OLD BOOKS AND DIGITAL PUBLISHING: EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY COLLECTIONS ONLINE

Stephen H. Gregg

Bath Spa University
Old Books and Digital Publishing: Eighteenth-Century Collections Online

Elements in Publishing and Book Culture

DOI: 10.1017/9781108767415
First published online: November 2020

Stephen H. Gregg
Bath Spa University

Author for correspondence: Stephen H. Gregg, s.gregg@bathspa.ac.uk

ABSTRACT: This is a history of Eighteenth Century Collections Online (ECCO), a database of more than 180,000 titles. Published by Gale in 2003, it has had an enormous impact on the study of the eighteenth century. Like many commercial digital archives, ECCO’s continuing development obscures its precedents. This Element examines its prehistory as first a computer catalogue of eighteenth-century print, and then as a commercial microfilm collection, before moving to the digitisation and development of the interfaces to ECCO, as well as Gale’s various partnerships and licensing deals. An essential aspect of this Element is how it explores the sociocultural and technological debates around access to old books from the 1930s to the present: Stephen Gregg demonstrates how these contexts powerfully shape the way ECCO works to this day. This Element’s aim is to make us better users and readers of digital archives.

KEYWORDS: books, remediation, history, digital publishing, eighteenth century

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ISBNs: 9781108720694 (PB), 9781108767415 (OC)
ISSNs: 2514-8524 (online), 2514-8516 (print)
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Timeline


1987 18thC STC cataloguing expanded to include pre-1700 material.

1987–8 Microfilming operation expanded.

1994 The 18thC STC renamed the English Short Title Catalogue (ESTC).

1995 RPI becomes Primary Source Media (PSM).

1996 Thomson Learning decides to begin digitising its collections.

1998 PSM, Information Access Company, and Gale Research merge to form Gale Group, part of Thomson Learning.

1998 ProQuest launches Early English Books Online (EEBO).

1999 Text Creation Partnership (TCP) formed.

2000 ECCO digitisation begins.

2001–2 Gale Group becomes Thomson-Gale.

2003–4 Eighteenth Century Collections Online published.

2004–10 TCP schedule for transcribing and publishing ECCO-TCP texts.

2006–9 UK organisation Jisc purchases ECCO files under license.


2007 Cross-search with EEBO added to interface.
Timeline

2009  ECCO II publishes more than 46,000 extra titles from scans done between 2003 and 2009. Subject field added. Optical character recognition (OCR) software replaced. ESTC and ECCO metadata enhanced by adding Library of Congress subject headings.

2010  End of microfilming programme.

2010  BiblioLife produces print-on-demand copies of ECCO titles.

2010  18thConnect website launched.

2011  Jisc Historic Books platform launched.

2011  TCP releases c.2,200 ECCO-TCP texts.

2014  Jisc Historic Books redesigned and relaunched as Historical Texts.


2015  Gale offers an additional ECCO interface option called Artemis.

2016  Artemis renamed Gale Primary Sources.

2019  Gale Digital Scholar Lab (beta) platform launched.

2020  Gale begins digitising a further c.90,000 books for future publication as ECCO III.

2020  Original ‘stand-alone’ ECCO interface scheduled to be turned off.