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The interesting essays presented here on aspects of print production and distribution can be viewed from the perspective of historian John Unsworth’s framework of “scholarly primitives.” These are “basic functions common to scholarly activity” and include: discovering, annotating, comparing, referring, sampling, illustrating, and representing. The individual essays, from 14 contributors, were presented at the annual Print Networks conference in 2002, and the functions of discovery, annotation, and illustration are, in general, evidenced more strongly than those of comparison, reference, sampling, and representation.

Some of the scholarship stands out for its evidence of a wider range of Unsworth’s scholarly primitives, coupled with an application of book history knowledge to broader economic, cultural, or intellectual
history. Stephen Colclough, on the emergence of railway bookstalls, is one example of excellent research placed in a business-history context and the author offers a revisionist presentation of evidence regarding W.H. Smith. Graham Law’s essay on Victorian newspaper novelists is also richly informed by both theoretical context and his own deep knowledge regarding syndicated fiction in this period. In addition, co-editor Catherine Armstrong’s essay on the spread of knowledge concerning the New World in early modern England is based on carefully considered evidence, and she requests a “reassessment of the much-contested distinction between high and low culture in the period,” arguing that in this case the distinction is valid. Some of her arguments are reminiscent of Ian MacLaren’s discussion of deliberate and “commandeered” (Armstrong’s term) literature concerning exploration in a later century.

John Hinks’s brief scholarly introduction places both the conference and individual essays in context, and he reminds readers of the “delicate balance between London and the provinces which was a key feature of much of the history of the book trade.” One might argue against the “delicate”! The trade of bookselling is strongly represented from a variety of approaches: its mechanisms and effect on the development of print culture; its contributions to political dissent and reform, and religious non-conformism; and, how it pushes the boundaries in intellectual life and science.

The collection is arranged more or less in chronological order. The opening essay by Lucy Lewis focuses less on trade elements and more on a fascinating exploration of intellectual content and editorial practice concerning an edition of Boethius’s *Consolation of Philosophy*. The sporadic references to the printer Thomas Richard are carefully informed by close examination of extant copies of the edition, coupled with Lewis’s wide knowledge of the historical period. Similarly, in an investigation of Norwich in the 17th century, David Stoker provides strong links between publications, local events, and broader historical trends and issues. As with many investigations regarding the provincial trade, previous conclusions about publication patterns drawn from surveys of the ESTC and the NSTC by John Feather, Simon Eliot, and others are borne out strongly. The essays vary in their strengths in this regard – some are based on primary materials with less evidence of theoretical and historical frameworks and whether such evidence would support the authors’ assumptions. Ian Jackson exemplifies strong use of theoretical underpinnings interwoven throughout his evidence-based and nuanced analysis of newspaper advertising.
practices framed as the “geographies of promotion” in one of the few essays to lay out the larger picture clearly at the opening and to pose the all-too-easily ignored query in book trade studies – why were certain practices adopted and maintained?

Some of these authors succumb to the urge (surely felt by all of us?) to claim a relatively untested supremacy for their chosen subjects: “he was probably the most prolific provincial publisher of his time” (41); and, “they were undoubtedly two of the most successful companies in the history of the English provincial booktrade” (104). David Hounslow bucks this temptation in his analysis of four individuals in York and Gainsborough who, he points out, were “unlike other provincial booksellers” and explains why. There are, of course, many hundreds of additional individuals and companies to be found in the British Book Trade Index founded and designed by the late Peter Isaac, whose friendly and intellectually rigorous spirit speaks in this collection through the posthumously presented and published essay on John Murray II’s relationship with the Scottish publishers Oliver & Boyd. Isaac’s rich endnotes indicate not only his typical thorough research but also his own wide prior publishing on related topics. His genial ghost continues to inform us all. The revealing addendum to his essay, crafted by Iain Beavan, is indicative of the friendship and respect among book-trade historians.

The crucial trade contribution of hack writers is explored in rich detail by Stephen Brown of Trent University in his essay about the Scot, James Tytler. Brown’s essay traverses much of Edinburgh and analyses the political and related content of several weekly and monthly publications. Brown’s careful analysis emphasizes the importance of market forces in the book trade. The market was and is a critical driving force that shaped the printing, publishing, and distribution decisions by all of those involved. While a business-history perspective informs some of these essays, others would be strengthened by an equal attention to business as to bibliography.

The general lack of illustrations or descriptive statistics is a puzzle, as several of the essays would be greatly supported by their addition, although some might be relieved that only two illustrations of hangings are included in Alice Ford-Smith’s brief and well-informed essay on the execution broadside trade. Ian Jackson’s contribution is the only one in this collection to present any evidence in graphical format. The intent is laudable, though the production quality of this volume is insufficient for clarity. Furthermore, in spite of the interesting spatial perspective (such as contracting geographical
spheres regarding advertising) there is, alas, not a single map! This is an ongoing quibble with this otherwise lovely series of publications. On the positive side, the tables in Graham Law’s essay offer a most helpful summary of basic information that is central to his description and analysis. Ian Maxted’s relatively brief piece on topographical prints from c.1790 to 1870 surely deserves more than one illustration, especially as the essay is an introduction to a digitization project that includes 3,500 prints. In terms of style, the contributions vary from the lively to the list-like, and the latter can be a perennial challenge when dealing with bibliographical details. One empathizes with the style difficulties facing Keith Manley in his clear-eyed presentation of details about subscription and circulating libraries. As so often in book history, part of the pleasure in reading careful research is that it leaves one wanting to know more about, for example, John Love in Weymouth, who “maintained a musical circulating library” and “lent telescopes.” Up with the music of the heavens.

The editors have used a light hand and this editorial stance has been typical for this series. Having an index is a splendid plan, but the need for added rigour is evident in several regards. This is a name index, yet the list provided under “Newspapers & Periodicals” excludes the sources in Graham Law’s essay. Lisa Peters’s piece is an example of an interesting topic discussed almost entirely without reference to existing scholarly literature, in this case on the topics of the history of medicine and the history of advertising (the latter is touched on only from the perspective of older works). Some gentle editorial intervention could have encouraged the author to strengthen her case. In addition, there are several geographical points that might have benefited from additional explanation. For example, while book-trade historians interested in the British trades are likely to know that Leith was Edinburgh’s port, they are less likely to know where Duddingston is in relation to the city (53). In a more complex example, readers unfamiliar with British book history might be befuddled by the reference to the Becket v. Donaldson case (91) which makes no mention of Scotland, a lacuna that robs the reference of its central relevance. Consideration of the publication and distribution of this volume to “far parts” might encourage a different editorial stance. It is to the editors’ and publishers’ credit that such an interesting volume is available in such parts, and I am not alone in looking forward to the next in this series.

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