

number of occasions) and one on the Collins Crime Club, which published so many popular titles from 1930 onwards. A preliminary Guide to Related Topics (such as Golden Age Crime Fiction and Television), many portraits and other illustrations, a substantial Bibliography (including journals and web sites) and an excellent index make this an indispensable work of reference. The two volumes are handsomely produced and bound in colourful covers illustrated by Paul Slater.

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### British Literary Manuscripts Online c.1660-1900

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Literary Manuscripts Online Series

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From original to photocopy to microfilm to digital to online: where next? Remember microfilm? The answer to all our library problems until some unkind soul pointed out that even archival film was not permanent; but an answer in an unexpected way since those films have now been converted, very successfully to judge by this collection, into digital, which seems likely, one way or another, to provide the long term surrogate we have been seeking, in addition to the obvious convenience of online access through a computer anywhere in the world. At a price, of course: you have to apply to the publisher for the cost to your institution, but it will not be cheap. Still, for those universities with active English literature schools I suppose the cost of a subscription could be offset against the travel costs of academics zooming around the world to visit libraries to consult the originals; a saving too in carbon footprints and handling of precious originals.

This service is as convenient as it sounds and the results are excellent in terms of the quality of the images retrieved. They show, too, the value of proper cataloguing. I used mainly the browse by authors function, but full MARC records for every item allow those with more wide-ranging or specialist needs to use an advanced search option of great flexibility. The results list is sorted by relevance criteria and allows refinement of a search if required. The results show basic cataloguing data to help selection. Options to view are either to go directly to the selected manuscript, or to browse

thumbnail images, or to access the full catalogue citation.

The images on-screen are both legible and flexible: clean copies – except that original marks, ink blots and the like which exist on the original are retained – may be rotated, zoomed in or zoomed out and generally manipulated to suit each user's needs. The images may be bookmarked, printed, e-mailed or downloaded. Items may be marked then brought together for comparison. Search histories are recorded and may be referred back.

Coverage is already impressive: more than 400,000 pages of author manuscripts from the Restoration (1660) to the close of the Victorian era (1900). Of course, the contents must reflect what has survived in major library collections, but there is material enough here to satisfy many and varied requirements both for research and for teaching. Highlights are listed by the publishers as early drafts of Oscar Wilde's epigrams and his correspondence from Reading Gaol; diaries of Emily and Anne Bronte; poems of Blake; the Glenriddel manuscripts and correspondence of Burns; and complete manuscript drafts of twelve of Dickens's major novels. Then there are the chance finds – a presumably "fair" manuscript copy of a poem by Walter Scott, or perhaps his handwriting was always that neat. As well as manuscripts there are, too, some printed books with authors' annotations and corrections.

A total of 16 major library microfilm collections are listed as sources, including the British Library and National Library of Scotland, the Folger Shakespeare Library and William Morris collection in the Huntington Library, as well as specialist author collections (Bronte, Dickens, Gibbon, Wilde, Scott and Cowper "and others").

The advance from a microfilm collection to a full online database service brings various additional benefits to the user. Not least are direct online links to the web sites of the host collection, available on each page, and links to related resources listed under palaeography, portraits and images, digital scholarship, catalogues and bibliographies and maps and place names. This all helps to make an already rich source into an even more valuable resource. For schools of English at college or university level this service would provide surrogate access to materials from around the world for research at any level, while it could also be used to enhance student research and teaching.

**Stuart James**

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