

THE BERTRAND RUSSELL RESEARCH CENTRE

NICHOLAS GRIFFIN
Russell Research Centre / McMaster U.
Hamilton, ON, Canada L8S 4M2
NGRIFFIN@MCMASTER.CA

The creation, components and mission of The Bertrand Russell Research Centre ("BRRC") at McMaster University are described. The components are *Russell*, the Russell Editorial Project's *Collected Papers* and Russell-I. Plans are being laid to incorporate other activities relevant to Russell Studies.

When Russell's papers came to McMaster in the late 1960s, it was inevitable that the university would become the main centre for research on Russell's life and work. The collection was not only the largest available on Russell anywhere, it dwarfed all the other collections put together. Its contribution to international scholarship started immediately and has continued ever since. Scores of books and hundreds of articles have been published using material from the Archives.

In addition to all this independent scholarly activity, many things have been done at McMaster to enhance and enlarge the collection, to make it more accessible, to publish material from it, and to foster Russell studies around the world. This journal (now in its 30th year of publication), the McMaster Edition of *The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell*, and the Russell listserv, Russell-I, are the three that will be best known to people who do not use the Archives on a regular basis. All three, like most of the other McMaster initiatives, originated with Kenneth Blackwell, the first (and, so far, only) Russell Archivist.

Although it probably hasn't been apparent to their users, all three were in one way or another anomalous in their relations to the university, none of them having a secure home in any existing university structure. The most serious consequence of this has been their precarious financial state.

With the creation of the BRRC all three are being given a permanent home within McMaster's Faculty of Humanities. The McMaster University Library remains responsible for the running of the Archives and for the care and preservation of the papers, while the new Centre takes responsibility for the publication of Russell material and for fostering Russell research. This journal is now published by the Centre, though it continues to be edited by the original editor. The work of the former Bertrand Russell Editorial Project has been taken over by the Centre, along with its staff, Arlene Duncan and Dr. Andrew Bone. And the Centre has now become the official home of Russell-1,¹ which has been resurrected after a brief hiatus. The listserv is no longer dependent upon Dr. Blackwell's volunteer work as listowner but remains just as dependent upon his frequent archival and other contributions to the discussions.

By far the most immense task currently facing the Centre is the completion of *The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell*. At present we are almost exactly halfway through our projected total of 30 volumes: with one volume in the philosophy series and fifteen in the social and political series to go, and two volumes nearing completion. Further volumes are being assigned to editors and new editors are being brought in to speed the completion of the edition. Unfortunately, merely creating the BRRC does not in itself transform the edition's finances—although increased support from the Faculty of Humanities has improved the situation. A major effort is underway to secure further public and private financial support for the edition.

Another respect in which we can foster Russell scholarship, despite limited means, is by providing a temporary base for the significant number of visitors who use the Archives. There is a large international network of Russell scholars, most of whom at one time or another pass

¹ [HTTP://MAILMAN.MCMASTER.CA/MAILMAN/LISTINFO/RUSSELL-L](http://MAILMAN.MCMASTER.CA/MAILMAN/LISTINFO/RUSSELL-L). Andrew Bone is the listowner.

through the Archives. The BRRC will be a natural hub for this network, keeping scholars around the world in touch with one another and providing a venue for them to present papers, meet members of the McMaster academic community, and discuss their work with one another. Longer-term visitors can be made Visiting Fellows of the Centre. At present we do not have the resources to support our visitors financially, though we hope eventually, when other more pressing needs have been met, that we will be able to invite visitors to the Centre and at least help with their expenses or co-sponsor visitors with other academic units. We expect to welcome our first Visiting Fellow next spring, and we encourage applications from others who would like to work at the Archives or the Centre. We hope also to foster links between McMaster and other organizations and individuals concerned with Russell. Next year the BRRC will host the annual meeting of the Bertrand Russell Society. In time, the Centre expects to hold conferences of its own on Russell and to support the attendance of Russell researchers from the Centre at conferences elsewhere.

Although work on the *Collected Papers* is a long way from finished, we are at least getting close to the beginning of the end, and it is time to start making plans for dealing with the rest of Russell's massive literary legacy. A huge, largely untapped component of this is his correspondence. This is a task which dwarfs even the *Collected Papers*. Russell was a prolific and brilliant letter writer. The electronic catalogue of Russell's correspondence, BRACERS, currently lists 25,128 letters by him in the Archives. Since only approximately two thirds of the correspondence has been catalogued, we may extrapolate that the total number of letters by Russell in the Archives is over 40,000. They range over every imaginable topic and they are addressed to people in all walks of life, including many of the most important intellectual and political figures of the twentieth century. The correspondence is a vast resource on the cultural life of the twentieth century from the point of view of one of its sharpest and most observant minds.

The sheer scale of Russell's correspondence rules out a print edition: a complete edition could easily run to 200 volumes! However, an online, electronic edition is technologically feasible. Space is not a confining factor for an online edition. But there are many other advantages as well. New letters could be added to it as they are found. There would be no need to attempt an exhaustive search for missing letters from a particular

period before a volume could be published. Nor would there be a need for supplementary volumes to include those letters which, despite the editors' best efforts, still turned up too late for inclusion in their proper place. Individual letters could be put online as they were edited, so the work could proceed as resources were available to do it.

The edition should be a fully edited one, with a machine-readable, transcribed text, accompanied by a scanned image of the document (the latter may well obviate the need for textual apparatus). The text will be fully annotated and introduced, and we can use the resources of the Internet to get help from users in annotating items which have eluded our efforts to track them down. Links will enable the user to travel to the next letter to the same correspondent, the next letter Russell wrote, or the next letter on the same topic. In many ways the Web is ideally suited to such a project, although care will have to be taken in its design to ensure that it is easy to use and that users are not overwhelmed by a plethora of mechanically generated and only marginally useful options.

At present, such an edition is beyond the slender resources of the Centre. As the edition develops we hope it will become self-financing, for example through the sale of subscriptions, but the costs of getting it underway are substantial. This is not a problem we expect to solve quickly and we will be looking to the Russell community, as well as to foundations and granting agencies, for the support necessary to make it possible.

Although the BRRC has been in operation since the beginning of July 2000, its official opening is not until 16 November, when Ray Monk, who has just completed his two-volume biography of Russell, will speak on "The Continuing Importance of Bertrand Russell". To coincide with the opening of the Centre, the McMaster Museum of Art will open a major exhibition of Russell material from McMaster's collection. We hope that many subscribers to *Russell* will join us for the opening.
