


Section A		
Institution: University of St Andrews		
Unit of Assessment: UoA28: History		
Title of case study: Preserving the World's Rarest Books		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2000 - 31 December 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s):	Period (s) employed:
Andrew Pettegree	Professor	01 October 1994 - present
Graeme Kemp	Project Manager	01 March 2012 – present
Flavia Bruni	Honorary Research Fellow	01 September 2015 - present
Arthur der Weduwen	Research Fellow	01 September 2018 - present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2015 - September 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
Section B		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>Preserving the World's Rarest Books (PWRB) is a partnership between the world library community and the Universal Short Title Catalogue (USTC), the first global survey of books published in the first age of print, between 1450 and 1650. The USTC has been developed over twenty years of research at St Andrews as a work of analytical bibliography and now contains information on more than 754,000 bibliographically distinct items, with locations of 4,000,000 surviving copies spread between 9,500 libraries, archives and museums worldwide. Since 2015, we have employed the analytical firepower of the USTC to help 66 libraries better understand their collections: specifically, to identify their rarest books. Librarians can use this knowledge to ensure that their rarest items, which normally include many unique surviving copies, are adequately preserved. As a result of PWRB, these items are often made publicly accessible in digital form. Libraries have also made their rarest works the showpieces of exhibitions, and the cornerstone of bids for funding. In addition, we have helped to train future experts: our summer programme has offered 42 people (ECRs) the opportunity to spend 6 weeks working with the project group, accumulating skills for future careers as researchers in the field or as rare book librarians. Antiquarian book traders, auctioneers such as Christie's and publishers such as ProQuest now use USTC as a first point of reference to establish the rarity of their items.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>Most Libraries do not know which are their rarest books. They know which are their most precious and most valuable. But it is a strange paradox of rare book collections that many of the most precious books are not very rare, and many very rare books are not much cherished. Gutenberg's Bible, the most precious of all rare books, survives in 46 copies; there are hundreds of copies surviving of Shakespeare's First Folio (286), or the first editions of Copernicus (the world's most stolen book). Yet many rare or even unique survivors are unlikely to be recognised as such. They tend to be books (or often single-sheet broadsheets) that were cheap to produce and never intended to grace the shelves of a library, utilitarian works that were used to destruction [R1, R2]. Often this sort of cheap print is not curated in libraries but is mixed in with bundles of manuscript material in archives. Such print has also largely been neglected in historical scholarship, at least until very recently: it plays no part in the triumphant humanist narrative of 'the print revolution', which concentrated mostly on the great milestones of print</p>		

production. Yet arguably, this cheap print, often distributed for free, reached a far larger public and was far more widely read [R3, R4].

The St Andrews Book research team has been engaged in charting the survival and location of rare books since 1995. The USTC went live online, as an open-access database available free of charge, in 2011, with 362,000 records covering the period between 1450 and 1600 [R5]. It was deliberately designed as a democratic resource for the digital age, offering 15 years of sustained data collection and analysis not only to the scholarly world, but also to anyone with access to the internet.

Between 2011 and 2015 coverage was extended to 1650, doubling the size of the resource [R5]. It now records 4,000,000 surviving copies, located in 9,500 libraries and archives worldwide. A key discovery is that of the 754,000 books known to have been published in the first two centuries after the invention of printing, about 30% can today be located in only a single copy. It follows that virtually every library with collections of early printed books of any size will have unique items. Furthermore, many unique items survive not in libraries, but in archives (and, to a lesser extent, in museums). Printed materials in archives have usually been wholly ignored in major national bibliographical surveys.

Concurrently, we offer through peer-reviewed scholarly publications commentary on trends emerging from our data and what these suggest for future avenues of research. This process of scholarly application, which has placed St Andrews in the centre of the debate on the future of book historical studies, is promoted through our annual book conference, now in its 11th year. The Book in the Renaissance [R3], a proposed new narrative of the invention and impact of print, owed a great deal to the emerging data from the USTC. The most specific St Andrews contribution to shaping the field has been the revelation of the importance of cheap print, jobbing work ubiquitous in the lives of early modern men and women, but never intended to grace the shelves of a library. This research has generated two agenda-setting collections, Lost Books [R1] and Broadsheets [R2] and 1 co-authored monograph, The Bookshop of the World [R4]. In addition to these works written or edited by staff members, Arthur der Weduwen's Dutch and Flemish Newspapers of the Seventeenth Century, 1618-1700 (Leiden: Brill, 2017) is an example of the fundamental analytical work contributed by our PhD RAs to PWRB.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

The underpinning research has been funded by peer-reviewed grants and includes peer-reviewed scholarly publications (monographs and edited volumes), all produced by highly regarded academic publishers.

R1. Flavia Bruni and Andrew Pettegree (eds.), Lost Books. Reconstructing the Print World of Pre-Industrial Europe (Leiden: Brill, 2016). Pp. 400. 24 essays, including 6 from the St Andrews group. DOI: [10.1163/9789004311824](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004311824). Available in Open access: <https://brill.com/view/title/32814>.

R2. Andrew Pettegree (ed.), Broadsheets. Single-sheet Publishing in the First Age of Print (Leiden: Brill, 2017). Edited collection. Pp. xii. 540. 20 essays, including 16 contributions from the St Andrews group. ISBN: 978-90-04-34030-5. DOI: [10.1163/9789004340312](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004340312).

R3. Andrew Pettegree, The Book in the Renaissance (Yale University Press, 2010). pp. xvi + 422. Monograph. ISBN: 978-0-300-11009-8.

R4. Andrew Pettegree and Arthur der Weduwen, The Bookshop of the World. Making and Trading Books in the Dutch Golden Age (Yale University Press, 2019). Simultaneous Dutch language edition, Atlas Contact, March 2019. ISBN: 978-03-00-23007-9. DOI: [10.2307/j.ctvc5c8p](https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvc5c8p).

R5. The Universal Short-Title Catalogue (<http://www.ustc.ac.uk/>). Graeme Kemp and Andrew Pettegree, eds. Open Access analytical bibliography, with details of 754,000 books published before 1650, with reference to 4,000,000 surviving copies located in 9,500 libraries, archives and museums.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words).

The [USTC](#) has been developed with over 20 years of research at St Andrews as a work of analytical bibliography and now contains information on more than 754,000 bibliographically distinct items, with locations of 4,000,000 surviving copies spread between 9,500 libraries, archives and museums worldwide. [S1] Since going live in 2011, the website has hosted an average of 3,500 people (users) per month; in total, more than 239,000 people (users) generated over 5,400,000 page views between 2014 and 2020. [S2] Our bibliographical research up to 2014, conducted under the umbrella of the USTC, revealed that 200,000 (30%) of the earliest printed books survive today in only a single copy. We became acutely aware of how fragile most of this material was. Some unique survivors were discovered in libraries that had not even put these items in their reserve collection; some lay unrecognised in archives. This neglect was alarming but hardly surprising, since the holding institutions had no way of testing the relative rarity of their stock. There is no way, with normal staffing and budget constraints, that libraries could ever undertake the multiple searches necessary to assemble this information for themselves. The [PWRB](#) project began in 2014 with an approach to the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. In our proposal, we undertook to recruit 50 members (libraries) over 3 years to join the new programme. Once they had signed on, we would work up for these libraries a list of all their early holdings, organised in order of rarity. We would then work with them to publicise and protect these previously unrecognised gems.



The programme got underway in 2015, and to date we have signed up 66 members (libraries) (our initial capacity was set at 50, and we subsequently accommodated 16 more who wished to join). [S3] Our service is provided free of charge to any library wishing to join PWRB. Once libraries have joined the programme, our staff collate their collections with the data in the USTC. It is important to PWRB that libraries act upon the findings we provide for them. To help libraries get full benefit from our

information, our initial letter of agreement provides them with an indicative checklist of follow-through actions. These actions include: (1) ensuring that all of their rarest books are properly curated. This may involve moving rare or unique items to their reserve and / or prioritizing them for digitization (see below) and (2) publicizing rare items, either via exhibitions or via the USTC website (see below).

The Curator of Special Collections at Carnegie Mellon University Libraries writes that from the perspective of rare books librarianship, the project offers several benefits. Firstly, *“it affords curators and librarians an authoritative census of surviving, institutionally-held copies of a particular book. This information guides investment and informs how a particular item is treated (insured, stored, appraised, displayed).”* Secondly, it *“provides an invaluable point of reference for cataloguers—those responsible for describing books in a library’s care. Consulting the USTC’s copious horde of metadata allows these professionals to conduct their work more efficiently and with a high degree of accuracy”*. [S4] PWRB has thus helped librarians to preserve the cultural heritage in their care in a number of key ways:

1. Enabling professional librarians to identify and publicize the rarest items in their collections:

In recruiting for PWRB we were keen to have a diverse range of libraries, public and private, large and small, university and state, museums, archives and specialist collections. We have some of the world’s great libraries signed up, including Harvard and the national libraries of Denmark, Argentina, Latvia and the Netherlands. [S3] Arguably, however, it may be the smaller libraries – the town library in Blackburn or Oslo Cathedral Library – that reap the most benefit. These libraries fear indifference may ultimately be a threat to their survival; the case for qualified staff is often difficult to sustain given other claims on a municipal budget. Even in larger institutions, rare book staff often feel they are losing ground as the pressure towards conversion of library space to digital resources grows ever stronger. A renewed effort to demonstrate the

importance of their holdings is greatly helped by the dramatic discovery of previously unknown books.

Most participants recognise the value of publicising their rare items and 3 have mounted their own exhibitions based on our data. In 2018, Marsh's Library in Dublin organized an exhibition of its unique and rare books based on information supplied by PWRB. [The Irish Times](#) reported that 'Marsh's partnership with the USTC project has revealed the library to have the world's sole surviving sample of at least 387 books and pamphlets, and the number is still rising' (11 May 2018). The exhibition remains available on the website of [Marsh's Library](#). The University of Rennes also mounted an exhibition based on PWRB data in April – May 2018, '[Rareté et livres rares](#)'. [S5] The Municipal Library in Trent hosted a smaller exhibition in 2017.

Libraries are also offered the opportunity to showcase rare items on our USTC website. In 2018, we began a fortnightly blog, each post highlighting 1 special item in the collection of one of our partner libraries. These blogposts attracted over 256,000 visits (online users) between March 2018 and January 2020 and have been widely shared on Facebook and Twitter. [S6]

Rare book librarians have reacted with enthusiasm to the information we had provided on exceptional items in their collections. In 2017, for example, the Curator of Rare Books and Manuscripts at Johns Hopkins wrote: "*I cannot tell you how thrilled we are about PWRB. It has inspired great enthusiasm about how to implement activities at Hopkins surrounding what it has revealed, and might help to continue to reveal.*" [S7] In 2018 the librarian at the Oslo Cathedral School wrote in response to the revelation of the unique Reformation pamphlets in their small collection: "*You did say, when we met, that an old collection like ours was bound to contain something interesting, but this is remarkable! As you can imagine, this find is far beyond my expectations. I know these leaflets, I've handled them several times, and always thought they might be 'something', although I've never investigated them any further*". By the end of the same week, he had been in touch with a German expert on the pamphlets' author and sent us full scans of the 10 unique pamphlets. [S8]

2. Facilitating the digitization of rare items:

PWRB has helped libraries to shape plans of digitization around the evidence we provide of what is rare. Digitization is crucial for both preservation and access, and without such data libraries tend to prioritise their most valuable books, which are likely to have been digitized many times over already (an example is the Nuremberg Chronicle of 1493, now digitized over 100 times). The consortium of Harvard Botany Libraries joined the programme specifically to guide their programme of conservation digitization. The Natural History Museum in London joined PRWB after being prompted by Harvard. Both are members of the Biodiversity Heritage Library, which makes biodiversity literature openly available on a global scale. Having hosted an exhibition of their rare items in 2017 (see above), the Municipal Library in Trent made co-operation with the USTC and PWRB an integral part of their plan to carry forward an active programme of digitization. Thanks to this programme the library has successfully identified, digitised and uploaded on its website 129 rare early printed editions surviving in only 1 or 2 copies.

The St Andrews book group also has a long-standing consultancy agreement with ProQuest, a major player in the field of digital publishing. ProQuest invests over USD1,000,000 per year on digitising early printed books, and we advise which titles to choose, and which libraries should be future prospects for filming programmes. The senior product manager at ProQuest writes that the company's partnership with St Andrews on their Early European Books project has contributed to the transformation of "*a database of works into a "goldstandard" for scholars of the Early Modern Period*". [S9]

3. Training future experts:

Through our summer programme, ECRs are able to spend 6 weeks working with the project group in St Andrews, accumulating necessary skills for future careers as researchers in the field or as rare book librarians. In seven years, we have welcomed 42 people (young scholars) from France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Italy, Russia, Israel, Germany, Switzerland, the Czech Republic, Canada and the United States as well as the UK. Graduates of our programme have subsequently gone on to PhD work in Leiden, Utrecht, The University of

Virginia, Cornell, Stirling, Oxford, Cambridge and St Andrews, and to positions in a number of rare book departments. The Rare Books Curator at Queens' College Cambridge writes that through participation in this programme "[I] built strong professional skills and gained experience that have proven to be essential in helping me kickstart my career in special collections librarianship". [S10] Building a community of future experts is obviously essential in creating critical mass in lobbying for more concentrated efforts to protect material culture of global significance. We now have graduates of our programmes embedded in the British Library, in libraries in Cambridge, Prague, Brescia, Pisa, and Trent in Italy and in the United States. We also have active relationships with major centres of training including the Universities of Leiden, Amsterdam, Rennes and Udine, and the French National Library School, ENSSIB.

4. Commercial benefits for corporate business and trade users:

The PWRB programme was exhibited at the Antiquarian Booksellers Association annual fair at Battersea, between 21 May 2018 and 26 May 2018, and at the Provincial Booksellers Fairs Association, York, between 14 September 2018 and 15 September 2018. The USTC / PWRB team demonstrated to book dealers, collectors and librarians the way in which the free, online resource can be used to reveal the rarity of their stock and the publishing context in which works were produced. A bookseller in the antiquarian book trade, now Curator of Special Collections at Carnegie Mellon University Libraries, writes that the effect of the project "*has been felt most keenly in the antiquarian book trade, whose booksellers and collectors are notoriously inexact in the statistics they cite in pricing and valuing materials. The USTC locates copies of rare books held in libraries worldwide, so the rarity of a particular title is now far easier to establish based on the holdings data it compiles.*" [S4]

As a result of the team's engagement with commercial users, members of the antiquarian book trade, including premier auction houses such as Christie's, increasingly use the USTC and its measurements of rarity in cataloguing their books. For example [S11]:

- In September 2018 a search on AbeBooks found 46 booksellers in 14 countries using USTC references to describe early printed books. The use of USTC data is on a strong upward trajectory: in February 2020 a search on AbeBooks and viaLibri found 114 people (booksellers) worldwide using USTC references to describe early printed books.
- Christie's website listed 66 lots containing valuable books and manuscripts sold between December 2014 and July 2018 for a realized total of approximately £910,000. Every record referenced the USTC.
- The online auction site Catawiki also uses the USTC, for example 'Very rare edition (1 copy in USTC)', as do antiquarian catalogues: 'This 1508 edition of Miniature's letter-writing manual, published by Rusconi, is **exceedingly rare. Not only are none found for sale, but, according to the USTC, only 1 copy is known to exist in European libraries!**' [use of bold by the seller].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of ten references)

S1. USTC screen shot

S2. USTC user data (Google Analytics), September 2020

S3. List of partner libraries signed up to PWRB

S4. Letter, former bookseller and now Curator of Special Collections at Carnegie Mellon University Libraries (25 September 2020)

S5. Press reports on Marsh's Library exhibition, The Irish Times (11 May 2018), and on the partnership with the Municipal Library in Trent, Trentino (9 June 2016)

S6. PWRB blog traffic

S7. Email, Curator of Rare Books and Manuscripts at Johns Hopkins (6 December 2017)

S8. Email, librarian at the Oslo Cathedral School (18 September 2018)

S9. Email, Senior Product Manager, ProQuest Information Solutions (25 September 2020)

S10. Letter, Rare Books Curator, Queens' College Cambridge (11 September 2020)

S11. A selection of the evidence for the commercial use of the USTC's rarity measurements (ABE books/Christie's)