A note on the first Library circulation system in Trinity[1]

Introduction
The Library's collaboration with the Computer Laboratory dates from the Laboratory's formation in 1968. A computerised catalogue was developed on the Laboratory's first computer – an IBM 360/44. – shared with teaching, research and some administrative processing.

Student lending / Circulation
By 1972, the Library was interested in automating the system for lending books to students. This was prompted by the growing collection of student lending books in the Library's collections by the move of the Modern Languages Lending Library from Regent House to the 1937 Reading room in 1967 and the transfer of the Lecky Library collection (Business and Humanities) from the Museum Building to the area under the podium (the "Annex") of the New Library (later named the Berkeley Library) in 1971.

The borrowing (circulation) of these books were managed by the Browne Issue System[2] and in 1979, a report stated there were c.50,000 books available for student loans.

With the opening of the Arts Building in 1978, the arts and humanity books in the Berkeley annex and the modern language collection in the 1937 Reading Room were moved to the new Lecky Library, forming a significant lending collection in the one reading room.

A new computer for circulation of the arts lending collection (PDP-11/34) was funded from the equipment allocation of the Arts Building and installed at the Computer Laboratory in 1979. Work started on programming immediately by Gail Hogan, System Analysist, and her team.

However, development of the system was seriously delayed by the changeover of the catalogue system from the IBM 360 to DEC computers. This work was also the responsibility of Gail Hogan and there was a certain urgency about the catalogue system as the IBM computer no longer had the capacity for the growing catalogue and much of the processing of the annual public catalogue and the monthly supplements were being done on UCD's IBM machine.

Circulation database
It had been hoped that the catalogue system, together with a back file of British National Bibliography records, would provide a large proportion of the book records for the new circulation system. However, surveys showed there was very little overlap as many of the books were foreign language publications and by non-UK publishers.

It was decided that the lending collection records would be best created by keying in brief details of each book into a new database. This was done by Lecky Library staff in 1981 over a period of about 4 months using a VT100 terminal connected by an acoustic coupler to the Computer Laboratory. There were delays in installing direct lines to the Library buildings, not least because of a long strike in the Post Office. The opportunity was taken to weed the lesser-used books in the collection and only titles in active circulation were recorded.

Barcodes (Code 39) were inserted into each book and the student ID card printing process amended so that ID cards had barcodes in time for student registration in October 1981.

However, not appreciating the consequences, the barcodes were just associated with the titles of books, and not the individual copies or volumes of multiple holdings. This led to problems at the counters for some years as it was difficult, if not impossible, to know which copies were on loan or due for return. Over the years, the individual barcodes and copies were matched up correctly. Barcodes were read at the counters using light pen scanners.

Circulation went live for the Lecky Library books in July 1982, soon after the network lines were installed, and reported to be working well in December 1982.

The Luce Hall opened in 1981 with a Science Library on the ground floor, bringing together most science books which had been in a variety of temporary locations. It included all the Science Lending collection. The circulation PDP-11 computer had additional memory and storage installed using funds from the Luce Hall equipment allocation.

In 1983 barcodes were inserted into science lending books. For the Science Books (a much smaller collection than the Arts Lending collection), there was a good coverage of the collection in the automated catalogue system and those records were transferred to the circulation system.

Science lending went live in 1984.

End of in-house systems
The Library catalogue system running on the DEC 2020 and the circulation system on the PDP essentially ran independently until 1988 when the Library's first commercial Library Management System (LMS) was installed from the American Dynix Corporation. However, it was two years before the complete transfer to the new system was completed although OPAC (Online Public Access Catalogue) terminals were installed in the reading rooms earlier.

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[1] Compiled chiefly from:
College Calendars
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Peter Fox. Trinity College Library: a History. Cambridge U. P., 2014.
[2] Browne Issue System – Wikipedia entry : https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Browne_Issue_System accessed 16 August 2018.