

REVIEWS

Graham Hudson, *The Design and Printing of Ephemera in Britain and America, 1720–1920*. London: British Library, 2008. 160 pp. ISBN: 978 0 7123 4904 8. £30.00.

Reviewed by Patrick Spedding

The blurb on the wrapper of this delightful publication begins “Ephemera has been collected for many years, but only recently has it become widely accepted as material for academic study.” This is a bit of an exaggeration. While it is true that scholars are increasingly interested in historical and very recent ephemera, the printed detritus of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has long been “widely accepted as material for academic study” (to say nothing of earlier material beyond the scope of the present book). An almost identical statement was made two decades ago on Maurice Rickard’s superb *Collecting Printed Ephemera* (1988): “The importance of printed ephemera is being increasingly recognized by collectors, curators and historians.”

Although both books make a claim for scholarly attention, and for an ever-increasing scholarly interest, they both give pride of place to collectors. This is probably a recognition of the fact that—in this area of print history above all others—the private collector still rules. And if the importance of ephemera for academic study really were as widely accepted as it ought to be then the cataloguing and bibliographical control of ephemera would be far more advanced than it is (the decision to exclude ephemera from ESTC being a case in point). Hudson’s bibliography, however, includes a number of important recent studies and reference works, such as Rickard’s *The Encyclopedia of Ephemera* (2000). This suggests that, if the study of ephemera has not yet “become widely accepted” or fully developed, it is at least moving in that direction.

Hudson’s book seems to be written and produced with the collector very much in mind, and is priced accordingly. (Rickard’s *Collecting Printed Ephemera* cost £25.00 in 1988; £30.00 for this book is a bargain.) It is a beautiful book, illustrated with over two hundred printed items, exactly described. The captions are informative and detailed—occasionally more informative than the text. The percentage of reduction or enlargement is given in all instances. It is a pity that the location of items reproduced is rarely provided (by my count, in only about 20% of cases). I assume that the remainder belong to Hudson. If so—and the reader shouldn’t have to guess—this underlines the fact that the private collector still rules.

The book is divided into eight chapters, corresponding to technological developments in printing, particularly in the printing of illustrations. There is no real justification for starting at 1720 and the book really does not quite reach its chronological destination of 1920. But the chapters do an excellent job of tracing developments over roughly two centuries, and on two continents, and take as a common starting point the presence of Benjamin Franklin in London in the 1720s.

The fact that Franklin was apprenticed in Boston, and is not responsible for any notable development in “The Design and Printing of Ephemera” in Britain or America is moot, as is the fact that there really were no notable developments in either country that justify 1720 as a starting-point.

Hudson begins *medias in res*, with letterpress and copperplate printing undertaken on wooden printing presses, as they had been for centuries. The seven chapters that follow cover “The Iron Press,” “The Rise of Lithography,” “Advancing Technology,” “Colour and Special Processes,” “Artistic Printing,” “The Leicester Free Style,” and “Process Engraving and Commercial Art.” There are a few pages of notes followed by a useful list of further reading. Each chapter provides a succinct explanation of printing processes interwoven with a history of changes in the design of jobbing printing to which these technological developments gave rise.

Rather foolishly, I thought I was already familiar with Hudson’s material: the technical *and* stylistic developments. I have been collecting ephemera myself for decades and since the advent of eBay I have bought hundreds of items from the period he covers. My interests have led me to read quite detailed histories of, for instance, the development of postcards, poster art, wine- and apple-box labels. But, as it turns out, I had *a lot* to learn about ephemera and I have to say that Hudson was a patient and entertaining instructor.

The explanation of an enormous number of competing technical developments from the period is supported by clear illustrations of examples and by regular quotation from trade journals. The latter, in particular, give some indication of the impact of these developments on the printing trades. Because the technical developments Hudson mentions are so numerous, it really isn’t possible to provide anything like a systematic over-view of this aspect of his book. But I was only occasionally left confused by his explanation of processes, or searching for an illustration to better understand the text. The use of Ben Day tints to provide colour tones is one process that wasn’t clear to me (92), but became clear from examples on the following pages (ill. 113 and 118)—where one finds a better explanation illustrated by a highly magnified detail. Similarly, “brass-rule work” is mentioned (ill. 134) before one encounters an explanation of this technique (113).

Since Hudson’s emphasis is on layout and design, much of the trade chatter that he quotes concerns aesthetics: the principles enunciated in the hand-press period on how to arrange text for public notices and posters, how to place emphasis using capitals, spacing and varying font sizes. The rectangular printing furniture of a wooden press is one of the reasons for the “characteristic horizontal-vertical stress of letterpress” (ill. 6), but also the size and weight of fonts such as Caslon. The iron frame and lever-action of Stanhope and Columbian presses led to a larger platen, which allowed much larger and fatter fonts and larger woodblocks—not just larger sheets of paper—to be printed.

New techniques for printing artwork facilitated the ornamentation of, and the integration of text and illustration on, ephemeral printing. Trade writers produced

guides for the layout and design of illustrated jobbing work and discussed the practical problems a small jobbing printer faces when choosing from among so many new fancy fonts, stock images, and printing techniques. As the industry expanded, geographically and in the volume of work undertaken, industrial production techniques were applied to printing and the production of artwork. In the larger publishing plants jobs became more specialised. Stock images and stock printing became widely available and commissioned artwork was rapidly produced using a production-line division of labour.

Printing competitions in trade journals and the exchange of “fancy” jobbing work clarify the changing aesthetic principles at play and help show the increasing importance of “artistic” layout and design towards the end of the nineteenth century (Ch. 6). The tradesmen called upon to arrange text and images, and harmonise colours, in jobbing work for “artistic printers” needed artistic training and ability. Not surprisingly, artistic printers and printers using elaborate multi-colour printing techniques began to see themselves as artists, or artisans of the exalted William Morris type. Although elaborate and artistic printing gave way first to a more free and simple (Ch. 7) and then a more austere style—especially in America in the early twentieth century—the importance of the artist/designer endured. By the end of the period considered by Hudson, book design was well established as a separate and specialised job within the printing industry, being undertaken, for the first time, by commercial artists with no background in typesetting or the printing industry.

I only noticed one typo (ill. 87 “xx%”) and my only real complaint about the book concerns the placing of images within the text. The reader needs to consult images almost continually. Although most of the images referred to in-text are within a few pages of these references they are almost never on the same page, suggesting that close proximity was not a guiding principle in the layout of images (even allowing for the difficulty of laying out such a heavily-illustrated text). However, this, and my previous quibbles, hardly detract from an otherwise excellent book that will, I hope, support further developments in the bibliographical recording and historical appreciation of ephemera.

Roger Chartier, *Publishing Drama in Early Modern Europe*. The Panizzi Lectures 1998. London: The British Library, 1999. x + 73 pp. ISBN 0 7123 4635 X. £16.00.

Reviewed by Wallace Kirsop

Roger Chartier’s 1998 Panizzi Lectures, promptly published in the following year, have been languishing in *Script & Print’s* backlog for a long time. For this our adventures and misadventures of the last decade are partly, but not entirely, responsible. The present quite brief notice is meant to make amends for the omission and to draw proper attention to a sophisticated statement of some of

the bibliographical and book-history concerns of the final decade of the twentieth century. The author's preface (ix–x) pays a generous tribute to Don McKenzie and notably to *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts*, which inaugurated the Panizzi series in 1985. Chartier himself now holds a prestigious chair at the Collège de France, an election that underscores his leading role as a cultural historian and the audience that specialists in the study of books as material objects can expect to reach in the France of the new millennium.

Roger Chartier, who has had several visiting appointments in Spain and North and South America, is unusual among French scholars in the range of his interests. Thus the little volume under consideration does not hesitate to tackle the vast fields of Spanish Golden Age and English Elizabethan dramatic literature as well as what was produced in France itself. There are three lectures, each one with its own notes set out—not altogether conveniently—straight after the body of the text: “Text as Performance” (1–27), “Copied Onely by the Eare” (28–50) and “The Stage and the Page” (51–73). English translations are provided of quoted Spanish and French texts. As is normal with volumes in the Panizzi series there is no index, a circumstance that throws the emphasis onto reading for an argument rather than using for reference.

Not for the first time Chartier frames his essay with “a poetic detour, a tale” from Borges and a conceit by the same author. In between we are invited to reflect on the nature of texts and of reading, to recognise the roles of performance, of orality and of communal absorption of the matter proposed in various ways to the public. Playing to his strengths, Chartier, who is always well informed about the relevant secondary literature, explores preoccupations he shares with McKenzie and with like-minded historians of books. What is being consistently opposed is “every form of literary criticism or cultural history that considers the materiality of texts and the modalities of their transmission or performance to be without importance” (22). Concrete examples are studied either by reporting the results of other researchers, for instance the work of the late Jeanne Veyrin-Forrer on Molière's *Précieuses ridicules* (*La Lettre et le texte. Trente années de recherches sur l'histoire du livre* (Paris: ENS de Jeunes Filles, 1987), 338–66), or by setting out personal investigations on a Lyonese piracy (a term properly used in this case) of Molière's *George Dandin* or on John Ward's copy—annotated for performance in the eighteenth century—of a 1676 *Hamlet* now in the Garrett Library of Johns Hopkins University. In the second lecture the Lyons *George Dandin* of 1669 takes a central position, not as a crude reprint of the authentic Paris edition of the same year, but as a plausibly presented example of memorial reconstruction. English and Spanish analogies reinforce a tightly and subtly written discussion of the instability of dramatic texts and of all the devices like punctuation, italicisation and capitalisation at the command of printers to suggest and to reconstruct the nuances of performance. Ultimately Chartier's argument has to be read in its rich texture rather than summarily abstracted.

Needless to say, a decade into the twenty-first century the debate has evolved. It is not for a non-specialist to comment on the more than abundant secondary

literature devoted to the stage and to play-printing in Spain or even in England. On the other hand, it is important to take note of the impact of Alain Riffaud's *habilitation* thesis and of his subsequent publications on the view we can now have of seventeenth-century French theatre. In particular in this context his *La Ponctuation du théâtre imprimé au XVII^e siècle* (Geneva: Droz, 2007) has become compulsory reading for anyone wanting to understand the complexities involved in the printing of French plays in the age of Pierre Corneille and to assess the role of compositors. Chartier has shown us that French historians can be attentive to the lessons of Anglo-American physical bibliographers and textual critics. Riffaud's achievements, including his more recent *Répertoire du théâtre français imprimé entre 1630 et 1660* (Geneva: Droz, 2009)—based on his path-breaking identification of almost all the printers involved—suggest that our snugly Anglophone profession would do well to look across the Channel—and learn a foreign language or two—in order to discover what bibliographers trained in Paris or indeed in the French provinces can add to the discipline.

Mary Ronnie, *Freedom to Read: A Centennial History of Dunedin Public Library*. Dunedin: Dunedin Public Libraries, 2008. xiv + 412 pp. ISBN: 978 0 473 13462 4. NZ\$49.95.

Reviewed by Ian Morrison

“Freedom” and “reading” are two ideas that are much more complicated now than they were one hundred years ago. After perhaps the most destructive century in human history we are all too aware that freedom can never be absolute and that reading does not always bring wisdom, or even gentility. It is to Mary Ronnie's credit, therefore, that over the course of her career she has maintained such steely clarity about the value and purpose of public libraries.

Freedom to Read was the 2009 winner of LIANZA's John Harris Award. It is as much *summa theologica* as *liber chronicarum*—part institutional history, part personal memoir, part manifesto—and makes no pretence of objectivity. Given her status in New Zealand librarianship (Dunedin City Librarian 1968–76, National Librarian 1976–81, Auckland City Librarian 1982–85, before being lured to Australia to teach in the library school at Monash University), Ronnie's views will be of wide interest for a long time to come.

There are weaknesses, of course. Writing for a New Zealand—indeed, primarily local Otago—audience, Ronnie assumes a depth of knowledge of New Zealand political and social history that very few Australian readers will possess. To have explained details like the abolition of the provinces would have weighed the book down for its primary audience, but not doing so risks losing a wider one. Were I to address such a criticism to Ronnie personally, she would doubtless stare back at me and remind me, politely but *very* firmly, that we have things called *libraries* wherein

it is possible to look up such details. The great strengths of the book, Ronnie's energy and vision, far outweigh such quibbles.

Twentieth-century Dunedin: the place and the times were made for an argumentative Scot, and Mary Ronnie flourished. Such forthright intellects are required to be more circumspect nowadays. Here is Ronnie reflecting on discussions in the early 1960s to "amalgamate" the Public Library's McNab Collection into the Hocken Library:

Several aspects of the suggested amalgamation disturb me even now. One is that it gave insufficient regard to the wish of Dr McNab that his collection should be available to the general public.... The very idea of splitting his collection and picking the best items for the Institute I find abhorrent because it trivialises public interests. (235)

Let's repeat that, to underscore the point: *it trivialises public interests*. Ronnie is very clear that all people are capable of, and equally entitled to, intellectual pursuits regardless of employment or socio-economic status, and that public libraries have an obligation to go beyond the lowest common denominator.

She could stare down important donors, too:

The [Wyclif-Purvey] Gospels were lacking some leaves ... and A. H. [Reed] devised a scheme to take yet another page out of it to frame and circulate.... But to me this volume was a thing to preserve as entirely as we could, and I told him so ... if he wished to proceed with further breaking it up it could be transferred to his private library. Of course he did not wish to do that and gave in.... He was not used to being thwarted. (185–86)

Admirers of Dunedin's civic and cultural achievements may be startled by the number and ferocity of the conflicts Ronnie records. From protracted haggling with Andrew Carnegie over the terms of the initial grant to Mayoral opposition to the new building in the 1970s, Dunedin Public Library has always been a contested site. Nor does the city's cultural sector emerge from Ronnie's account as a cohesive entity: the Mechanics' Institute and the Hocken Library were both at various times at odds with the Public Library, as were newsagents (who ran circulating libraries) when converted buses began to deliver services to outlying areas after the Second World War. This last episode generated one of the all-time great library-related newspaper cartoons—a bespectacled suburban newsagent, cutlass between his teeth and sub-machine gun in his hands, waiting to ambush the mobile library (152, citing the *Otago Daily Times*, 6 July 1950).

There is a serious point to be made about such cartoons. Ronnie makes liberal use of them, and they serve a wider purpose than incidental illustration. Not only do they encapsulate individual issues; taken as a whole they show that one of the secrets of Dunedin Public Library's success—from its first Librarian, W. B. McEwan,

through to current head Bernie Hawke—is that it has always been newsworthy. The fact that it was established in the first place can be largely credited to the unrelenting efforts of influential newspaperman Mark Cohen and, whether because of that fact or not, threats to the library, as well as its challenges, shortcomings and achievements, have never failed to be noticed by the press.

Cohen was an impressive autodidact, and the guiding theme of *Freedom to Read* (as with Ronnie's *Books to the People: A History of Regional Library Services in New Zealand* [NZLA & Ancora Press, 1993]), is the capacity of public libraries to transform lives by creating opportunities and presenting ideas beyond the boundaries of formal education. Ronnie is justifiably proud of the library's extraordinary special collections, and of her role in developing them, but she makes it clear that these are not just treasures to be hoarded for their own sake: for one thing, access to A. H. Reed's medieval manuscripts started twelve-year-old Christopher de Hamel on his glittering career. De Hamel's magnum opus, *The Book: A History of the Bible* (London: Phaidon, 2001) is dedicated "to the memory of those exhilarating sessions *after school* [my emphasis] with A. H. Reed" (342). The story of a young schoolboy discovering illuminated manuscripts—the real deal, not just photographs—neatly epitomises the world of possibilities opened by the Public Library. The last cartoon deployed by Ronnie depicts a quiz show host announcing that "Tonight's lucky winner ... attributes his success to the Dunedin Public Library" (358).

Public sector managers are called upon to report outputs. Articulating qualitative *outcomes* is a much more difficult task. The intelligence and passion of Ronnie's advocacy enliven a topic that may seem dry even to readers of *Script and Print*. *Freedom to Read* is an engaging chronicle and a significant contribution to discussions of the future and purpose of public libraries.