Professional Development Leave Application - Benjamin Watson

Recusant Literature in the Donohue Rare Book Room - An Update

In 2003 I received a Professional Development Leave to create a "description of USF collections by and about Catholics in England during the period of the Penal Laws, beginning with the accession of Elizabeth I in 1558 and continuing until the Catholic Relief Act of 1791, with special emphasis on the Jesuit presence throughout these two centuries of religious and political conflict." The Donohue Rare Book room houses a research-level collection documenting the Recusant controversies. These volumes offer unusual challenges to description – imprints are frequently false or absent. Texts consist of intricate polemical arguments ranging across multiple texts from multiple viewpoints and finding expression in half a dozen languages, with Latin predominant. The guide created in 2003 exceeded 100 pages and has been extensively used. John Hawk reports that he relies on this instrument when working with faculty, students, and non-USF researchers. Just last semester Professor Katrina Olds of History used the Recusant literature guide as a framework for student research projects conducted in the Rare Book Room and built around an individual Recusant text selected from the collection by each student.

In the decade since the guide was written, John has asked me to collaborate with him in identifying and selecting additional volumes for the Recusant collection, usually acquired through specialist dealers in London. Books that fit the scope of this collection are scarce and expensive, but they are also uniquely exciting as carriers of multiple meanings from one of the most dramatic, long-running episodes of church/state conflict in Roman Catholic history. John supports the present proposal to extend and amplify the original bibliography, which will include detailed new descriptions of all post-2003 additions. John and I will also work together to determine the most useful avenues for expansion of the various topical background sections within the guide.

GOALS -- I intend to use a wide range of bibliographic and historical research tools to write detailed descriptions of material added since 2003 to the Rare Book Room's Recusant collection. This work will exceed the descriptive scope of existing catalog records, and will include biographical, contextual, and copy-specific information.

TIMELINE -- The project will be completed during calendar year 2015. Leave-time will be taken in segments of one or two weeks, to minimize disruption in Tech Services. Much of the research and writing will take place in the Rare Book Room or elsewhere in Gleeson.

VALUE -- The project is intended to increase the ability of Rare Book Room staff to answer research questions about the Recusant collection accurately and efficiently. The guide could also potentially be made available online for direct use by students or researchers.

FUNDING -- I did not request funding in 2003 for the initial phase of this project. Existing library resources were sufficient for that work and would also be sufficient for this proposed follow-up.