The C.K. Ogden Papers at McMaster University:
Bibliographia Benthamiana

James E Crimmins
K E Garay

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Charles Kay Ogden (1889-1957) is best known to Bentham scholars as the editor of *The Theory of Legislation* (1931) and *Bentham’s Theory of Fictions* (1932), and for delivering the Bentham Centenary Lecture at University College, London on 6 June 1932, subsequently published with the somewhat whimsical title *Jeremy Bentham, 1832-2032* (1932). Ogden once proposed to take his editorial work on Bentham further by producing a new edition of the *Works* to be supplemented by selections from the extensive manuscript holdings at University College. The three-year period he estimated for completion of this project indicates that Ogden was either not fully conversant with the store of valuable materials contained in the Bentham Collection at University College, or somewhat naively optimistic about what could be achieved in the time specified. On the other hand, he may have intentionally underestimated the volume in order to win the interest of a sponsor.

Perhaps more intriguingly, there are striking similarities between the careers and indeed the personalities of the two men. As with Bentham, Ogden’s interests and occupations were numerous and diverse, in the case of the latter spanning traditional philosophy, psychology, translation and, most of all, linguistics and the invention of Basic English. Ogden’s eccentricities and genius for invention took him into the public domain, where he encountered little more success than his great predecessor, whom he appears to have taken for his model. When, after World War II, the new British Government broke faith with Churchill’s earlier promises of solid support for Basic English, a bitterly disappointed Ogden demanded and eventually received compensation in the amount of £23,000, a sum identical to that received by Bentham in payment for the failed Panopticon prison venture.

Ogden was born on 1 June 1889 at Rossall School at Fleetwood in England. After schooling in Buxton and at Rossall, he won a scholarship to Magdalene College, Cambridge, where he completed the first part of the classical tripos in 1911. While at Cambridge he co-founded and organized the Cambridge Heretics, a society in which views were exchanged on politics, religion, philosophy and literature by a variety of notables (members and invited guests), including Rupert Brooke, Frank Harris, George Bernard Shaw and G.K. Chesterton.

In 1912 Ogden began the weekly newspaper *The Cambridge Magazine*, reporting university events and featuring short articles and poems. The journal achieved notoriety
during World War I when, from October 1915 onwards, it began to feature a regular section on the war, edited by Mrs C.R. Buxton, entitled “Notes from the Foreign Press.” The appearance of a balanced selection of opinions, both pro- and anti-war, provoked vehement opposition both within and beyond the academic community; questions regarding Ogden’s publication were raised in the House of Commons, government advertisements were withdrawn and The Cambridge Magazine, while barely managing to stay afloat, became nationally and even internationally known.6

While at Cambridge Ogden also published The Problem of the Continuation School (co-authored with R.H. Best, 1914), Militarism versus Feminism (1915), Fecundity and Civilization (under the pseudonym “Adelyne More”, 1916), and a translation of Romain Rolland’s Au Dessus de la Mêlée (Above the Battle, 1916).

After the war, Ogden’s interest in language theory became paramount. As a successor to The Cambridge Magazine he turned his attention to a new journal, Psyche, which, while it began as a publication devoted to the more arcane aspects of parapsychology, quickly began to shift its focus to linguistics and to the prospects for an international language. It is in the latter regard that Ogden’s research on Bentham proved uncommonly valuable, especially for Bentham’s work on language theory and fictions.7 In the editorials and articles Ogden produced for Psyche, Bentham is frequently referred to as a pioneer in this area and as the source of Ogden’s own inspiration.8 Indeed, it could be said that Ogden took Bentham’s work on language and his speculations concerning a “universal grammar” to their natural conclusion in his own linguistic schemes and inventions. It is not overstating the case to claim that Ogden’s career, from the 1920s until his death, was shaped and directed by his reading and editing of the writings of Bentham.

Ogden’s work on language bore its first substantial fruit in 1923 when, with his Cambridge friend and colleague I.A. Richards, he published the seminal study The Meaning of Meaning. Their work on meaning explored another dimension in 1925, when the pair, in cooperation with James Wood, produced The Foundations of Aesthetics. Ogden’s major editorial accomplishments also occurred during this period and testify to the encyclopedic character of his mind and interests. For Kegan Paul he edited the famous International Library of Psychology, Philosophy and Scientific Method series, supervising the publication of hundreds of titles by authors such as G.E. Moore, W.H. Rivers, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Bertrand and Dora Russell, Carl Jung and Jean Piaget. Other series edited by Ogden included the ‘Psyche Miniatures’, the ‘Today and Tomorrow’ series and the ‘History of Civilization’ series. After visiting the United States for the first time in 1926, Ogden became scientific editor of Forum and in 1927 he founded the Orthological Institute in London. The Institute, which is still functioning, was intended to provide an international base for language investigation and research and to operate as a headquarters for the promotion of Ogden’s most ambitious project of all, Basic English.

It was the invention and refinement of Basic English which consumed most of Ogden’s ample energies from the late 1920s until his death in 1957. Its ultimate failure to realize the prospects he saw for it was the greatest disappointment of his career. The main outlines of Basic English were first revealed in a series of editorials in Psyche during the late 1920s.

Basic English, as Ogden defined it, is “a selection of 850 English words, used in simple structural patterns, which is both an international auxiliary language and a self-
Ogden's concept was, however, more than a mere word list; idioms were to be eliminated as were most verbs, since for Ogden, as for Bentham, verbs were "slippery eels" and the cause of much linguistic difficulty. Instead of verbs Ogden admitted 18 "operators" into his list: only "come" and "go", "give" and "get", "put" and "take" and 12 others were permitted. These operators, along with the remaining 832 carefully selected words, were to fulfill the function of the normal 20,000 word English vocabulary.

After a series of revisions to the word list and at least one change of name — an earlier draft called the concept "Panoptic English" — the full design and word list appeared in a *Psyche* miniature in 1930. From the first Ogden had acknowledged Bentham's influence on the scheme, and he reiterated his debt in the Bentham Centenary Lecture given in London in June 1932. In an essay of the same year he reckoned Bentham's impact in the following terms:

> For help at every stage in the work, Bentham's *Theory of Fictions* was of the greatest value, and his support for the idea that the "verb" system might be broken up for international purposes, was responsible for the decision at least to make the attempt. So Bentham is the true father of Basic English.11

Among the early supporters of Basic English Ogden could count George Bernard Shaw, Julian Huxley and H.G. Wells; they were among the well known figures who signed a declaration that they would "welcome any provision for its practical application, especially... for the establishment of closer relations with the peoples of Africa and the East."12 In his science fiction novel *The Shape of Things to Come*, Wells also made Basic English "the official medium of communication throughout the world by Air and Sea Control, and by 2020 there was hardly anyone in the World who could not talk and understand it."13

Many publications designed to facilitate the use and dissemination of Basic English were produced during the 1930s, edited either by Ogden or one of his associates at the Orthological Institute, including the rendering into Basic English of Well's *The Time Machine*, parts of Joyce's *Anna Livia Plurabelle*, Shaw's *Arms and the Man*, Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*, Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty*, and Grimms' *Fairy Tales*.

Others were less sure of the utility of Ogden's scheme: George Orwell, after expressing some sympathy with the goals of language reform during his years at the B.B.C., savagely satirized the barely disguised Basic English in *1984* (1949).

Basic English was far from being the first international language proposal to appear on the scene; the Esperanto movement had an estimated 2,000 members in Britain during the 1930s. Perhaps even more difficult for Ogden to overcome was the sense among native English speakers that their language should not be tampered with and the resistance among non-native speakers of English against what they perceived as a form of cultural dissemination in the spreading, albeit in abbreviated form, of the English language.

Ogden found his most influential champion in the somewhat unlikely form of the British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill. The establishment of a Cabinet Committee on Basic English in July 1943 seemed, at last, to provide the firm support which Ogden had so long sought. He was to discover, however, as Bentham had a century before him, that the promised backing was never to materialize. With the end of the war, which had made the need for international communication so acute, and the fall of Churchill and
his Conservatives in 1945, Basic English retreated from the national agenda once again. A somewhat shamefaced government did pay Ogden the Benthamite token sum he requested in compensation, and assisted in the setting up of the Basic English Foundation in the spring of 1947 "to propagate the teaching and study of Basic English as an international medium and thereby to increase the knowledge of English among mankind."

The new Foundation did not prosper; Ogden abandoned the chairmanship and relations with the government bureaucrats became more and more strained. Basic English, as a first step in the teaching of standard English, established itself in India, Africa, the Far East, The Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, but Ogden's grand design for Basic as an international language was not realized; in the early 1950s government funding ceased entirely. Embittered but not defeated, Ogden continued tirelessly to promote its cause until his death on 20 March 1957.

The Ogden Papers at McMaster University are contained in 154 manuscript boxes, presenting the Ogden scholar with a task of Benthamic proportions. Most of Ogden's library of incunabula, his early printed books related to language and his collection of the manuscripts of Lord Brougham were purchased by University College, London in 1953. Following Ogden's death another 50,000 to 60,000 books from his collection were purchased by the University of California at Los Angeles. After Ogden's death, his brother Frank went through all of his papers, pulling out and setting aside certain materials and making annotations in pencil on others. Sections of the papers were then sold off in the early 1970s and the remainder finally auctioned in many lots during 1980-81 by Lawrence, Fine Art of Crewkerne in Somerset. It has been estimated that roughly ninety per cent of the Ogden papers offered at the Lawrence sales was purchased by McMaster University.

The Ogden Papers are organized into four unequal categories: (i) those connected with the Cambridge Heretics, ca. 1909-25; (ii) correspondence relating to The Cambridge Magazine, ca. 1912-22; (iii) post-1921 correspondence; and (iv) manuscripts, diaries, news clippings, draft articles and other items (excluding correspondence). The papers have good research potential, not merely as a primary source for Ogden's life. The papers relating to The Cambridge Magazine have important material on press coverage during World War I and Ogden's difficulties in steering an impartial course. Among other items, category (ii) contains material written by Bertrand Russell, Gilbert Cannan, T.E. Hulme, Frank Ramsey and G.E. Moore. In category (iii) there are important exchanges with I.A. Richards, the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski, H.L. Mencken, and the military engineer and author Count Alfred Korzybski. Naturally, Ogden's papers document in detail the story of the development of Basic English, and it is here that Bentham scholars will find manuscripts of special interest, including material relating to the Bentham Centenary Lecture of 6 June 1932.

The Ogden Papers have not yet been fully catalogued, hence the notes which follow are arranged in the order in which the material is presently found in the several boxes. The boxes of particular interest to Bentham scholars are 134, 135, and 143. It should be noted, however, that the following cannot claim to be a comprehensive record of all the Bentham-related material in the Ogden Papers, since it is likely that other miscellaneous fragments and items of interest will come to light when the formidable task of itemizing the entire fonds is completed. Few of the individual sheets in these boxes are dated, but fairly accurate dates can be supplied based on the subject-matter.
Box 134: Papers, 1923-1929

Many of the papers in this box relate to Ogden’s language research. One file-folder (ca. 1929) contains, among other materials, several working models of Ogden’s Basic Word Wheel Panopticon, invented by Ogden as an aid to the structuring of English sentences to accompany his book *The ABC of Basic English* (see photograph). The Word Wheel has seven wheels, each of which displays words branching out from the centre like spokes in a bicycle wheel. By manipulating the circles it is possible to construct an incalculable number of different sentences. Box 134 also contains a sketch in ink of a Panopticon Diagram of a Wound, possibly designed to assist in the instruction of medical students or to aid in the diagnosis and treatment of wounds. Another folder contains printed lists of words under the heading “Panoptic English,” and a handwritten note announcing that “500 words say everything,” though Ogden later settled on a basic language of 850 English words.

Box 135: Papers, 1930-1934

In the main the papers in Box 135 are related to the Basic English project, with occasional manuscripts pertaining to Bentham, including references to Bentham’s theory of fictions interspersed with a few corrected proof-sheets for an article on the topic of Basic English (see note 11 below). Also contained in this box is a corrected draft of “Offences against Taste,” audaciously published by Ogden as one of the appendices to his Bentham Centenary Lecture, and a corrected draft version in type of a paper entitled “Bentham on Invention” (subsequently published in *Psyche*; see Appendix A,
item 7). In the latter, Ogden refers the reader to Bentham’s *Defence of Usury*, *Theory of Legislation*, *Manual of Political Economy*, and *Rationale of Reward* as examples of what the inventive mind might achieve. There are, too, fragmentary notes of various kinds. One note is headed “Population,” with references to Malthus and Halevy. Another note informs us that “In MS. headed ‘Political Prospects’ (Pk1.107) dealing with Bankruptcy of Bank of England, Bentham says: ‘By what is man governed but by words?’” Yet another (in a series of eleven sheets of notes drawn from B. Daydon Jackson’s *Life of George Bentham*) relates that in the “Life of George Bentham 1906 it is stated (p.81) that Bentham before his death on June 6 was able to understand that the Reform Bill had passed.”

Undoubtedly, the most interesting item in this box is Ogden’s extensive memorandum proposing a new “Centenary Edition of the Works of Jeremy Bentham” (a handwritten draft followed by a typed version, dated December 1932), to be undertaken by the Orthological Institute. Though no particular sponsor is indicated, Ogden estimated the total cost for the entire project at £100,000, “based on the figure of £10,000 for merely reprinting the nucleus with some editorial addenda,” and projected completion “in approximately three years from the date on which this sum was made available.” On the subject of Bowring’s edition of the *Works*, Ogden was at pains to point out its rarity and to underscore its unreliability: “full of errors both in transcription and typography.” So far as the manuscripts at University College were concerned, he suggested the purchasing of “photostat apparatus” and hiring of an operator in order to reproduce working “photostat copies of the 25,000 most helpful pages,” at a total cost of £10,000. Revealing a somewhat superficial awareness of the riches of the Bentham Manuscripts at University College, Ogden comments, “How much more publishable material would emerge is uncertain...” Additional assistants were to be hired at a total cost of £5,000.

**Box 143: News clippings, mainly related to the centenary of Bentham’s death**

Among folders of unrelated material Box 143 contains a folder of news clippings of articles on Bentham, mainly from June 1932 on the occasion of the centenary of his death, including one by Sir Ernest Barker in *The Observer*. Some of these articles may have escaped the attention of Bentham scholars. They are here listed in chronological order, accompanied by a selection of quotations:


   For a man to claim the attributes of a Divine Being is not at all an unknown thing in the history of mankind. For a man to claim to be a prophet is even more familiar. But for a man to claim that he combines the functions of Moses and Jahweh and to do so with a definite measure of success is a phenomenon calculated to unsettle the sanity of a work-a-day lawyer, scientist, or historian. The only man at all comparable with Bentham in this particular was his contemporary, Napoleon Bonaparte, the Code Maker.

One reason why Bentham's writings on education have been forgotten is because "his projects were all abortive. . . [I]f his practical proposals need defence, his general principles need none; they were not only enlightened and progressive for their age, but they have stood the test of time, since in many ways they resemble those on which the national system of education has actually proceeded."

Bentham was "one of those 'mad Englishmen' . . . who are the glory of England." In later life "he fell victim to 'terminological exactitude'".27  

"In his hands utility became a trumpet, whence he blew strains to shake down the walls of English common law, and to frighten into limbo the spectral 'sinister interests' which haunted the eighteenth-century British Constitution."

"Bentham brought to the elucidation of that principle three gifts—a convinced and burning passion; a mathematical precision of thought and statement; and, perhaps above all, a gift of legal and political invention. The mathematics of Bentham's utilitarian calculus are sometimes thin and jejune. The fertility of his inventiveness was superb."

Bentham "has been almost forgotten, although (or perhaps because) the multitude of reforms for which he laboured are merely the commonplace conditions of today."

"Every law, in Bentham's view, was an evil. The legislator was to take care that the evil he attacked was really greater than that which he employed to prevent it."

"He was the Socrates of his time, the centre of a circle and the master of a school: like Socrates he was 'always conversing about things human'; and as the conversation of the Socratic circle passed into the life of Athens, so the talk of Bentham's circle became part of the life of England."

Bentham "made up his mind to become a social engineer, to be 'the Newton of Legislation', to force the world by sheer irresistible reason to pursue the aim of 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number'."

"A contemporary facetiously remarked that it would be a melancholy sight to see the mortal remains of Jeremy consigned to the care of a marine store dealer.30
'The sight of the skull of Yorick, the King's jester, knocked about by a sexton's spade, is calculated to excite serious reflections, but the idea of the skeleton of Bentham—clothed as we have seen him in his life—ticketed for sale, is too painful a thought to dwell on. 'If Dr. Johnson could have foreseen the thing, it would have given him genuine satisfaction to convert it into an instance illustrating The Vanity of Human Wishes.'

Appendix A: Ogden's writings in Psyche with reference to Bentham

With the exception of Ogden's works listed in note 1 below, most of his writings on, or with reference to Bentham appeared in Psyche, which began publication under Ogden's editorship in July 1920.31

4. “Bentham's Philosophy of 'As-if','' 9/1 (1928), 4-14.
15. “Basic English and Grammatical Reform,” 16 (1936), 51-75.32

Appendix B: Articles on Bentham by others in Psyche

Notes

* We are indebted to Carl Spadoni for allowing the use of his Archival Information Sheet on the Ogden Papers and for his assistance in locating material relating to Bentham in the Archives at McMaster University. For permission to quote from the papers, we gratefully acknowledge Charlotte Stewart-Murphy, Director, William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, Mills Memorial Library, McMaster University.


2 In an unpublished note dated December 1932, included in the Ogden Papers at McMaster University, Box 135. See below, note 11.

3 Bearing witness to Ogden's eccentricities, one finds in Box 134 of McMaster's Ogden Papers a substantial folder containing series upon series of numbers for roulette, a game which Ogden played regularly at Monte Carlo. The notes are either an attempt to develop a "system" or perhaps simply a study of the frequency with which certain numbers and colours turn up on the roulette wheel. Whichever it is, Ogden notes in disarming fashion (for gamblers, that is) towards the end of these papers: "This plus + minus game (without progressions) gives you lots of play, with no appreciable profits."


6 Mr. Butcher M.P. alleged that the magazine contained "pacifists' propaganda of a kind repugnant to the great majority of the members of Cambridge University and of the people of the country"; _Parliamentary Debates_, Vol. xcix, p. 36, 12 November 1917. See also M. and E. Kolinsky, "A Voice of Reason in the First World War", in Florence and Anderson (eds), _C.K. Ogden_, pp. 56-81.

7 In addition to Ogden's edition of _Bentham's Theory of Fictions_ see also the "Essay on Logic", "A fragment on Ontology", the "Essay on Language," and the "Fragments on Universal Grammar" in _The Works of Jeremy Bentham, Published under the Superintendence of his Executor John Bowring_, 11 vols. (Edinburgh, 1838-1843), viii; also the essay on "Nomography" with an appendix on "Logical Arrangements, or Instruments of Invention and Discovery employed by Jeremy Bentham", ibid., iii. For a useful discussion of these matters see R. Harrison, _Bentham_, London, 1983.

8 For Ogden's writings on Bentham in Psyche see Appendix A above.


12 These declarations or "Basic English Manifestos" contained 135 signatures expressing support for Ogden's invention. See the description of them (as lot 334 in Part II of the sale of Ogden's papers) by Lawrence, Fine Art of Crewkerne, Somerset, England, in the catalogue of 12 February 1981.


15 For a full account of developments during the war and immediately following it see K.E. Garay, "Empires of the Mind? C.K. Ogden, Winston Churchill and Basic English", _Historical Papers/Communications historiques_, 1988, pp. 280-91.

16 The issue of _The Basic News_ (No. 10), published in 1950 after a ten-year hiatus, demonstrates how widely Basic English had spread throughout the world.

17 Siegfried Sassoon's letters to Ogden, for example, are listed in Catalogue 20 (August 1972) by Dawson's of Pall Mall. Wittgenstein's letters, used by G.H. Wright in his edition of _Letters to C.K. Ogden with Comments on the English Translation of Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus_ (Oxford, 1973), are also absent from the Ogden Papers at McMaster; it is likely that they were sold by the Orthological Institute, to which Ogden left the bulk of his estate, before the Crewkerne auctions.

18 Ogden's contract to publish _The A BC of Basic English_ with Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trubner and Company is also contained in Box 134, dated 2 Nov. 1928. The photograph of The Basic Word Wheel Panopticon appears courtesy of the William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University.
As Ogden put it in the article "Basic English and International Development," p. 18: "850 words do all the work of 20,000." The full 850-word list was included as a fold-out sheet facing the title-page of Basic English.

In the year before the Bentham Centenary Lecture, Ogden edited and published the essay "Bentham on Sex" appended to his edition of The Theory of Legislation. The material for this appendix and the one contained in Jeremy Bentham, 1832-2032 is culled from the Bentham MSS in UC 74a/35-222 (1814, 1816) and UC 161b/215-523 (1816-18).

Source in Bentham unknown.


Ogden here refers to his Centenary Lecture, Jeremy Bentham, 1832-2032, p. 45.

Written on the occasion of the promulgation of the new property statutes, and loosely based upon the views of Lord Acton (quoted several times in the article).

In the proposal for a "Centenary Edition of the Works of Jeremy Bentham" (see above Box 135) Ogden notes that this article is by "a famous international authority." In part the article is a review of Bentham's Chrestomathia, here described as "entirely based on Bell's 'Elements of Tuition', though the language and the amplifications are characteristically Benthamic."

Barker's article has been marked by Ogden (?) with blue and red pencils.

One is reminded of Churchill's famous response to the Speaker when asked to withdraw an accusation that a fellow M.P. had lied: "I beg the Speaker's pardon. My honourable friend is guilty of terminological inexactitude!".


Based in part on Ogden's Centenary Lecture, to which Beales refers in a footnote (together with Ogden's edition of The Theory of Legislation). Ogden's influence can also be seen in a passage pointing out Bentham's influence on the development of "Basic English, as a workable international language."

The "contemporary" is not known.

The compilation of this Appendix has been greatly assisted by W.T. Gordon's C.K. Ogden: A Bio-Bibliographic Study. Gordon also refers to "Popularization through Basic: The Destruction of International Trade" in Progress and the Scientific Worker, 1 (1933), pp. 146-149; according to Gordon this essay provides "a brief account of Bentham's contribution to language simplification, followed by a translation into Basic English of Bentham's 'Observations on the Restrictive and Prohibitory Commercial System'" (p. 76). For the latter work, first published in 1821, see Bowring, iii. pp. 85-103.

Reprinted as a supplement to The Basic News, July 1937.