

Newspaper feature 'Find of a lifetime',
in the Ballarat *Courier* , (23.9.1978),
taken from the La Trobe University Record (August / September 1978)

Study leave for lecturer in Spanish Mr Bruno Scarfe led to the discovery of a lifetime. While in Madrid four years ago he unearthed what has since emerged as one of the world's major collections of Spanish plays in antique editions — from the 17th to the 19th century.

'It's the only collection of its type in Australia and New Zealand and compares with a select number in the United States and Britain,' says Bruno, who has spent the past few years analysing the find. Last year and early this year he published news of the collection, and already it has aroused considerable interest overseas.

The collection includes about 2000 separate items, many of them publishers' remainders or second-hand copies. Some of them are marked for acting. About 200 known and an unknown number of unnamed authors are represented by 812 titles in over 1000 different editions.

The well known Spanish author Calderon de la Barca is best represented: 110 titles in 235 different editions. Other popular names include Lope de Vega and Cervantes; there is a long list of well recognised authors, as well as many neglected ones known to few Hispanists.

The find was made in a derelict and dusty bookshop. 'Because of its general run-down state I suspected that it might contain something of interest, long forgotten: perhaps even an old copy or two of Spanish "Golden Age" plays.

'I would have been quite happy to find some editions from the early 1900's, but the owner, a very old man, was singularly unhelpful. He said he had nothing from the period I was interested in, but the shop wasn't far from where I lived, so I just kept going back and browsing through the shelves. On about my eighth visit the owner came up to me and said: 'You wouldn't be interested in old Spanish plays by any chance?'

Words fail at a time like that, but Bruno was told to come back later, when bundles of plays, tied up roughly with rope, were brought down from the attic.

'My first reaction was that I could not ever afford any of the copies, but he offered to make a special price if I took 100. So I got that first batch for 2000 pesetas, which was about \$30 Australian then.

The next few weeks saw Bruno daily back at the shop, from dawn to dusk going through the piles of musty papers.

The items go back to 1604 and illustrate a substantial range of dramatic genres over three centuries. About 130 known and quite a number of unnamed publishers, printers and booksellers from a dozen or more towns in Spain and from Havana are responsible for the works.

The collection includes several hundred items known as *desglosadas* — constituting plays ripped from volumes once holding a dozen or so plays. Many of these are from volumes of the 17th century, and are works that have never been reprinted. But the majority of the items are known as *suetas*, pamphlet-like publications featuring only a single work. Most are plays designed to be read on their own, and they were quite widely distributed by the standards of the times. Later they were often bound in a single volume. Says Bruno: 'The vagaries of *desglosadas* and *suetas* provide a curious reflection on patterns of consumer supply and demand.

'From something I was told at the shop, I suspect that there might be a number of collections similar to mine, possibly in the United States, but to the best of my knowledge nothing has ever been heard of them. They have probably been buried away in a vault.

He feels that when an individual scholar like himself makes a discovery of this sort, work on it is more likely to start immediately. 'Institutional purchases can sometimes be laid aside for many years because the specialist interest and working funds may not be there to enable research to proceed.

'My first two years back from study leave were spent mainly in familiarising myself with the scope and nature of the collection, but of course I have my teaching commitments and other duties as well, so to some extent it was only a part time task', Bruno says.

One of the early problems encountered while trying to establish the rarity of his items in relation to those of overseas collections resulted from his use of descriptive catalogues. Each authority, Bruno found, used different descriptive criteria.

The other concerned dating works which lacked any imprint or other form of identification. This led Bruno to use the watermarks in the paper to help him pinpoint the dates. However, there were hardly any reference works for Spanish water marks, and none which used the now reliable methods of beta-radiography, or x-ray, reproductions.

Some of the first watermarks Bruno studied were from the Madrid publishing house of Antonio Sanz; 142 copies of 61 plays came from there. The Sanz watermark project,

and early 18th century.

'It's my impression that the items of Salazar y Torres in this collection are of some rarity, and I've sent microfilm copies to Texas as requested. As well I'm corresponding with a librarian from Cambridge University Library who has catalogued a collection similar to mine, and wants additional information for continuing research.'

Bruno says he has just had approval of his request for study leave next year, and is keen to follow up some of these contacts made by letter.

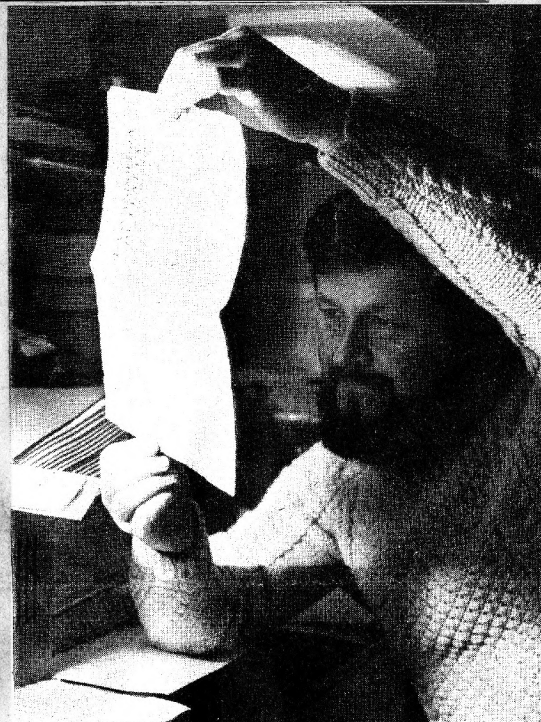
Why is this precise identification and dating of each and every edition so important to researchers like Bruno and the people he is corresponding with?

Bruno explains: 'It's totally relevant to

For a LaTrobe University man

THE FIND OF A LIFETIME

Right: Bruno Scarfe examines one of his 'finds'. Below: The oldest dated work in the collection, de Vega's *El Testimonio Vengado*, goes back to 1604. Bottom right: The 'tail piece' from Cervantes' *Los Baños de Argel*. Similar illustrations are featured at the end of most plays.



designed as a pilot project, has been written up in the May issue of the *Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand Bulletin*. Eventually Bruno hopes to note, compare, reproduce and catalogue all the watermarks.

Bruno explains the significance of the watermarks technique for very accurate dating: 'The wire device used in those days for making the marks, generally wore out in a very short time and consequently identical watermarks would have appeared in the paper for only a very short time. I'm now using this method as a careful check on dates supplied as well as for dating undated items. Of even greater value, I believe, is the use of this method for defining and authenticating items through their foundation material — their paper.'

Last year he published an outline of his find in the *American Bulletin of the Comediantes*, the journal of an international circle of students of the Spanish theatre. Since then his correspondence has included requests for assistance from Germany, Ireland, England and America.

Two German scholars producing a bibliography of Calderon, one of the Golden Age's most important writers, said the Scarfe collection Calderon holdings appeared to be the most comprehensive outside Madrid's Biblioteca Nacional. They had intended to

produce a three volume work, but since hearing of Bruno's find they are thinking of printing a supplementary fourth volume on it.

From Ireland a University College Dublin scholar wrote with questions relating to a collection of 'Golden Age' plays reputedly brought back from Seville in the late 1600's by Samuel Pepys. To help in his verification the scholar has asked Bruno to send descriptions of a number of items.

In Texas a specialist researcher on Agustin de Salazar y Torres is looking for editions of the writer's works from the end of the 17th

understanding the transmission of texts; you have to know what texts existed and at what times in order to recognise which are the reliable ones and which may be used in preparation of new editions now and in the future. This is vital to correct scholarship. With each edition, and indeed sometimes with each impression, changes are made. Even subtle changes of punctuation can be vitally important. This type of authentication of texts is very advanced in Shakespearean scholarship. But it's still relatively new to people dealing with Spanish works.'

Why are foreign scholars so interested when such detailed scholarship is generally not even carried out in Spain itself?

In part, Bruno blames Spain's recent history for this. The Golden Age he talks about was a period of literary refinement to rival anything seen in other countries. Problems of economic, religious, social and political nature, especially in the last century, including the Napoleonic campaigns and through to the Civil War of 1936-9, have not advanced that type of scholarship.

The antiquities of Ancient Greece and Egypt were for long periods better researched and understood by the world outside; and now those countries are reaping the benefits of those parts of their heritage preserved overseas. 'And so it could well be with this type of work', says Bruno.

