

From Fragile Paper to Hard Screen

Creating a digital bibliography of «Skillingsstrykk» in the National Library of Norway

Skillingsstrykk – the Norwegian Boradsides and Flugblætter

Skillingsstrykk literally means “penny print”. It is the Norwegian equivalent to the English Broad-sides and even closer to the German Flugblätter.

A *skillingsstrykk* is a single sheet of cheap, printed paper, usually folded once to give four pages, or twice to give eight pages. These simple prints circulated in Norway from the 16th to the 20th century, and were especially widespread in the period between 1850 and the early 1900s.

Skillingsstrykk typically contained one or more songs, but could also contain news, advertisements, proclamations, gossip or stories. They circulated between high and low, centre and periphery, and can arguably be designated as our first mass medium and representative of popular culture.

“Street songs”, “songs for a penny”, “leaflet songs”, “market songs”, and “songs for kitchen maids” are some of the different names that were used to designate the songs that were printed, distributed and sold as *skillingsstrykk*.

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Project background

Skillingsstrykk have recently started to attract an increasing amount of attention from singers, students and scholars from a variety of academic disciplines in Norway. Initial research made it clear that there is a gap between the popularity and reach that the *skillingsstrykk* once had and their lack of documentation and accessibility in contemporary libraries and museums. As a result, a project initiated by the Music Section at the National Library started up in 2016 with the aim of mapping the library's collection of *skillingsstrykk*.

Rescuing a neglected material

The National Library's collection contains several thousand *skillingsstrykk*. The estimated number is somewhere around 5.000 prints, spread across different collections in the library. They are an example of a typically neglected

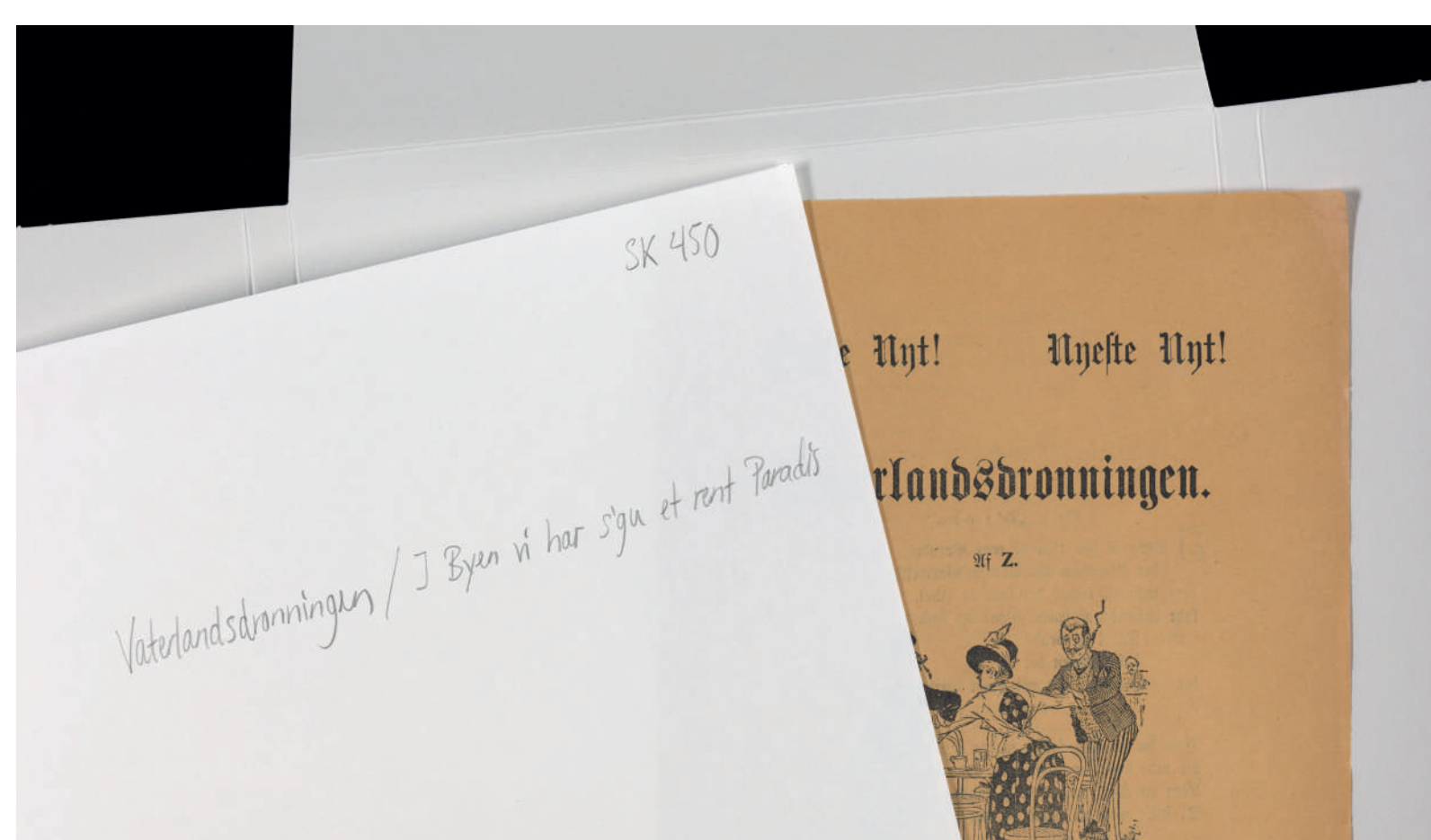
material: Only a portion of them have been catalogued, they are difficult to find for external users, and as a fragile material many of the prints are in poor condition.

Aims and outcomes

Four primary aims are to:

- Preserve
- Catalogue
- Digitize
- Create a bibliography and online platform

Digitizing and publishing the *skillingsstrykk* online is a step towards making them more accessible to researchers and the general public. A long-term goal is to create a complete and searchable online bibliography of the National Library's collection of *skillingsstrykk*.



1. Preserving

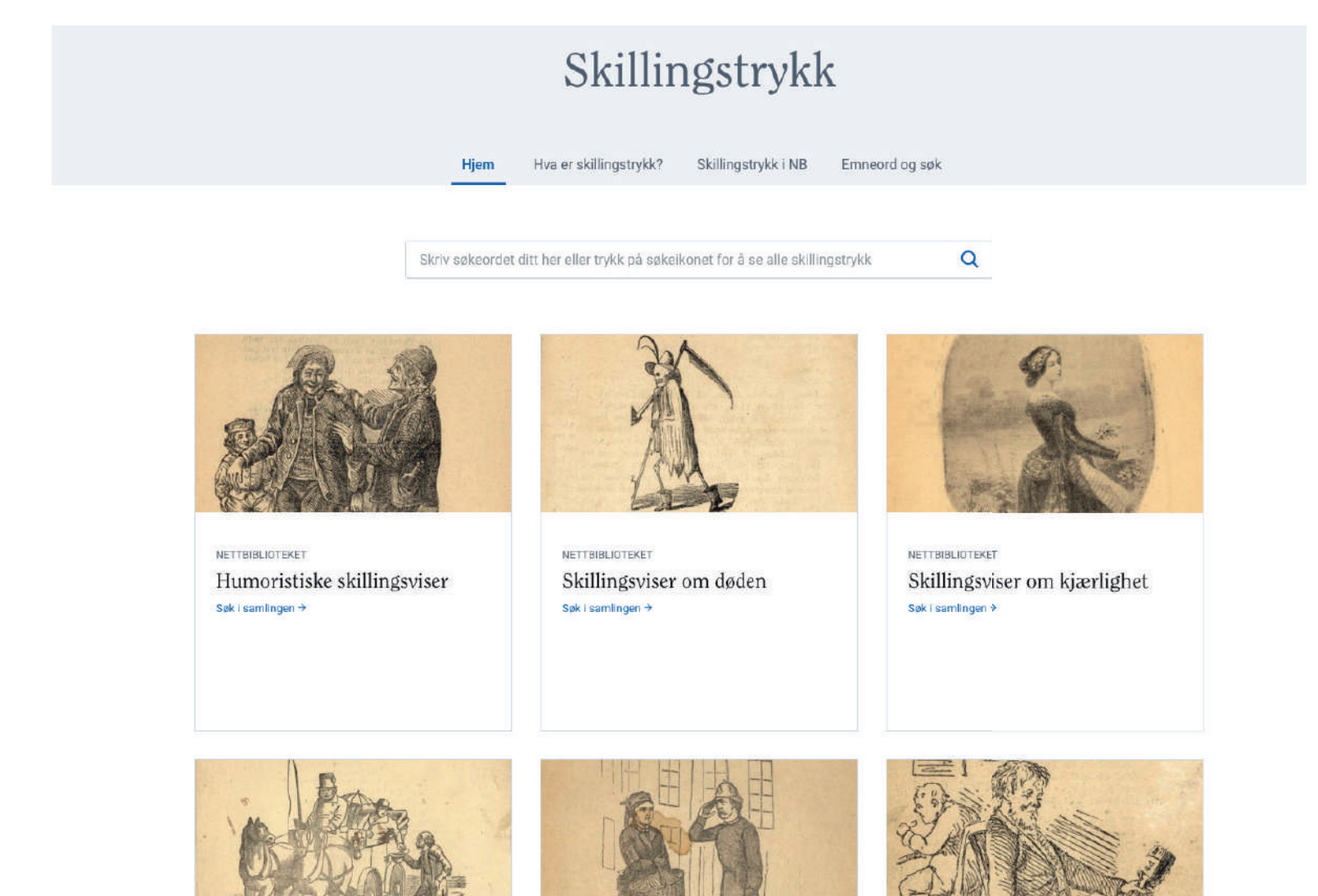
Most of the *skillingsstrykk* in our collection are from a period when the pulp industry was in rapid growth in Norway (the 1850's and onwards). These are of cheap paper quality with a high acid content and short durability. Some are very porous and might crumble if they are not carefully stored. To protect these fragile prints, they are kept in acid-free packaging and stored in climate-controlled rooms.



2. Cataloguing and digitizing

To secure permanence, it was important that the *skillingsstrykk* be catalogued in a robust and international platform. We use the library services platform Alma, which allows us to include a large amount of metadata, such as: title, the first line from a song, the tune prescript, illustrations, author, publisher, place and year of publication,

number of pages, size, price, etc. We can also include subject headings, short descriptions of a song's content, names of places and people, or historical events mentioned in the songs. Digitized files are processed with OCR software (Optical Character Recognition), making them searchable.



3. Creating a bibliography and online platform

A complete bibliography of the National Library's collection of *skillingsstrykk* is still a way off. However, our online platform nb.no/skillingsstrykk is up and running, and newly catalogued and digitized *skillingsstrykk* are continuously being added.