

## The Electronic Edition of Harrod's Papers: a Preliminary Report from the Visitor's Logs

After publishing a book, one wonders how many readers there are and what parts of the book are accessed more often. Sale figures are a rough indicator of readership, but usage of library copies is much more difficult to assess. The analysis of citations (so far as they are taken up by instruments such as the SSCI) only indicate what readers have found interesting and relevant enough to be cited, not what they were looking for or has attracted their attention in the first place.

For books having a counterpart on a web site, such questions may be roughly answered by examining the hosting site's logs. The results can be surprising, as was the case with the electronic edition of the *Interwar papers and correspondence of Roy Harrod*.

Shortly after the traditional printed version was published in September 2003, an almost complete electronic version was made available free of charge at <http://economia.unipv.it/harrod/edition> (some documents, for which copyright holders did not give permission to publish online, had to be omitted). Besides aiming at making the texts more easily accessible to the scholarly community, the electronic edition had the purpose of helping to overcome two limits intrinsic to a printed edition.

One lies in the necessity to be selective, for in the chosen interval the mass of extant papers and especially of correspondence largely surpassed the available space. The selection criterion, as expounded in the editorial introduction, was the relevance of the documents for the understanding of Harrod's economic thought, of the steps of his career, and also of his collateral activities as an *amateur* of philosophy and politics. This led to the exclusion of about three thousand personal and routine letters and some *juvenalia*. As a partial remedy, a summary description of these documents was given, including the location in repositories, to the benefit of those scholars who would be interested in other aspects of the correspondence, such as the administrative duties of an Oxford don or Harrod's personal correspondence with his contemporaries.

A traditional edition in print involves a second kind of problem: the editor's understanding of the subjects discussed in the correspondence and of the historical development of the discipline is unavoidably projected in the categorization of the subject index.

The electronic edition aimed at remedying (partially at least) these limits. Publication without space limitations permits to include not only a number of documents that had to be omitted from the printed version, but also the reproduction, as images, of some of the originals. The site consists of about 2,200 pages: each document in the printed edition – letters, essays, and press items – is reproduced as a separate web page, as well as all the new items added and all the independent elements of the editorial apparatus – editorial and general introduction, tables of contents, bibliographies, biographical entries. It also incorporates a dedicated search engine which allows users to explore the text being constrained not by the editor's categories, but by the author's original wording. The indexing of the site was performed *before* the copyrighted documents were taken out, so that the search engine captures the entire text even if it cannot be shown.

The electronic edition cannot be a substitute for the printed text, but it can be a complement to it. And it is precisely the understanding of this point that induced the publisher, Edward Elgar, to consent with the publication online free of charge – publication which was also made possible by the Department of Economics of the University of Pavia, Italy, on whose server the site is hosted, and by the generosity of almost all copyright holders.

The search engine keeps track of all searches performed, and the hosting site produces a cumulative log showing the number of accesses to each page. Conjointly, these two logs permit to evaluate what the readers find interesting in the materials included in this web site.

The first aim of the electronic edition, that of supplying additional materials and making the whole collection of documents more easily accessible, seems to have been reached. The site received almost 2 millions requests by 15 July 2006, totaling 5.27% of the traffic of the domain [economia.unipv.it](http://economia.unipv.it). The main index was seen about 10,500 times, the General introduction 3,150 times, the Editorial introduction 1,600 times. The page listing the symbols used was hit almost 3,200 times, giving a minimum estimate of meticulous visits.

Throughout his career, Harrod devoted relevant shares of his time not only to economics, a subject he chose by necessity rather than for primary interest, but also to philosophy and politics. Interestingly enough, the philosophical and political items in the collection, almost ignored by economists, have attracted the attention of general readers. The document visited more frequently is a letter Harrod received from the philosopher Alfred Ayer in 1933 (almost 8,800 hits), well ahead of the most frequently read exchange on economic matters, the Harrod-Keynes correspondence in 1938 on methodological issues (1,500 hits). The remainder of the philosophical and political materials are not such high scorers, but compete at the same level as the purely economic documents. Readers, in particular, have been interested in Harrod's commitment with the anti-appeasement front in 1938–39, with his numerous writings on population decline, and with his organization of round-robin letters to the press or to politicians (a letter from Oxford economists to President Roosevelt, and the related documents, was seen more than 1,300 times).

The items relating to Harrod's private life, as distinct from his academic and public figure on which the edition centered, have scored very high. Of the correspondence, the 4th classified is a letter to Douglas Woodruff while another letter to E. Sackville-West is also among the most frequently seen letters. Among the biographical entries (one of the most visited sections: 6,600 hits to the table of contents), the pages seen more frequently concerned Harrod's close circle of friends, beginning from Maurice Bowra (2,800 hits) and Lindemann (2,250). Among the 25 people whose biography was seen more than 1,000 times there are only 6 economists, the first being Hubert Henderson at 1,300.

The 'bonus' items, that is, the documents reproduced in full or in part in the electronic edition but not in the printed version, have been quite successful. The index of these materials was seen 1,350 times, the index of the abstracts not in print was consulted by 1,900 readers. Most of the 63 letters written by Henry Scott-Stokes to Harrod (fully transcribed by Scott-Stokes's daughter Charity) were seen between 6 and 700 times each.

The incorporated search engine was not used as fully as initially hoped. Only about 1,000 searches were performed, most of which were repeated several times with alternative spelling or combinations. The top searches were personal names. Keynes's is by far at the top of the list (21 searches), followed by a number of searches occurred 2-4 times, fairly evenly distributed among economists, philosophers and politicians, while Harrod's personal friends seem to have raised slightly less interest. Either readers did not appreciate that the internal search engine, contrary to the users' favorite external ones, also picks up the items omitted due to copyright problems (this is now visibly specified on the page), or simply were not interested in detailed refinements of their searches or in the problems that would have required examining the recurrence of certain categories or of specific linguistic expressions within a corpus of texts – with a handful of exceptions consisting in searches of terms such as “foreign trade multiplier” (7 times), “dynamics” (5), “growth” (4), “multiplier” (3), “liquidity” and “interest” (2).

From the fact of readers having been more interested in what the editor has purposely omitted from the printed edition, and from their scarce use of the philological instrument at their disposal, one could be tempted to despair. Yet this also suggests that the choice of including specific traces of the omitted materials, with enough indications for interested readers to locate and examine them, was not only correct but more useful than one could think. One may thus hope that some readers will want to explore the less well-known sides of Harrod, his Oxford environment, his political commitment and his philosophical bent: and indeed the list of library abbreviations has been checked already 2,200 times so far.

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