
John Carter: An Assessment and a Handlist

by

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JOHN CARTER WAS ONE OF THE MOST PROMINENT AND SIGNIFICANT figures in the Anglo-American book world in the twentieth century. Indeed, he held a unique position, for he distinguished himself as a bookseller, a collector, a scholar, and a writer, equally at home and equally recognized on both sides of the Atlantic. He created innovative rare-book catalogues for the Scribner Book Store; formed several notable collections, especially of Catullus and Housman; was a pioneer investigator of the bibliographical problems of nineteenth-century publishers' bindings; performed (with Graham Pollard) a classic piece of bibliographical detection in uncovering the Wise-Forman forgeries; produced a scholarly edition of Sir Thomas Browne's *Urne Buriall and the Garden of Cyrus*; and wrote (or co-wrote or co-edited) several celebrated works—*An Enquiry into the Nature of Certain Nineteenth Century Pamphlets* (1934), *Taste and Technique in Book-Collecting* (1948), *ABC for Book-Collectors* (1952), and *Printing and the Mind of Man* (1967).

A record of his published writings is obviously a basic guide to his accomplishment. But such a record is also desirable for another reason that would not apply to many people: nearly every piece he wrote, no matter how small (including brief reviews and letters to editors), is worth reading for its style and wit. I am therefore presenting here a handlist (following in Carter's tradition of handlist-writing) that will enable readers to find these pieces. Carter published so prolifically (some 1500 items are known) in such a wide array of venues that there are bound to be many items I have missed, especially among his letters to editors. But what is here is a comprehensive nucleus to which additions can be made. As Carter said in his handlist of Stanley Morison, it is "intended to serve as a series of signposts now and as a basis for amplification, correction and addition in the future."

As an introduction to the handlist, I shall attempt a brief assessment of Carter's achievement, which is a by-product of the overview provided by the handlist. It is inevitably biographical to some extent; but the emphasis is on Carter's writings, not his life, because a book-length biography already exists: Donald C. Dickinson's *John Carter: The Taste and Technique of*