Preface

This Guide seeks to paint a comprehensive picture of the incredible wealth of primary source materials to be found in the Special Collections Division of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester. It is not intended to replace existing guides to research resources in particular fields, or the numerous catalogues and handlists of individual collections; rather, to serve as an initial entry point into the system of finding aids, enabling researchers to identify collections relevant to their studies.

The need for such a publication has long been felt. While the John Rylands University Library of Manchester is a comparatively young foundation, having been established in 1972, its predecessor institutions had long and distinguished histories: the John Rylands Library opened to the public in 1900, while the origins of the University of Manchester Library go back as far as 1851. Although brief overviews of the collections have been published previously (these are listed in the general bibliography) and many individual catalogues issued, researchers might reasonably argue that they have waited long enough for a comprehensive guide to the major collections.

It is particularly appropriate that such a Guide should be published now. First, the compilation of the Guide has been facilitated by, and it in turn serves to promote, the major projects which have been underway since 1995 to improve access to the collections through the creation of on-line catalogues of printed books and archives. These projects have been generously supported by non-formula funding from the Higher Education Funding Council for England. Secondly, as the Library and the University of Manchester approach significant anniversaries in the years 2000 and 2001, the Guide celebrates the wonderful richness of the Special Collections, which constitute one of the University's greatest research assets, and a resource of international importance.

The Guide had modest beginnings, in early 1997, as a summary of the Library's many archive and manuscript collections. It was soon realized that its usefulness would be immeasurably enhanced if printed-book collections were also incorporated. Insect-like, it developed through several stages, in ever-growing computer-generated and photocopied forms, finally metamorphosing into a
published edition. In any dynamic and growing library a guide to collections is likely to become out of date almost as soon as it is published. It is anticipated that future editions will take account of new acquisitions and developments in cataloguing, while the parallel, on-line version of this *Guide* will be regularly updated.

As editor I have been charged with putting the *Guide* together, and must accept the concomitant responsibility for all errors and deficiencies. However, the *Guide* is essentially a summation or epitome of the work of countless colleagues over many years, who must share any credit for the value of the publication. Of present colleagues I must thank particularly David Riley and John Canner, whose unrivalled knowledge of the printed-book collections at Deansgate and the Main Library has helped to bridge the many gaps in my own bibliographical expertise; Anne Young, who has answered countless queries concerning the manuscript collections; Stella Halkyard, who has supported the project throughout with her customary enthusiasm; Peter McNiven, who kindly put at my disposal earlier surveys of collections which he had compiled, and who also proof-read the entire text and made many useful comments; and Dorothy Clayton, General Editor of the Bulletin, who not only furnished a great deal of information on sources for North-West history but also greatly assisted in bringing the *Guide* to publication. Other colleagues who have generously offered advice or information, or upon whose earlier work I have drawn, include Fran Baker, Dave Brady, Alistair Cooper, John Gale, John Gandy, Jane Hudson, Caroline Hull, Chris Hunt, John Laidlar, Diana Leitch, Gareth Lloyd, Peter Nockles, the Rev. Ann Peart, Chris Perkins, James Peters, Jocelyn Richardson, Ian Rogerson, Brenda Scragg, Jacque Sen, Judith Shiel, Katherine Thomas and Janet Wallwork. Jon Agar from the Centre for the History of Science, Technology and Medicine supplied information on the National Archive for the History of Computing. Marcia Pointon, Pilkington Professor of Art History, put forward several suggestions for material to be included in the *Guide*. Of the many former colleagues whose writings in the form of catalogues, handlists, guides, articles, exhibition captions and miscellaneous documents I have freely used, I can thank individually only the following who are known to me personally (others may be identified in citations): J.F. Coakley, Clive Field, Ruth Hobbins, Sarah Lawrance, Evelyn Lord, Glenise Matheson, David Moore, Alison Peacock, Alexander Samely, Jan Schmidt, Sarah Smith, John Tuck, Geoff Tweedale and Jacqueline Yallop. Finally, my thanks must go to Mike Pollard of the Department of Art History and Archaeology for so expertly taking and developing the photographs.

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