Indexing cartoons

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1973 saw the establishment at the University of Kent (England) of the Centre for the Study of Cartoons and Caricature, with an initial donation of some 20,000 original drawings. The centre now has over 110,000 original cartoons and strips. Original indexing was on cards. By 1993 it was clear that this system had had its day, a special cartoons thesaurus was developed and a fully searchable and increasingly refined set of indexes was made available online. This article describes this development and the complexities of cartoon indexing, and invites readers to try their hand at it via the new facility (www.kent.ac.uk/cartoons/) which permits users of the catalogue to make changes to the indexing, add context or extend the keywording.

Due to an accident of history, the British national collection of political and social cartoons is at the University of Kent in Canterbury. The formation of an academic study centre dedicated to political and social cartoons was first discussed in 1972, in the wake of 'Drawn and Quartered', a successful cartoon exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery. Dr Graham Thomas, a lecturer in the University of Kent's Department of Politics, had already contacted national newspapers in an effort to locate surviving cartoon collections, and had found them eager to donate these archives to anyone willing to take them. The idea of a 'Cartoon Study Centre' began to take shape.

This initiative came at the right moment. Publishers like Associated Newspapers admitted that they were facing 'very pressing problems of storage', and in 1973, after six months of negotiations with that company, the University of Kent received a deposit of three and a quarter tons of cartoons. These 20,000 original drawings were soon joined by almost 10,000 drawings from the Beaverbrook Library, and in November 1973 a 'Centre for the Study of Cartoons and Caricature' was formally established – although even then it was admitted to have been saddled with 'a ponderous name'.

By 1983 the original deposit had grown by loan and donation to a collection of 70,000 original drawings. By 2003 it stood at 90,000, and several recent deposits have raised this still further, giving the centre by far the largest cartoon archive in the country. There are four main collections of material for academic study: the original cartoon artwork, a cuttings collection, an online catalogue with digital images and a library of printed material. The centre's indexing is largely of the first two collections, as most of the 4000 items of printed material are separately catalogued as part of the University Library.

The centre's archive of original cartoon artwork currently contains over 110,000 original cartoons and strips, representing the work of more than 350 British cartoonists. About 60,000 of these cartoons are on long-term loan, but the remaining 50,000 are owned by the University of Kent. The centre's cuttings collection adds another 85,000 cartoons, the majority taken from the major London newspapers between 1961 and 2006. This archive increases by some 4000–5000 cuttings each year, and the centre also holds the cuttings books of individual cartoonists such as Percy Fearon, Michael Cummings and Nicholas Garland.

The centre has a constant flow of visitors, both students and researchers. We get a similar number of enquiries and requests for reproductions of cartoons, in academic books and articles, and for commercial reproduction, but the greatest use of the centre's resources now takes place remotely, through the online catalogue. The work of digitizing, cataloguing and delivering cartoons via the web now absorbs most of the centre's efforts.

The first attempts to index the centre's collection were on cards. A card was produced for each cartoon, with cartoonist's name, date and place of publication, featured individuals, and what was called a 'list of topics'. Multiple copies were produced, and arranged into four series: the 'Artists' Index', arranged by the name of the cartoonist and carrying a print from the microfilm of the original cartoon; the 'Subject Index', with its own set of keywords; the 'Index of Individuals'; and the 'Chronological Index' listing all the cartoons that had been carded.

Although the index cards carried reference images, they were intended to help researchers using the originals, rather than be a substitute for them. Despite the fact that the subject cards employed some 15,000 individual keywords, the card index did not support complex searches. In 1988 the centre thus began to develop a computer catalogue, and in 1990 began creating digital images of its cartoons, to add to its own cataloguing software as a visual index of its holdings.

By 1993 there were 12,000 images on computer, and it was obvious that a clear break had to be made with the old card system. This began in the following year, with a project to refine the keywords, the realistic aim being 'not to create a perfect cartoon thesaurus, but rather to create something much better than we have already'. A special cartoon thesaurus was eventually constructed, the project staff admitting that, as the centre required a dense set of terms applicable to British social and political history, 'we have been unable to find an existing thesaurus with more than a peripheral overlap'.

In 1996 some 18,000 catalogued cartoons were released on CD-ROM, and in 1999 all 30,000 catalogued images became available through the centre's website. This catalogue is accessible from www.kent.ac.uk/cartoons/ by clicking 'Search the Database'. It contains some 113,000 cartoons from the centre's archives, dating from 1903 to 2003, and representing the work of almost 250 British

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SMYTHE   D. Mirror   28th November 1962        AC 1448

No caption (Flo is happy because Andy apologised after
he hit her)

35 x 26 cm   Ink and blue  wash

MARRIAGE AND SEXUAL RELATIONS : domestic violence
EXTERIORS : streets - urban
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Figures 1 and 2
The original index card for Reg Smythe's 'Andy Capp' cartoon of 28 November 1962 (above), and the current database entry (right). Much more complex searching is now possible, and the keywording has become more sophisticated, with 'domestic violence' now being treated as part of 'Social problems' and not 'Marriage'.

cartoonists. There are in addition images of some 1000 cartoons, mostly dating from before 1903, taken from other collections.

The development of the online catalogue has brought a dramatic change in the number of people using the centre's collections. In 1993, before anything went online, the centre got what it called 'a regular flow of requests', but this amounted to just 30 enquiries a month. From 1999 to 2003 almost 20,000 researchers registered to use the online catalogue, and by the end of that period they were making 1400 research visits to the site every month. The centre was thus handling 45 times as many enquiries as ten years before, with a smaller staff.

The current total is closer to 2000 research visits a month, and most regular academic researchers will have made 4000, 5000 or 6000 separate searches over the last three or four years, resulting in anything up to 50,000 retrieved images. The size of the catalogue, and the quality of the digital images, means that many users complete their research online without needing to consult the centre's collections of originals or cuttings.

For cataloguing, each image is given a unique code. It is then indexed through a series of fields identifying the artist, periodical, date of publication and medium – for example original drawing, cutting or photocopy. If the cartoon has a caption this is entered in a separate field, and there is also a field for the 'Embedded text', so that any wording within the cartoon also becomes searchable. A 'Listed personalities' field, governed by a names authority file, then identifies all the individuals depicted, from left to right and top to bottom.

This part of the indexing is fairly straightforward, but other elements have to be added to make the cartoon fully searchable. For example, the 'Listed personalities' field must also contain any individuals alluded to in the cartoon, but not actually depicted. The 'Implied text' field performs a similar function by identifying implied references within the cartoon, such as visual quotations from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Finally, a 'Subject keywords' field is used to describe the contents of the cartoon, according to the centre's thesaurus, so that it can be retrieved with other cartoons on a similar subject such as 'Cold war'.

It might be thought that some of this indexing is excessive, but it enables researchers to make complex searches, which can be revealing. For example, Raymond Jackson – 'JAK' of the *Daily Express* and *Evening Standard* – arranged with a publicity company for its clients' products to appear in his cartoons. They can be found in the 'Embedded text' field of the database, which shows references to Dettol, Bonjela, Cossack hairspray, and other Reckitt & Coleman

Figure 3
A screen grab showing Raymond Jackson's *Daily Express* cartoon for 18 March 1978, when an NUT strike was preventing thousands of children getting school meals. The shop in the background includes Reckitt & Coleman products.

products from February 1977 onwards. In Jackson's *Daily Express* cartoon of 18 March 1978 the company's managing director Tom Richards even appeared as 'T. Richards Chemist', running a shop selling a range of the products he represented.

The 'Embedded text' field indicates how profitable this relationship was, and in October 1979 Richards wrote proudly to Reckitt & Coleman that 'JAK has not produced a hospital or medical cartoon in 1979 where Dettol has not been mentioned.' However, the number of references declined after January 1981, when *Private Eye* carried an article exposing Jackson's close relationship with Reckitt & Coleman. But once again the 'Embedded text' reveals how Jackson got the last word, by drawing a bogus '*Private Eye* – Dettol Issue' in the corner of his *New Standard* cartoon of 13 March 1981.[1]

However, the more accurately you try to index cartoons, the more difficult it becomes. For example, which version of the cartoon should be indexed? The original idea was to catalogue only original artwork, and the centre's database has some 40,000 images taken from originals. However the emphasis gradually changed, until the majority of the catalogued images – some 82,000 – are now of the final printed version of the cartoon, taken principally from the centre's large archive of newspaper cuttings.

This suits the centre's purpose, as the principle justification for its collection is that these images were seen by large numbers of people. The printed version was thus the origin of any impact that the cartoon may have had, and in historical terms it has as much right to be called the 'original' as does the artwork. The problem comes when the database contains images of both the artwork and the printed version, which can look quite different. For example, most original artwork does not include shading, which was added by the blockmaker. The cartoonist only indicated where it should go, using blue wash or crayon, and the look of the cartoon can be quite different.

At first these different versions were catalogued separately, but the variant images are now grouped together under a single set of indexing metadata. The indexing no longer refers to a single physical object, rather to the underlying idea, and for almost 9000 cartoons – 8 per cent of the total – users can choose to see either the original artwork or the printed version. Where variant images exist, the catalogue by default shows the cutting rather than the original artwork.

The proportion of variant images is set to increase with the cataloguing of the Carl Giles archive. This vast archive arrived at the centre in 2005, and a single Carl Giles cartoon might now be held by the centre in five different forms: the original artwork, a high-quality 'pull' taken from the printing

Figures 4, 5 and 6 (right)
These screen grabs show one sort of variant image, based on cartoons by David Low which include elephants. The first shows a page of thumbnail images resulting from the search. The second shows the indexing metadata for one of these cartoons, with an image of the original artwork, and the third shows it with an image of the cutting. In either case clicking on the cartoon would produce a much bigger image.
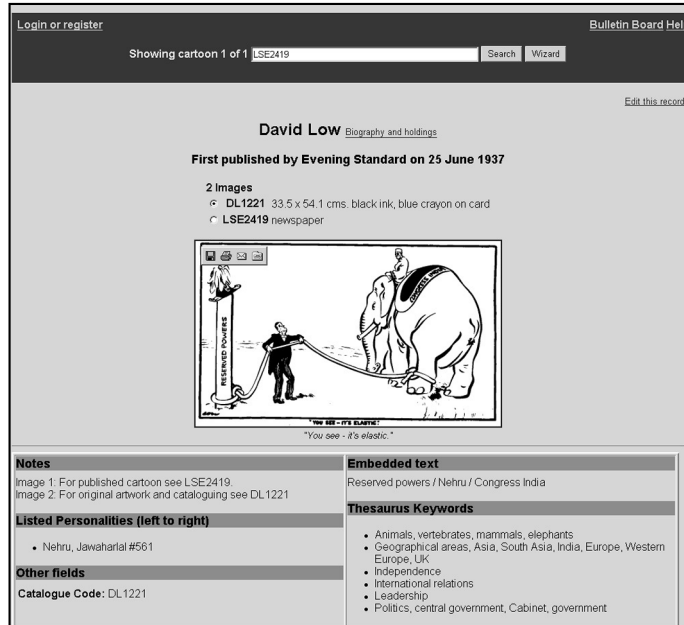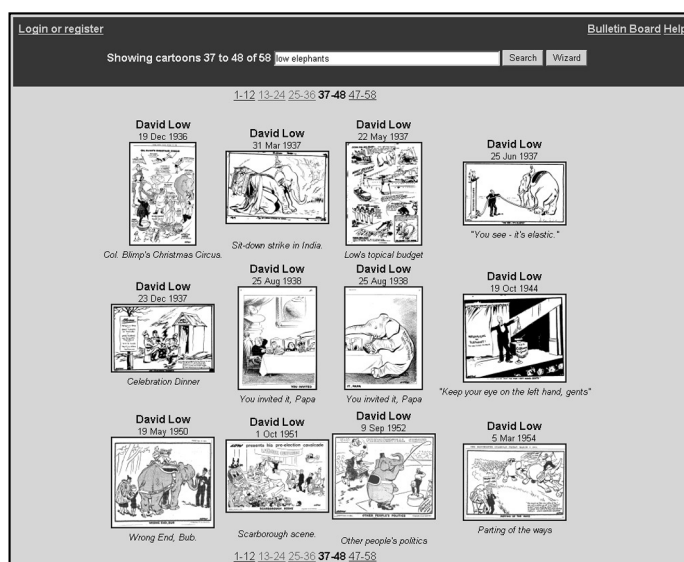
plate, a glass negative made for syndication, a newspaper cutting and a reprinted version in the *Giles* annual. The intention is to digitize a large proportion of this material, with variant images being available under one set of metadata.

Shadows are not the only difference between the original artwork and the printed cartoon, however, for cartoonists like Giles delighted in teasing the editorial staff. One journalist later recalled his first job as a boy messenger on the *Daily Express* in the late 1940s:

> I went to Liverpool Street station by bus to collect Carl Giles's cartoon off the Ipswich train. Curiosity bubbled when I took the original up to the *Daily Express* features department and the subs studied it this way and that. 'What are they looking for?' I whispered. 'The rude bits to blank out,' I was told. Giles was sometimes guilty of deliberately hiding penile shapes, nippled breasts and French letters in the drawn details. The dense foliage of trees was always a major cause of anxiety.[2]

This game seems to have been played by other *Daily Express* cartoonists. On 1 January 1956, Giles' colleague Michael Cummings, who had joined the paper six years earlier, submitted a cartoon entitled 'If French election technique crosses the Channel . . .' The centre's online catalogue shows the surviving artwork, and identifies the numerous politicians it showed, including Anthony Eden, then prime minister, who is having his trousers ripped off.

The cartoon appeared on the morning of 2 January 1956, but a letter in the Giles archive, from the *Daily Express* layout man Harold Keeble, reveals that the first version differed from the one catalogued. 'You will see that I have trouble with other cartoonists as well', Keeble informed Giles, adding, 'it was necessary to carry out some pretty spectacular surgery between the first and third editions last night'. He attached the two different versions of Cumming's image of Eden, to show the hastily removed bulge in his shirt.[3] The catalogue entry for this cartoon will have to be amended, to record both the changes in the original artwork, and the two different versions of the printed cartoon.

Multiple versions can also arise through censorship. In the General Election campaign of May 1997, for example, Dave Brown drew a cartoon intended for the *Independent* to publish the day after the poll. It made fun of the Labour Party's drift to the right by showing a headless figure outside No.10 Downing Street, with Tony Blair and John Major shown as donkeys, and the words 'PIN THE HEAD ON THE TORY'. The text originally ended with the words 'The winner? Don't be silly we all lose!', but the paper's editor removed the final three words, then dropped the cartoon altogether after the first edition.

A final example of variant images through censorship comes from April 2003, when Steve Bell drew a cartoon for the *Guardian* showing a simian George Bush, squatting on a toilet encrusted with excrement, and using paper imprinted with the UN emblem. The heading was 'Of course there will be a role for the UN', and the cartoon also featured Saddam Hussein as a sewer rat and Tony Blair as a poodle buried up to its neck in excrement. Bell doesn't submit roughs, which makes censoring his cartoons difficult, but after careful thought the editor removed three turds from the version printed in the paper. However the copy on the *Guardian* website remained unaltered, giving further difficulties for the Centre's indexers.

With these variant images the basic unit of indexing becomes a notional underlying cartoon, but with some cartoonists the complexity is even greater. The centre has some of the workbooks of David Austin, who drew single-column 'pocket' cartoons for the *Guardian* from 1990 until his death in 2005. For most of this period he drew two completed cartoons a day, for the front page and the letters page, but these were chosen by the editor from nine drafts or 'roughs' which Austin sketched in his workbook.

It would be possible to catalogue these roughs under the same metadata as the finished cartoon, but what should be done with roughs that are quite different? The centre has a large collection of cartoons by Stanley Franklin, cartoonist on the *Sun* from 1974 to 1998. Franklin regularly provided the editor with two or three quite different roughs on the same subject, and many of these roughs survive in his

Login or register   **Bulletin Board Help**

Showing cartoon 1 of 1 | MC0173 | Search | Wizard

Edit this record

Michael Cummings Biography and holdings

First published by Daily Express on 2 January 1956

One Image
MC0173 29 x 43.5 cm ink, blue crayon

Cummings has a New Year's delightful dream nightmare [If the French election technique crosses the channel . . crossed out]

Listed Personalities (left to right)
- Bevan, Aneurin #107
- Butler, Richard Austen (Rab) Baron Butler of Saffron Walden 1902-1982 #131
- Eden, Anthony (Robert Anthony) 1st Baron Avon 1897-1977 #216
- Macmillan, Harold (Maurice Harold) 1st Earl of Stockton 1894-1986 #497
- Gaitskell, Hugh #316
- Lloyd, Selwyn #942
- Shinwell, Emmanuel #258
- Crookshank, Henry #1290
- Attlee, Clement 1883-1967 #82
- Dalton, Hugh 1916-1964 #185

Other fields
Catalogue Code: MC0173

Embedded text
Politicians Union / 1. Squeeze Middle Classes out of existence / 2. More Lies / 3. Bigger and better 'Crichel Downs' / 4. Fourteen MONDI rule

Thesaurus Keywords
- Behaviour
- Dreams, nightmares
- Geographical areas, Europe, Western Europe, France
- Historical periods and persons, French Revolution
- Human biology, psychology
- Medicine, medical science, psychiatry
- Political leaders, politicians
- Politics, elections
- Social attitudes
- Social problems, violence
- Trades unions

Figures 7 and 8
A screen grab of the indexing for Michael Cummings' *Daily Express* cartoon of 2 January 1956, and a cutting showing his original depiction of the prime minister.
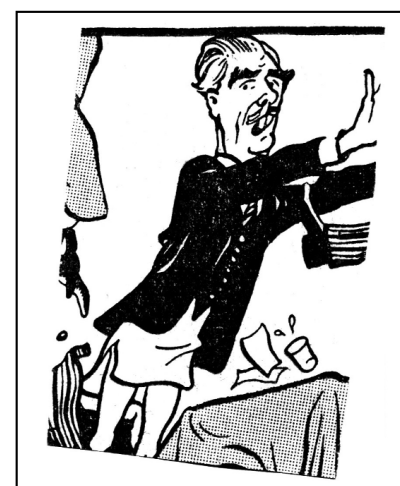
Figures 9 and 10
Dave Brown's cartoon for the *Independent* of 2 May 1997, which was first altered then dropped. The centre (right) has the original artwork, with the censored words restored by the cartoonist.

archive. If the centre digitizes Franklin's roughs, should it link them to the metadata of the published cartoon on the same subject, despite the fact that they might not resemble it in any way?

Luckily some of these difficult questions can now be shared with readers of *The Indexer*. Recognizing that users of its online catalogue have a vast amount of expertise, the centre has recently introduced a new facility. Dr John Bovey, of the university's Computing Laboratory, has adapted his original software to permit users to register as editors, enabling them to make changes to the indexing, add context, or extend the keywording, under the watchful eye of a moderator. So if you'd like to try your hand at indexing cartoons, now's your chance!

Notes

1. 'Jak of all trades', *Private Eye*, 16 January 1981, p. 20; 'Letters', *Private Eye*, 30 January 1981, p. 8.
2. Victor Davis, 'The boys done good', *British Journalism Review*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (2004), p. 64.
3. Centre for the Study of Cartoons and Caricature, Carl Giles Archive, 'Harold Keeble' file, letter from Keeble to Giles, 2 January 1956 [misdated 1955 on original].

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Figures 11 and 12
Spot the difference in the two different versions of Steve Bell's cartoon for the *Guardian* of 4 April 2003. It is difficult to know whether this censorship is a symbol of the editor's power or of his weakness, but either way it creates yet another indexing problem.