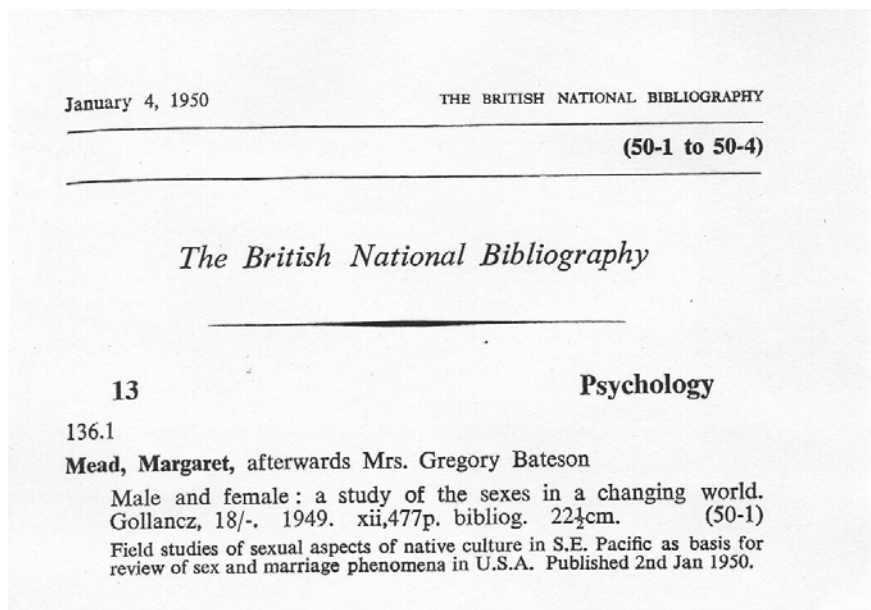


The BNB is 60!

The British National Bibliography (BNB) is 60 years old in January 2010.

It was established in 1949 in response to the recommendations of Lionel McColvin who had undertaken a survey of the public library service in 1942 which resulted in the McColvin Report. He came to the conclusion that it was uneconomic for each library to produce its own catalogue. He found that they tended to consist of very brief entries which contained little description and, of course, they did not provide the user with information on books not held by that library. He identified a need for a weekly list of full catalogue records of new books which could also be used by libraries to create their catalogues, if necessary by cutting and pasting the entries on to catalogue cards!

Things got moving after the war ended and the Council of the British National Bibliography was established in March 1949. The new national bibliography commenced full operations in 1950 and consisted of weekly lists of all books and first issues of new serial titles published in Great Britain. Each title was catalogued in accordance with the *Anglo-American Code* and classified according to the Dewey Decimal Classification system. Author/title indexes were provided every four weeks and the lists were cumulated into an annual volume. A pilot issue number 0 was produced in December 1949 and issue Number 1 was published on 4 January 1950. It contained just 25 entries which were printed on one side of the pages to enable cutting and pasting the entries on to cards. This practice was dropped from the first issue of 1951 as it was too costly and impractical as pasting the entries on to cards caused them to buckle so they were unusable.



The first entry in BNB issue Number 1

Printed BNB continues to this day. We still produce weekly printed issues (though the average weekly issue contains around 3,500 entries!), interim cumulations and annual volumes - which is not to say that the BNB has not been developed over the years.



One year's printed BNB

After a number of technical problems were overcome, a proper BNB catalogue card service commenced in June 1956, with cards available for all entries published since the previous January. A weekly BNB MARC exchange tape service began as early as January 1969 and BNB MARC records were made available online with the introduction in 1977 of BLAISE (British Library Automated Information Service).

Following a pilot CD-ROM produced in co-operation with the Bibliothèque Nationale in 1988, BNB on CD-ROM was launched in 1989. It consisted of a two-disc backfile set covering records created from 1950 to 1985 and a current file disc containing records created from 1986 onwards, which was updated quarterly. The first Windows version came out in 1996 by which time the current discs were updated monthly and the backfile was compressed on to a single disc.

Distribution of BNB records via ftp was made available in 1998 and eventually this replaced the tape service all together. Production of BNB on CD-ROM ceased with the December 2008 issue but BNB was made available for searching on the Integrated Catalogue, as a catalogue subset search, in December 2008.

BNB development continues and in October it was added to Search our Catalogue, again as a catalogue sub-set search. For some months we have been piloting a free BNB MARC record download service via Z39.50, and this month we are launching another pilot service. We are providing printed BNB via .pdf downloads to existing subscribers to the printed product. This new service will enable us to deliver the 'printed' BNB to our customers at least two weeks in advance of them receiving the hard copy.

Information on the early history of BNB was gleaned from 'The history of the British National Bibliography 1950-1973' by Andy Stephens. British Library, 1994

Andy also provided the illustrations below from his personal archive.

Where am I
SURE to
find it?



*You will quickly find information about
British books in the*

British National Bibliography

FOR THE LIBRARIAN

The Weekly Lists provide an ideal medium for book selection. The full catalogue entry and the detailed analysis of subject matter greatly help in the task of evaluating the suitability of each

THE COUNCIL OF THE
BRITISH NATIONAL BIBLIOGRAPHY
LIMITED

PROPOSES A

CATALOGUE

CARD SERVICE

One of the original objects of the committee which, in 1949, formed the Council of the British National Bibliography, Ltd., was to establish a catalogue card service. After much experiment the Council has devised a way of producing catalogue cards from the printed entry in the Weekly Lists.

A CARD SERVICE COULD BEGIN
EARLY IN 1956