close, and patent rolls); memoranda rolls of the Exchequer, 1632-1660; State Papers, Domestic; Monastic Cartularies; Common Pleas Rolls; King's Bench Plea Rolls; and High Court of Admiralty Papers. From the British Museum there are wanted the Register of the Privy Council, the Cottonian and Harleian Manuscripts, portions of the Hardwicke and Newcastle papers from the Additional Manuscripts, the Thomason Collection of pamphlets published during the Civil War and Commonwealth, and the 108 volumes of the Classified Catalogue of Manuscripts.

A wide selection of more than fifteen hundred manuscripts from the Bodleian and Oxford College libraries, and more than three thousand volumes of Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Urdu, and other manuscripts from the Cambridge University libraries comprise part

of the list. Many of the more important manuscript collections owned by noble families or by smaller libraries have been scheduled for copying as well, but the filming has been postponed until work is finished on the larger collections. In addition a carefully selected list of illuminated manuscripts has been reserved for filming in full color. The first frames of this color series are now in the United States and appear extremely successful.

Some concept of the size of the project can be had from the fact that the thirty-one lists ordered to date, out of a total of forty contemplated, comprise approximately 25,000,000 pages.

The microfilm technique is still somewhat new in England, and although University Microfilms had cameras and operators there, it was necessary to obtain addition technicians and to educate the custodians of libraries in the aims of the project and the uses of the film. The shortage of skilled labor in England is severe. Since a knowledge of manuscripts was desirable, women with such experience have been employed with great success. Too much cannot be said in praise of those who have done so well despite the handicaps of unfamiliar equipment and a strange technique. Though the work progressed somewhat slowly at first, it has constantly gained speed: in 1941, 162,280 pages were copied; in 1942, 706,150 pages; and in 1943 through August, 670,000 pages.

Each microfilm carries as the first exposure a title card giving the name of the manuscript, the call or catalogue number of the library owning the manuscript, the condition of the original, the library in which the original is deposited, the order number of the manuscript, and in some instances the date. When the manuscript has been listed in a published catalogue, *i.e.* the British Museum Catalogue, or the Summary Catalogue of Western Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library, that number is given also. It is felt that this information is sufficient to identify the manuscript.

It is planned to catalogue these films and to publish lists of holdings. Sufficient information will be given so that a scholar desiring to use any of these films will be able to obtain positive copies from the Library of Congress at a very reasonable rate, simply by giving the identifying information given in these booklets. Thus for the first time American scholars will have easy access in the United States to a well-rounded and complete collection of manuscript material.

As would naturally be expected, the English librarians very properly raised certain questions regarding the wholesale copying of their

manuscript collections. Recognizing as they did the importance and necessity of preserving and protecting them against possible loss,² they still were somewhat hesitant to grant permission for wholesale copying by a procedure which would readily allow duplication in another country. Therefore it was agreed that there should be certain restrictions upon the use of this film; the film could be freely used for research purposes or quotation, but if the manuscript was to be edited or the film reproduced and published in facsimile or in type, the permission of the owning library must be obtained. This seems a perfectly reasonable stipulation and was readily agreed to.

Enough cannot be said in praise of the splendid co-operation of the librarians whose collections are being copied. While their collections have been protected by copying, the work has placed an increased burden on a staff already greatly reduced by war demands. In many instances the manuscripts had to be brought from places of safety for copying, or unusual arrangements made to locate the cameras in evacuation depositories. In spite of these difficulties there has been a ready acknowledgment of the importance of the project and an eagerness to get on with it. Credit, too, must be given to Mr. Esdaile whose unfailing attention to the arrangements and details of the work has contributed much to the success of the project.

It will be seen that we have really made but a small beginning on the total program. We hope that the work can be continued and expanded after the war to include not only English libraries but libraries of other countries as well—Europe, Asia, and South America. In this way we will gradually assemble the materials for research and make them available to American scholars. While we realize that the microfilm copy does not in many respects serve as adequately as does the original, in a great majority of cases it is adequate. There is further reassurance in the fact that there exist copies of these unique, irreplaceable manuscripts in a form which makes possible additional duplication, should the need arise.

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²It was not possible for many of the libraries to evacuate all of their holdings immediately at the beginning of bombing. In fact certain of the libraries still have not evacuated many of their collections due to the physical impossibility of finding safe places in the country and the task of packing and transporting them.