

# *The children's collections at the University of Reading*

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11 | 2016

La collection, fabrique éditoriale des œuvres pour la  
jeunesse : l'apport des archives

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# The children's collections at the University of Reading

Sophie Heywood

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- 1 The University of Reading's archive and rare book holdings relating to children's books offer a unique insight into all aspects of book production for the young in modern Britain and beyond. It is one of several important archive collections in this area in the UK. The largest is held at the Victoria and Albert museum library; the National Library of Scotland traces the history of Scottish children's books; modern and contemporary author's papers since the 1930s are collected by the Seven Stories National Centre for Children's Books in Newcastle; and notable smaller collections include the Manchester University children's literature collection, the Opie collection at the University of Oxford, and the Hockliffe Collection at the University of Bedfordshire. What makes the holdings at Reading of particular interest to scholars is the possibility they offer for the study children's books from a broad range of perspectives. In addition to an extensive collection of books and periodicals aimed at the young, from the eighteenth century to the present, the Special Collections hold authors' and illustrators' papers, publishers' records, and printing and book design archives. These various collections allow scholars to study publications from their inception and production, through to their reception and current use in the Teaching Practice collection.

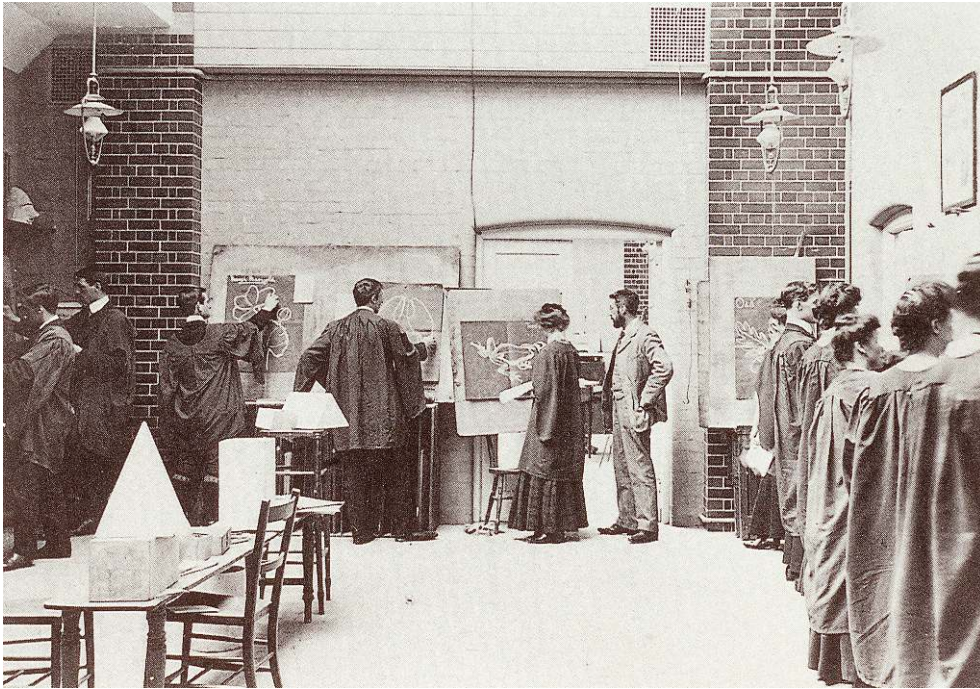
## The children's collection

- 2 At the core of the children's books material is the children's collection, with over 8,000 books and journals written for children dating from the eighteenth century. The collection originated in the 1950s with a gift of early nineteenth-century children's books from Sir Frank and Lady Doris Stenton, both historians at the University of Reading. Consequently in the 1960s the Library gathered together all the books for the young distributed throughout its holdings into one specialist collection of children's literature. According to Dennis Butts, the co-founder of the Masters degree in Children's Literature

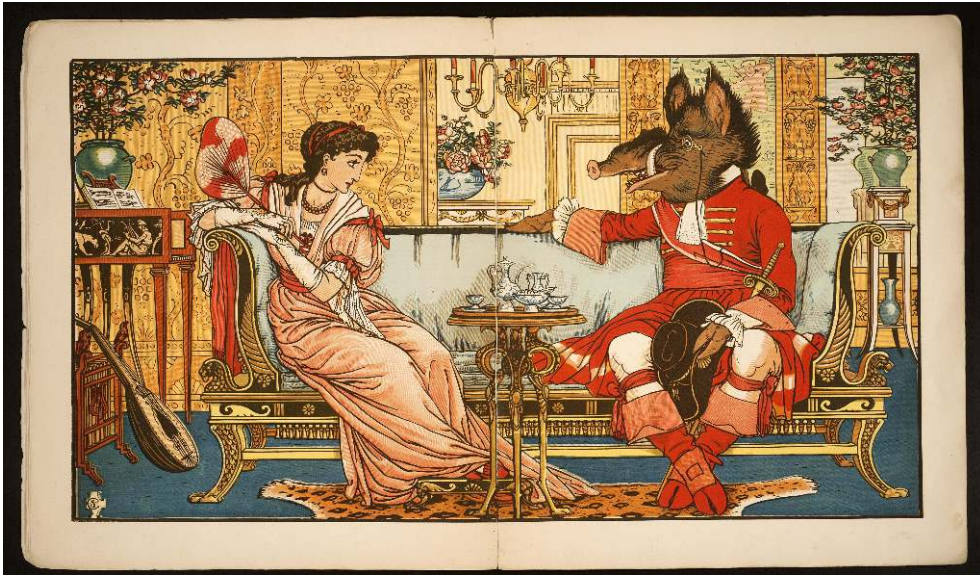
at Reading, this collection continued to grow thanks to the 'redoubtable' university librarian, Edith Cairns<sup>1</sup>. She shared the Stentons' interest in children's books, especially girls' stories from the 1920s and '30s. She encouraged more donations, and developed the acquisitions in this area. Further impetus came in the 1970s, when the University started to teach children's literature. A series of donations then expanded the holdings, notably the Crusoe Collection and the Wizard of Oz Collection. The main focus of the collecting policy has been on British titles from the nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, and, in Cairns' words 'no attempt has been made to restrict it to "good" books in the accepted sense; it is a collection of books that children read'<sup>2</sup>.

- 3 As befits a British children's literature collection with its eye on children's favourites, one of its particular strengths is in the area of school stories; a genre 'rooted in British culture'<sup>3</sup>. This is mainly thanks to Edith Cairns' interest in the genre, particularly in school stories for girls. Most of the titles in the collection date from the genre's first heyday in the late nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth century, by writers including Elinor Brent-Dyer, Dorita Fairlie Bruce, Elsie Oxenham, Angela Brazil, Talbot Baines Reed and Frank Richards. Before she died, the author of the hugely popular chalet school series, Elinor Brent-Dyer, made a bequest of her considerable collection of pre-war children's books. This was inspired by correspondence between Brent-Dyer and Edith Cairns.<sup>4</sup> It enriched the university's collection in this area significantly. The Brent-Dyer books are distinguished by a special label, designed for the Library by the author's close friend and collaborator, Sydney Matthewman. Some of the books contain interesting inscriptions. As Cairns put it: 'they serve to bring their original owner vividly to mind'<sup>5</sup>.
- 4 The second strength of the collection is in children's periodicals and annuals. This includes unbroken runs of two reviews that played key roles as tastemakers in the second half of the nineteenth century: a complete run of *Aunt Judy's magazine* (1866-1885, edited by Margaret Gatty, and then her daughter Juliana Ewing) and complete runs of the first three series of the *Monthly packet* (1851-1899, first edited by Charlotte Yonge). Scholars interested in the expansion of children's magazines in this same period will enjoy the runs of the iconic *Boy's Own Paper* (founded in 1879) and the *Girl's Own Paper* (founded in 1880), *The Children's Newspaper* (founded by Arthur Mee in 1919), as well as many other less well-known titles. The twentieth century collection is equally interesting, with international acquisitions that bring to mind the involvement of children's culture in the century's turbulent history. Soviet children's periodicals from the 1940s and '50s nestle next to the 'space hero' Dan Dare in the seminal British boys' comic from the 1950s *Eagle*. Close by is a short run of *Gioventù Fascista* (Fascist Youth), an Italian fascist youth magazine.
- 5 Thanks to its longstanding specialism in fine art education, the University's collections are rich in illustrated books for the young (ill. 1). Several of the artists have some connection with Reading. The prominent artist and famous children's illustrator Walter Crane (1845-1915) was briefly Director of the Art Department at Reading in 1897<sup>6</sup>. The collections contain four rare examples of the toy books Crane produced for George Routledge between 1867 and 1877: *Beauty and the Beast*, *Princess Belle-Etoile*, *The Yellow Dwarf* and *The Frog Prince* (ills. 2 and 3). In addition, there are numerous editions of the books he either wrote or illustrated for children, including his book *The Baby's Opera* and the illustrations he produced for children's books by Mrs Molesworth. The archives also hold some correspondence between Crane and the children's publisher George Bell and Sons. Alongside Crane's works, the collections offer the interested reader early editions of

Crane's fellow 'golden age' nursery illustrators, Randolph Caldecott (1846-1886) and Kate Greenaway (1846-1901). Another of the Art Department's collaborators was the artist Kathleen Hale (1898-2000), who became well-known for her picturebooks featuring Orlando the marmalade cat (ill. 4). She was a student at the Art Department from 1915 to 1917, and donated several copies of her *Orlando* books to the university. All of this material can be consulted in conjunction with other archives held by Reading. Cataloguer Ruth Gooding's inventory lists the complementary holdings for Hale in the archives; 'there is correspondence in both the Allen and Unwin, and Chatto and Windus archives, and in the Miscellaneous Prints Collection there is a portfolio of coloured prints from wood blocks by members of the School of Art which includes two items by Kathleen Hale. In the recently acquired Royle archive there are paste-ups of some of the *Orlando* books, and a number of Christmas and birthday cards featuring Orlando and his family".



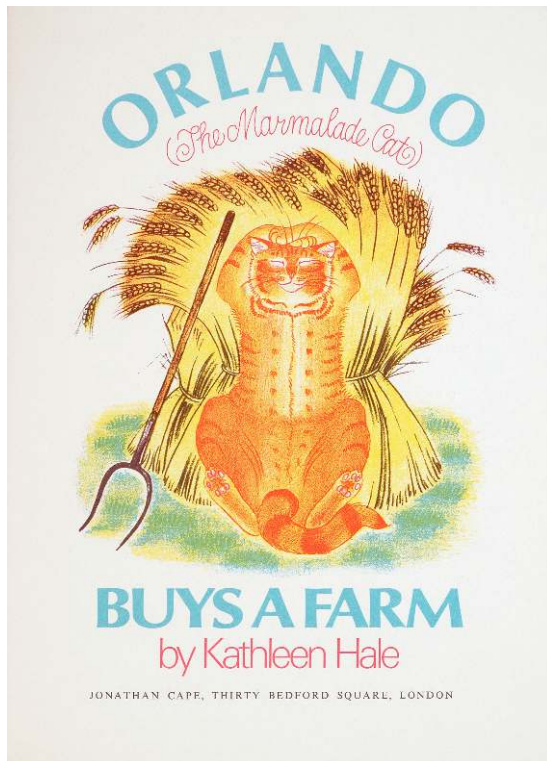
Ill. 1. A Fine Art class at the University of Reading



III. 2. Double-page illustration from Walter Crane's *Beauty and the Beast* toy book, 1874



III. 3. Illustration from Walter Crane's *The Frog Prince* toy book, 1874

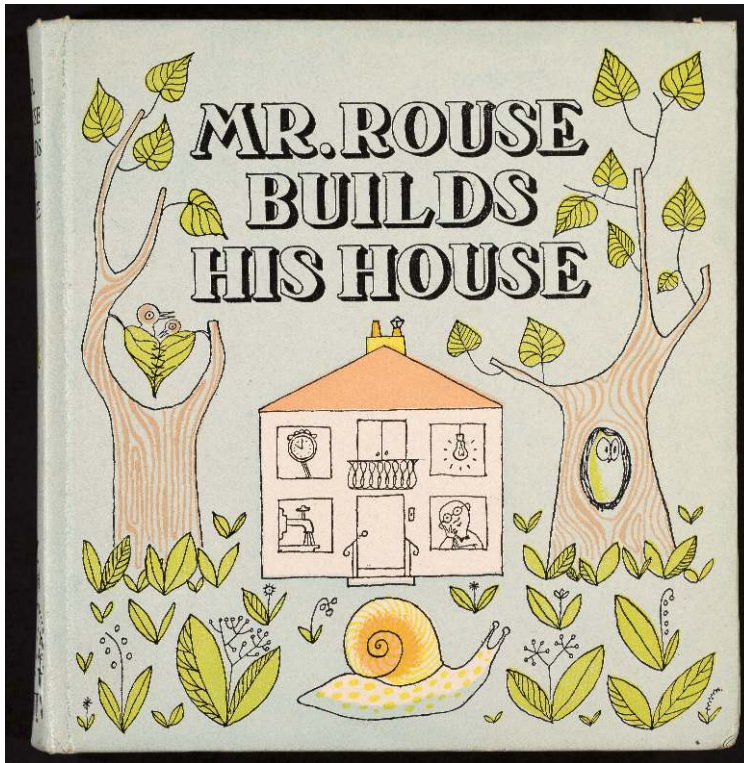


Ill. 4. Cover design, Kathleen Hale, *Orlando buys a farm*, 1942, this edition Jonathan Cape, 1972  
Image copyright Random House Group Ltd.

## Children's books in the archive of British publishing and printing

- 6 As this last example of Kathleen Hale demonstrates, the children's collection holdings are complemented by the wealth of material relating to the children's book industry held in Reading's most important archive collection, the Archive of British Publishing and Printing. This has been recognised as a pre-eminent collection of national and international significance. Children's publishers and presses with significant children's lists are well represented within the archives. The collection includes the records of Jonathan Cape, George Allen and Unwin, Bodley Head, and Macmillan, who all produced numerous titles for children, as well as the archives of the leading publisher for children in the nineteenth century, Darton and Harvey, and the small press Gaberbocchus, who produced avant-garde books for children (ill. 5). Educational publishers such as George Bell and Sons, Ladybird, Longman, and Heinemann Educational Books are also fascinating sources for information on children's book production<sup>8</sup>. Additional holdings in this area include collections of nineteenth-century publishers' catalogues, and numerous examples of book jacket design, including specimens of original artwork. For scholars of children's illustration, the Ladybird records and the papers of the illustrator H.M. Brock (1875-1960) are of particular interest.



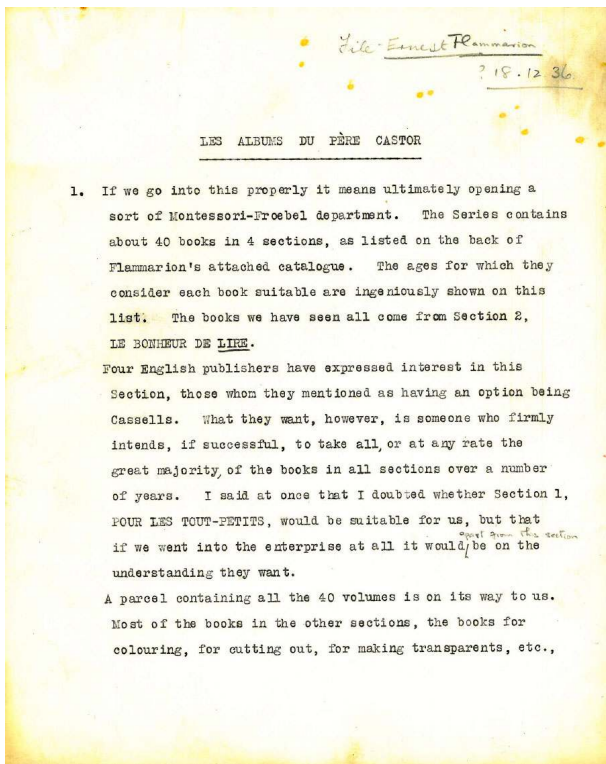


Ill. 5. Stefan Themerson, drawings by Franciszka Themerson, *Mr Rouse builds his house*, Gaberbocchus Press, 1950

Image copyright Uitgeverij De Harmonie

- 7 While the children's book collection holdings are largely English-language, the publishing archives contain valuable information pertaining to the transnational book trade and cultural exchange in children's books. The records of educational presses such as Longman, Macmillan, and Heinemann Educational Books provide information on the trade in colonial editions of schoolbooks across the British Empire. There is also the famous example of the post-colonial publishing industry in Heinemann Educational Books' African Writers Series (launched in 1962 by Alan Hill and Van Milne, with the Nigerian author Chinua Achebe as their first editorial adviser) designed to promote African writing and produce books for use in African schools<sup>9</sup>. Equally, the publishers' records are a rich source of information on translation, often containing material relating to the sale of rights, contracts detailing translators' conditions of work, and correspondence recording the discussions between editors and translators. An interesting example can be found in the Allen and Unwin archive, relating to the project of translating into English the well-known French *Père Castor* series in the 1930s (ill. 6). The children's collections contain some of the first English editions issued from the project, the *Père Castor's* Wild animal books (*Romans des bêtes*). The books were remarkably faithful to the original editions, their prose artfully translated by the children's poet Rose Fyleman to retain 'that delicate gaiety which shows they come from the French' according to the publisher's blurb. Reading the correspondence within the archive confirms this first impression; the editors' were concerned to reproduce the images and layout as carefully as possible, and the correspondence with Fyleman reveals the various debates over word choice and in particular how to translate the titles (including several suggestions by Stanley Unwin's young son, Rayner, the boy who famously encouraged his father to publish *The Hobbit*<sup>10</sup>). The records also trace the global itineraries of the English

editions of these French books, notably to India, where they were translated into Marathi and Hindi.



Ill. 6. Report for Allen and Unwin on Flammarion's Père Castor series, 18 December 1936, AUC 48/6  
Image copyright Harper Collins

- 8 And this is where the real interest of Reading's collections for the scholar of children's literature lies. By searching across these different archives it is possible to build up a fuller picture of the production and reception of children's books and magazines in any given period. *Aunt Judy's Magazine* provides a good illustration of the unusual insights this approach can yield. The magazine reviewed many of the books held in the collection. Moreover, it was published by George Bell and Sons, and in their archive the scholar can find several boxes of letters sent to the publisher by the magazine's editors, and contributors, among others<sup>11</sup>. Similarly, the *Children's newspaper* holdings can be read alongside the correspondence between its founder and editor, Arthur Mee, and his contributor John Derry, covering the period 1905-1936. The letters relate to work that Derry produced for Mee's publications, and also show Mee's thoughts and plans for forthcoming books and serials<sup>12</sup>. Here we can see how, in addition to shedding new light on publications, a search across the different archives can help gain deeper understanding of the careers of key figures in the children's book world. In this respect, most notable are the University's extensive holdings relating to the author Ian Serraillier (1912-1994). The fifty boxes containing his papers consist largely of manuscripts, typescripts and galley proofs, including *Fight for Freedom*, *Havelock the Dane*, *The Clashing Rocks*, *The Cave of Death*, *They Raced for Treasure*, *Flight to Adventure* and *The Silver Sword*, along with correspondence, notebooks, ideas and story outlines, rejection letters, publishers' agreements, press cuttings, research material, lecture notes and typescripts, and other more miscellaneous material. This collection can then be read in conjunction with the Heinemann Educational Books archive relating to the New Windmills series. This

was the series Serrailier founded with his wife in 1948, with the aim of producing quality literature in inexpensive editions for schools, and which he co-edited until the 1990s.

## Collections-based research and teaching at the University of Reading

- 9 The children's book holdings support the teaching and research of several departments and institutes within the University. For this reason, the archives and collections have been shaped by the distinctive teaching and research environment and the strong commitment to teaching with the collections within the University. The main University Library has substantial holdings in the Teaching Practice Collection of modern children's books, fiction and non-fiction. These are used by the trainee teachers studying at the Institute of Education, in addition to the Institute's Learning Hub, which also houses The National Centre for Language and Literacy (NCLL), a collection of over 10,000 trade and education publications published during the last 3 years. The collections in the University archives form an important resource for the work of the Graduate Centre for International Research in Childhood: Literature, Culture, Media (CIRCL), based in the Department of English literature. Since the launch of specialist teaching in children's literature at Reading in 1974, followed by the launch of the UK's first accredited degree in children's literature in 1984, the library has supplemented its archive collections with an important reference work collection relating to children's literature and culture, including subscriptions to a wide range of periodicals in the field.
- 10 The great wealth of resources held by the University enriches theoretical and historical approaches to teaching children's literature, pedagogy, and children's book design, allowing them to be supplemented by a more 'hands on' approach. The Masters programme in Children's Literature uses the collection to train its students in archival research on two core modules: Nineteenth Century Children's Literature and Twenty- and Twenty-First Century Children's Literature. Students are taken to the children's collection by their lecturers and the librarian, and shown selected items. They then form groups to select their own materials to make a presentation, or explore theoretical issues in relation to the archive. In the Department of Modern Languages and European Studies, students following the module on French Children's Literature use the Père Castor archive material to discuss opportunities and challenges when translating children's literature (ills. 7 and 8). They read the publisher's report on the series, look at the correspondence between the editor and the translator, and then compare the French and English editions.



Ill. 7. An example of collections teaching: students from the Department of Modern Languages and European Studies study the English translations the Père Castor series.

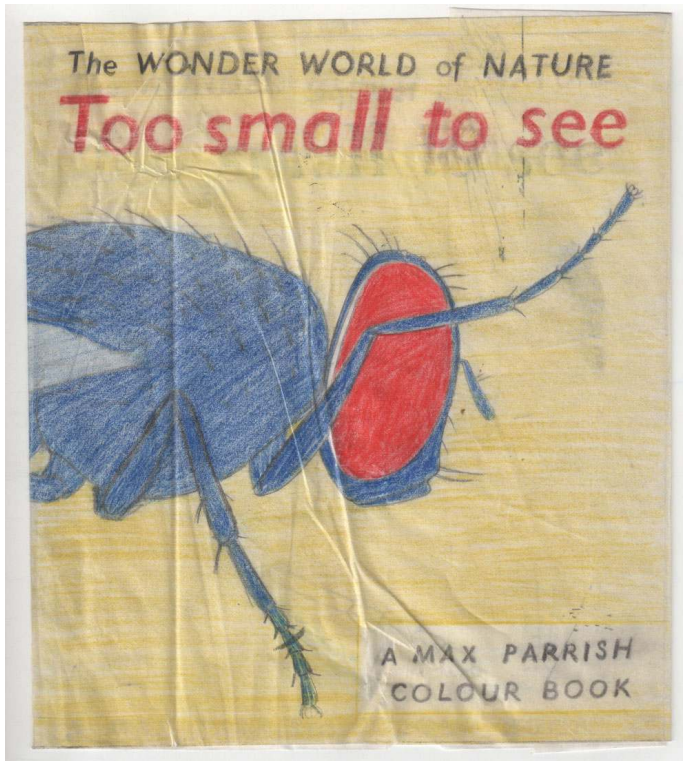
Images copyright Max Pieri.



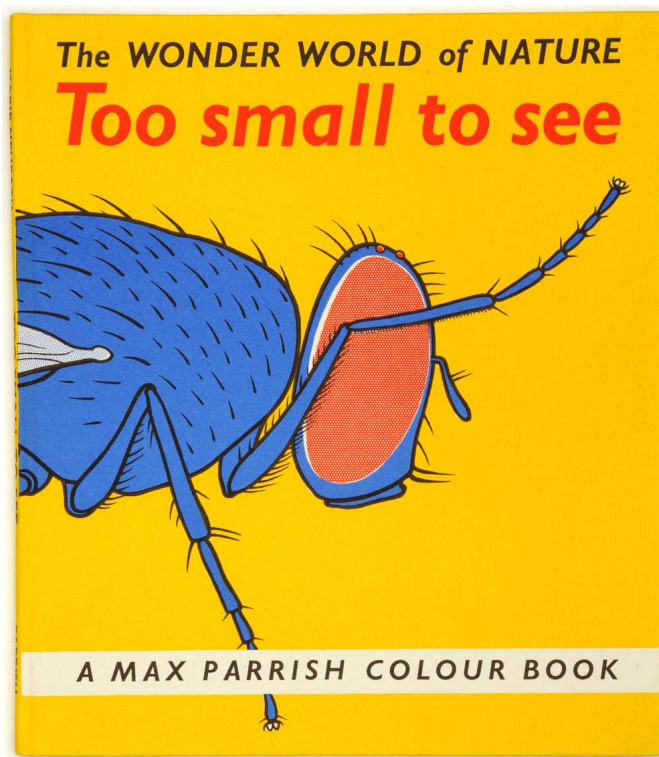
Ill. 8. An example of collections teaching: students from the Department of Modern Languages and European Studies study the English translations the Père Castor series.

Images copyright Max Pieri

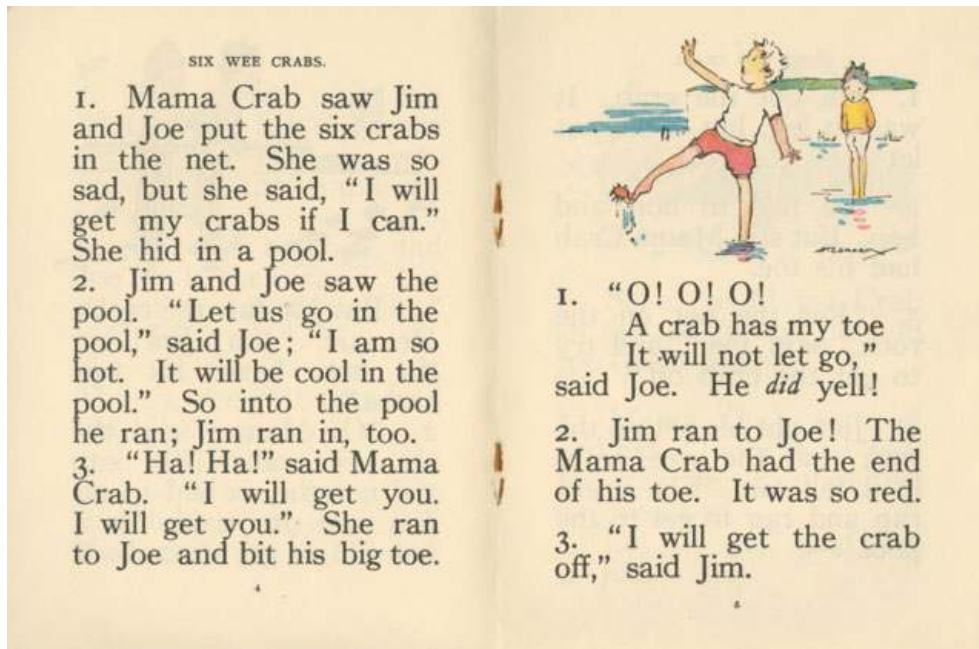
- 11 A further excellent example of how collections teaching and research have enriched the University's archive holdings is the collections developed by the pioneering Department of Typography and Graphic Communication. In 1968, Michael Twyman transformed the Fine Art School's typography classes into a Typography and Graphic Communication degree programme, the first course of its kind at a British university. This led to the establishment of the Department in 1974<sup>13</sup>. Professor Twyman has always been a strong advocate for collections teaching, because, in his view: 'so long as designers or design students are concerned with products for the real, three-dimensional, tangible world, they must surely be encouraged to experience real objects of the past<sup>14</sup>'. For this reason, from the 1970s, the Department was committed to building an archive collection in typography and design.<sup>15</sup> Their archives and collections are now regarded as being of international importance.
- 12 For children's books, the largest relevant archive in the Typography archive collections is the Otto and Marie Neurath Isotype Collection, which details the Isotype movement and its 'methods of designing and disseminating data that have played a major role in twentieth-century graphic design thinking<sup>16</sup>'. The collection originated in a three-year research project the Typography team were running, funded by a group of publishing houses, on the use of illustration in primary school books. They contacted Marie Neurath in 1970 in the course of this research, and so began a lengthy collaboration and meeting of minds<sup>17</sup>. It is a treasure trove of information on Isotype books for children, which they produced for the Max Parrish Colour Books imprint. Neurath and her collaborators worked on series of educational books such as *The wonder world of nature* and *Wonders of the modern world*, of which Professor Sue Walker, who has worked extensively on the Neurath collections in her research, writes 'were remarkable for their child-centred focus and technical accuracy<sup>18</sup>'. Marie Neurath carefully preserved the materials relating to the production and design at all stages. It is therefore possible to study their children's series from early sketches, mock-up books, through to the costings, print proofs and corrections, and ending up with the finished product. This example of *Too small to see* (1956) shows the design work in the mock-ups, and the final bold and colourful cover (ills. 9 and 10). In addition to the Neurath collection, the Typography archives also contain two collections of school reading books. The first is a selection of children's reading books, which originates in the Department's interest in how reading can be facilitated by simple and accessible design. This was recently enriched by the items acquired during Sue Walker and Linda Reynold's research into book design for children's reading<sup>19</sup> (ills. 11 and 12). The second is a collection of multilingual reading books for schools, which developed out of Professor Walker's research collaboration with colleagues in the Institute of Education<sup>20</sup>.



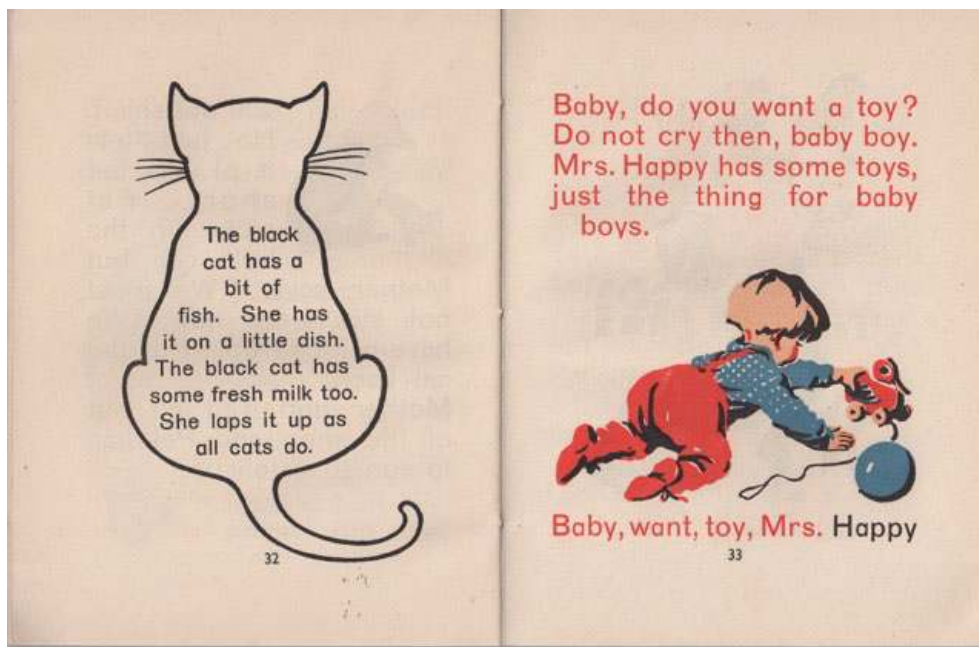
Ill. 9. Design mock-up and resulting cover for Marie Neurath, *Too small to see*, Max Parrish, 1956.  
Images copyright University of Reading



Ill. 10. Design mock-up and resulting cover for Marie Neurath, *Too small to see*, Max Parrish, 1956.  
Images copyright University of Reading



Ill. 11. Examples of children's reading books from the Department of Typography and Graphic Communication collections. *Six wee crabs*, London, Cassell and Co, c.1929.



Ill. 12. Examples of children's reading books from the Department of Typography and Graphic Communication collections. Hilda Haig-Brown and Zillah Walthew, *The romance of infant reading* series, Book 2, *At the shops*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1943

## Conclusion

- 13 This brief overview of the archive holdings relating to children's books at the University of Reading has emphasised the unique insights they offer into the history of children's literature and book production, from a broad range of perspectives. These are working collections, embedded in and shaped by the dynamic research and teaching culture of the

University. As humanities research takes a notable material turn, museum and archive collections are increasingly recognised as important laboratories for original scholarship. The value of the resources found within the University of Reading's Museums and Special Collections archives for training in research methodologies and the research and production of new knowledge has been recognised in the University's Collections-based research programme. This scheme runs a doctoral programme, with a focus on skills training for working with material culture and museums and archive professionals, and provides funding opportunities for doctoral students and visiting scholars. In addition, a range of financial support options for doctoral research students is available at the University. We welcome applications from students and university scholars, but also all professionals working with children's literature and culture for whom our collections are of interest. The children's collections offer an important opportunity for fostering new research and collaborations in this field.

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## NOTES

1. Interview with the author 27 May 2016.
2. Edith M. Cairns, *Catalogue of the collection of children's books 1617-1939 in the library of the University of Reading* The Library, University of Reading, 1988, p. IX
3. M.O. Grenby, *Children's literature*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2008, p. 87.
4. For further information on this bequest, see Edith M Cairns, 'The Elinor Brent-Dyer Collection in Reading University Library', *Souvenir: the journal of the Violet Needham Society*, 6 (1987), p. 13-14. Rosemary Auchmuty, author of several books on girls' school stories and the chalet school stories, is a professor in the Law Department.
5. E. Cairns, 'The Elinor Brent-Dyer Collection', *op. cit.*, p. 14.
6. For a full description of the Crane holdings, see: <https://www.reading.ac.uk/web/FILES/special-collections/featurecrane.pdf>
7. For a full description of Hale's career and the University's Hale holdings, see: <https://www.reading.ac.uk/web/FILES/special-collections/featureorlando.pdf>
8. For information on these holdings, see: <https://www.reading.ac.uk/special-collections/collections/archives/sc-publishers.aspx>. The Ladybird collection was the subject of an exhibition in 2012: <https://www.reading.ac.uk/internal/staffportal/news/articles/spsn-468790.aspx>
9. On the Heinemann African Writers Series, and the extent to which they were 'educational' as opposed to 'literary', see Gail Low, *Publishing the postcolonial: Anglophone West African and Caribbean writing in the UK, 1948-1968*, New York, London, Routledge, 2011, p. 66-73.
10. For an interview with Rayner Unwin: <http://www.tolkienlibrary.com/press/837-An-interview-with-Rayner-Unwin.php>
11. George Bell & Sons Archive fonds MS 1640/226, 1640/230, 1640/232.
12. <https://www.reading.ac.uk/special-collections/collections/sc-mee.aspx>
13. On the history and ethos of the Department, see Professor Twyman's acceptance speech at the Sir Misha Black Medal award ceremony in 2014: <http://www.mishablackawards.org.uk/award-ceremonies/2014/medallist-address>
14. *Ibid.*



15. The Department runs a blog on using Typography collections in research and teaching: <http://blogs.reading.ac.uk/typographycollections/>
  16. On the archives and the Isotype movement, see the website of the Department's research project 'Isotype Revisited' (funded by the AHRC, 2007-2011): <http://isotyperevisited.org>
  17. Michael Twyman, 'Isotype and the University of Reading' (1981): <http://isotyperevisited.org/1981/01/isotype-and-the-university-of-reading.html>
  18. Sue Walker, 'Design info for children', *The Eye* [En ligne], 28 November 2012; URL: <http://www.eyemagazine.com/blog/post/Info-design-for-children>; see also her chapter in Christopher Burke, Eric Kindel, Sue Walker (eds) *Isotype: design and contexts 1925-1971*, London, Hyphen Press, 2013.
  19. See also Sue Walker, *Book design for children's reading: typography, pictures, print*, London, St Bride Foundation, 2013.
  20. *Building bridges: multilingual resources for children*, Clevedon, Multilingual Matters, 1995.
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