

## 1987/88 at Henry Morley

Molly Chuah\*

**Abstrak:** Penulis laporan ini menghuraikan pengalaman penyelidikan dan penemuannya semasa mengikuti kursus Sarjana Pengajian Perpustakaan dan Maklumat di School of Library, Archive and Information Studies (Henry Morley), University College London pada sesi 1987/88. Perhatian utama pengajian ditumpukan pada pengawasan bibliografi penerbitan rasmi di Britain dan Malaysia. Penggunaan piawaian bibliografi antarabangsa pada Malaysiana merupakan bidang kecil pengajian.

**Abstract:** This report describes the writer's research experience and findings while undertaking the MA course in Library and Information Studies at the School of Library, Archive and Information Studies (Henry Morley), University College London during the 1987/88 session. The bibliographic control of official publications in Britain and Malaysia was the substantive area of her study. The application of international bibliographic standards to Malaysiana was the subsidiary area.

The MA in Library and Information Studies course at University College London is essentially a research oriented programme. It provides one with an opportunity to make an indepth study into two areas within the field of library and information studies. The choices made in this instance were the bibliographic needs and provisions in selected subject areas; and the organisation and retrieval of knowledge.

Within one of these two areas a specific topic was identified for study for a dissertation. In view of the importance of Malaysian government publications and the problems of availability and access to these publications, it was decided that a study of the bibliographic control of British official publications be undertaken so as to draw some lessons for application to the Malaysian context.

Her Majesty's Stationery Office or HMSO, being a major government printer and publisher in Great Britain, was the first organisation to be looked into. In an above average year, the HMSO could be producing nearly 9000 new titles.<sup>1</sup> The Bibliographic Section of HMSO's Publications Centre plays an important role in the bibliographic control of British government publications as it is responsible for the production of a range of catalogues and lists of HMSO and international organizations' publications. Titles are input into computers and from this database the *Daily List*,

monthly and annual printed catalogues are produced. These catalogues are invaluable tools for tracing both in and out of print titles.

The Bibliographic Section also maintains a database known as Publication Research which gives details of all titles published since 1976, all HMSO titles published before 1976 which are still in print and all agency titles received by HMSO since 1976. This database is accessed by HMSO's order handling department, enquiries, sales offices and HMSO's bookshops to ascertain the stock status of a title. Information regarding recent HMSO titles is held on Prestel, providing customers with details on the very date of publication. Specific titles are advertised on Prestel and customers may transmit their orders through it.

The Bibliographic Section also provides a telephone enquiry service, responding to queries as varied as bookshop opening times or subsidiary legislation made under certain Acts. It also checks and deals with written enquiries on orders and titles.

However, there is an increasing number of official publications not undertaken by HMSO but independently by government agencies themselves.<sup>2</sup> This group of non-HMSO publications was not covered by any major bibliographic aids

\* Pustakawan Tiingkatan Biasa, Perpustakaan Institut Pengajian Tinggi, Universiti Malaya.

until 1980 when Chadwyck-Healey first issued their *Catalogue of British Official Publications Not Published by HMSO*. It was thus necessary to investigate how this catalogue is compiled. A discussion with its editor, David Worthington, revealed that the compilers relied heavily on a researcher in their employment at the Bodleian Library, a copyright deposit library. This researcher checks her card index of publications received against Chadwyck-Healey catalogues and then prepares a list of items received by Bodleian but not by Chadwyck-Healey. Publication lists, periodicals of official organisations and newspapers are also scanned for publication announcements.

Tracking down publications for inclusion in this catalogue is not without problems. Personal contacts established in official organisations break down with transfer of officers. The decentralised nature of departmental publishing and distribution operations mean that several sources of supply have to be checked. Moreover, government publications usually have very small print-runs and consequently they go out of print shortly after release. Many departments do not publicise their publications and seldom maintain adequate distribution channels. The rather narrow interpretation of "publication" adopted by some officials results in the restriction of circulation of materials to a specialised group of readers.

Despite these problems the compilers have succeeded in adding 21 new contributors in 1987, relying on the following four main sources to track down governmental agencies: Stephen Richard's *Directory of British Official Publications*, HMSO's *Public Bodies*, and *Civil Service Yearbook*; and the Central Office of Information's *Information, Press and Public Relations Officers*.

This catalogue is now available on DIALOG as *British Official Publications (Non-HMSO)*. The inclusive dates of the DIALOG file is 1980 to the present and it is updated bimonthly. Plans to have a combined HMSO and non-HMSO catalogue on CD-ROM have materialised with the release of the first disk in March 1989, of *the Catalogue of United Kingdom Official Publications*, a joint Chadwyck-Healey and HMSO effort. This catalogue records all UK official publications and those of twelve major international organizations from 1980 to the present. Consisting of more than 160,000 records, the database is updated quarterly with the 1989 subscription scheduled for March, July, October and January.<sup>3</sup>

Besides providing a comprehensive listing of all British Official publications not published by HMSO, Chadwyck-Healey also provides a document delivery service on microfiche.

Having investigated how bibliographic control of British official publications is undertaken by publishers, attention was then turned to the role played by libraries which have large collections of official publications. A two week attachment at the House of Commons Library provided an excellent opportunity to gain some insight into the indexing system maintained for the vast quantity of British parliamentary papers issued.

For several years the Commons Library had maintained, on visible strip indexes, indexes to Parliamentary proceedings, Parliamentary papers, European documents, UK official publications, press cuttings and notes, research reports, etc. However, this manual system could not cope with the increase in the volume of these materials and the wider ranging and more specialized enquiries received by the library. Therefore, it was necessary to transfer this manual system to a computer-based system over a five year period beginning in 1980, thus inaugurating the Parliamentary On Line Information System (POLIS). POLIS is a subject indexed database maintained by the Library's Indexing Unit, with inputs from various other sections such as the International Affairs Section which indexes European and international publications. Hardware is operated by the Inspectorate UCC. The software used is the BASIS text management package. The files available on POLIS are as follows: PARL83 consisting of all Parliamentary items from 9 May 1979 to May 1983; PARL87 - all Parliamentary items from 22 June 1983 to May 1987; POLIS - all non-Parliamentary items plus all Parliamentary items from June 1987 onwards; and HOLLIS-House of Lords Library pamphlets and official publications from 1979 to April 1987. The current growth rate is approximately 80,000 items per annum.<sup>4</sup> From this database one obtains immediate references to the source of full text, date of publication, names of departments, ministers, Members of Parliament, chairpersons and titles of committees, legislation; and subject headings assigned from the POLIS thesaurus.

Apart from being briefed on how the various items are indexed and input into POLIS, there was also a one day session with the Hansard indexer

who explained how printouts from POLIS were edited to produce the fortnightly and sessional indexes to the Hansard. Practical experience at retrieval from POLIS was obtained during the first week of attachment at the Parliamentary Section (Oriel Room) which is an extremely busy reference and readers' services section.<sup>5</sup>

A visit was also made to the University of Southampton Library to study the organization of the Ford Collection of Parliamentary Papers under the charge of Diana Marshallsay. Indexes of bills, annual reports, press notices, ministerial statements, consultation documents are maintained on cards. An invaluable aid to the collection and for the compilation of the *Ford Breviates* is the subject index to policy papers. The organisation of the collections of British official publications at the British Library Official Publications & Social Sciences Service Reading Room (OP & SS)<sup>6</sup> and the University of London Library at Senate House, was also explored.

The study of the Malaysian situation entailed firstly the establishment of the historical background to government printing and publishing in Malaysia. For this purpose, primary sources such as Government gazettes, and the annual colonial reports at the Public Records Office, Kew were referred to. As for current publishing, distribution and acquisition practices, data had to be collected through a survey. Questionnaires were circulated to eighteen government agencies and these were followed up with interviews conducted from 12 December 1987 to 12 January 1988.

The findings of the study were presented in a dissertation entitled "*Bibliographic Control of Official Publications in Malaysia*".<sup>7</sup> There is no doubt that bibliographic control of official publications in Great Britain is much more extensive and sophisticated than in Malaysia. HMSO publications and Parliamentary papers are at least adequately covered unlike in Malaysia where there is an absence of bibliographic expertise at the Government Printer to undertake the compilation of an adequate and frequently issued catalogue, let alone detailed indexes. Neither is there any commercial enterprise like Chadwyck-Healey interested in undertaking such bibliographic func-

tions. Given the lack of awareness of the importance of bibliographic control and expertise at the major sources of publication, bibliographic control after publication is a more feasible solution. Libraries, particularly the National Library and academic libraries which possess a pool of bibliographic expertise, are more likely to undertake the tasks of tracking down publications and bibliographically describing them. However, Malaysian academic libraries, no longer given legal deposit status, may find their acquisition efforts hampered.

Though a greater portion of time was spent on this major area of study, considerable attention was given to auditing diploma classes in cataloguing and classification in relation to the minor area of study chosen, i.e. the organization and retrieval of knowledge. The weekly seminars on area classification during which the application of bibliographic standards to collections in Asian and African countries and Oriental and African subject collections was discussed, proved very enlightening for the study of the cataloguing and classification of Malaysiana. This study was eventually presented as a minor report in which modifications to international bibliographic standards such as the *Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules 2nd ed.* (AARC2), were also suggested for Malaysiana

The automation aspect of information organization and retrieval was dealt with during a course of lectures, PASCAL programming classes, and demonstrations of wordprocessing packages, database management software, viewtext systems, online searching of bibliographic databases and OPACS (online public access catalogues), use of CD-ROM and electronic mail. What proved very interesting were the various conferences and exhibitions such as the *Eleventh International Online Information Meeting*, 8-10 December 1987 during which state-of-art systems were demonstrated and the *Small Computers in Libraries International Conference and Exhibition*, 23-25 February 1988, which dealt with the use of microcomputers in libraries

All in all, the year's sojourn in London was a stimulating one, academically and profession-

ally. The research process was a test of independence and tenacity in spirit, especially during the gloomy autumn and winter months. Without the encouragement of lecturers, family members

and dear colleagues at home and the camaraderie of fellow students, the trials and tribulations of student life would have been insurmountable. To these friends I express my sincere thanks.

### Notes

1. Brian Minett, "Parliamentary and statutory publishing", *Law Librarian*, 16 (1985), p.8.
2. In 1978 Diana Marshallsay, Librarian in-charge of the Ford Collection of Parliamentary Papers, University of Southampton Library, estimated that up to 30,000 items a year were published independently by government bodies compared to about 10,000 by HMSO. HMSO's role in official publishing has declined in recent years. For example in 1986 the HMSO's annual catalogue listed 4,600 publications, a figure considerably lower than the 1975 figure of 7,200.
3. *Library Association Record*, 91:3 (March 1989), p.170.
4. POLIS technical details August 1987. Computer and Technical Services Section of the House of Commons Library.
5. For structure and services of the House of Commons Library see David Menhennet, "Inside the Commons Library", *Library Association Record*, 72:10 (Oct 1970), p.329; M. Rush and M. Shaw, editors, *The House of Commons: Services and Facilities*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1974, pp.134-160; Philip Laundry, *Parliamentary Librarianship in the English-Speaking World*. London: Library Association, 1980, p.29-41; Dermot Englefield, *Parliament and Information: the Westminster Scene*. London: Library Association, 1981.
6. See R.W. Howes, "Official publications in the British Library," *International Library Review*, 19(1987), p.225-241.
7. A copy is deposited in the University of Malaya Library.