

CHAPTER FIVE

AN EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

The list prepared by the selector for ordering the books can serve a further purpose: it can form the basis of a catalogue to accompany the exhibition. If the audience is going to be a very general one, no catalogue may be needed: the books themselves may be sufficient. But a more specialised audience - chemists or teachers, football players or geologists - will almost certainly want to read or refer to some of the books they see at the exhibition, and they will be grateful if they can pick up a catalogue of the books on display and take it away with them.

A Catalogue or a List?

A stencilled list will often do the trick. It costs little to produce: typewriter, stencil, paper, and someone's time (and infinite care!). If you can afford to give copies away, you can expect it to be very popular. The trouble is that a stencilled list has little permanence and not much authority. It may be absolutely accurate and contain all the relevant information, yet still seem slightly makeshift. If authority or permanence are what you want, a printed catalogue is the answer. It is, however, the most expensive way to list the books.

Two examples of pages from printed catalogues are given in Appendix A; one from an exhibition of children's books, the other from an exhibition of Commonwealth literature. Both are annotated. Part of an unannotated list appears as Appendix C and part of a stencilled list as Appendix B.

Getting the Number Right

It may be that the funds raised for the exhibition are sufficient to cover the cost of a printed catalogue. The likelihood, though, is that they are not. You are then faced with the difficulty of working out how many copies of a catalogue have to be sold at a given price to recover the outlay of producing them, or, better, of making a profit. The first rule here is to avoid extreme over-estimation of possible sales. Every publisher of every different sort of book can tell you hard luck stories of books that didn't sell nearly as well as expected. But whereas they can balance losses on one title against gains on others, you can't. You, as the producer of a catalogue for an exhibition, are bringing out one title only: you cannot recoup any losses on its sale with profits from a past or future bestseller.

In choosing the right number to print, past experience of exhibition attendance is invaluable. If you know that a similar exhibition a year or two back was attended by 1,000 people, then, other things being equal, you might hope for the same attendance again. If the price of the catalogue can be kept low, then you might guess that one in four people will be tempted to buy a copy. Can it be produced and sold at a price that means that the original outlay is recovered on a 250 sale? Or, better, a 200 sale? If so, then it is probably a worthwhile risk to print 400 or 500 copies. But beware of the temptation to overprint: the run-on price for another 500 or 1,000 is so reasonable, the printer explains. But however reasonable, if you don't sell the original number there is absolutely no point in having extra copies whatever the price.

If you decide to have a printed catalogue, make sure to get estimates from more than one printer. It may even repay the time to get four or five. In order to prepare an estimate, the printer will need to know several things. They include the size of the page, the number of pages, the number of illustrations (if any), the type of cover, any colour printing required (e.g. on the cover), the type

of binding, the date the copy will be ready for printing, and the date the finished copies are required. Someone on the committee is sure to be able to prepare a printing specification or to know a suitable person who can be asked to help.

Given the right information, the printers you approach can give you estimates for various print runs (e.g. 400, 500, 750 and 1,000 copies). You can also ask for a specimen page, or a page from something similar that the printer has already produced, so that you know exactly what to expect. With this information you can decide which estimate to accept. Probably it will be the lowest, but you may prefer to take a slightly higher estimate if you have reason to believe that the quality of the work or the reliability of the service justify the extra expense.

It is vital that material in a catalogue is 100% correct: titles, author, publisher, ISBN (International Standard Book Number) where available, and annotations if required. However good the compiler, there should be someone to counter-check the work and ensure that the material is correctly marked-up. The printer is only responsible for seeing that what he is given is correctly printed according to the instructions he receives. Alterations to printed material can be expensive, so make sure that errors in the proofs are not your fault or you can expect to have to pay the printer for correcting them.

When the exhibition opens, do not put out all the catalogues at once : they must be rationed, though obviously more will be required at the official opening than at other times.