An Introduction to the Society for the History of
Authorship, Reading and Publishing

Every field of scholarship has its moment of quickening. It arrives when the discipline is still relatively new, after its first researchers open up the territory. These pioneers must work alone, often unaware of each other's existence, trying as best they can to locate source material and solve methodological problems. Then, after a few decades, they discover each other and draw together. They organize conferences, journals, and professional societies; they collaborate on bibliographies and other reference works; and, drawing on a growing body of research, they find answers to questions that once seemed unanswerable.

Book history has now reached that milestone. The necessary groundwork—surveyed by Robert Darnton in The Kiss of Lamourette—has been done. National book history groups have sprung up throughout Europe. In the United States there are a number of associations for specialists, such as the American Antiquarian Society, the Research Society for Victorian Periodicals, and the American Printing History Association. But many book historians still lack a scholarly home, and we still need an international organization that can put us in contact with one another.

That necessity was driven home when I edited British Literary Publishing Houses, 1820–1965 with Patricia Anderson. The most difficult part of that project was the business of scrounging up potential contributors. Clearly, they existed: but lacking any central directory or newsletter for book historians, how could we locate them? Eventually we did find them (with help from RSVP and the Book Trade History Group) and in the process we discovered something remarkable about book historians: they are scattered all over the disciplinary map. They teach in departments of history, literature, sociology, communications, journalism, librarianship, art, even anthropology. Many work outside the academy, as book trade professionals, librarians, journalists, and book collectors.

If these specialists could be brought together in the same journal or conference room, the cross-fertilization would invigorate book history enormously. The present reality, however, is that we are being held back by our isolation. We tend to move in our own disciplinary orbits and rarely intersect. As a result,
we often are stymied by methodological problems that other scholars, unknown to us, have already solved. To take one example, literary historians still frequently say that it is impossible to enter the mental universe of the common reader, although a decade ago social historian David Vincent, in *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom*, showed how it could be done.

The problem is that there is no forum where social historians, literary historians, and all the other varieties of book historians can talk to each other. That is why we are creating the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing. SHARP will be devoted to every aspect of book history: the social and economic history of authorship; the history of the book trade, copyright, censorship, and underground publishing; the publishing histories of particular texts, authors, editors, imprints, and literary agents; the spread of literacy, book distribution, and library usage; canon formation and the politics of literary criticism; reception studies, reading practices, and reader response. SHARP aims to be a truly global network for scholars everywhere, in or outside the universities.

The first organizational meeting for SHARP was held 10 August 1992 at the University of California at Santa Cruz, as part of a conference on Victorian publishing, where John Jordan of the Dickens Project generously offered us the use of his facilities. The response was very encouraging, and a Planning Committee was set up. Jonathan Rose (president), Simon Eliot (vice president), Mickie Grover (treasurer), and Patrick Leary (secretary) are now serving as a provisional government, assisted by Laurel Brake, Robert Darnton, Roger Chartier, James Raven, Beth Luey, Anne Humpherys, and Deanna B. Marcum. (Officers will be formally elected, and a constitution ratified, at the first SHARP conference in June 1993.) Launched with seed money from Drew University, SHARP is incorporating as a non-profit organization.

**The First SHARP Conference on Book History**

The Planning Committee is currently organizing SHARP’s inaugural conference, to be held 9-11 June 1993 at the City University of New York Graduate Center. Through the good offices of Joseph Witrich, Stuart Prall, and Gerhard Joseph, we will be hosted jointly by the English and History departments at CUNY.

We welcome proposals for papers, which should be no longer than two pages. (Please do not send complete papers.) The conference will have no set theme, but we particularly invite...
papers that will interest a broad range of book historians. In addition to formal papers, there may also be workshops on teaching and research in book history; please let us know if (and how) you would like to contribute to these sessions. Conference proceedings will be in English. All proposals should reach Dr. Simon Eliot, The Open University, 4 Portwall Lane, Bristol BS1 6ND, England no later than 1 July 1992.

The SHARP Program Committee will consider these proposals at a meeting in London on or around 27 July. We have chosen London as our venue to reach out to an international constituency—to allow the participation of British and European book historians, as well as the scholars from North America and elsewhere who come to England every summer and take up all the seats in the British Library. Any member of SHARP who is not submitting a proposal is eligible to join the Program Committee. If you are interested, contact Simon Eliot at the above address, and send him an address and telephone number where you can be reached in July.

About SHARP News

SHARP News will be published quarterly and sent to all members of SHARP. It will be a source of practical information for book historians—news you can use about research, teaching, publications, and professional activities. We intend to publish:

* Calls for papers and conference reports
* A list of recent publications on book history
* Authors' queries and research notes
* Short articles on teaching and collaborative research
* Notes on archives and other research facilities
* News about special interest groups

SHARP members may also publish, free of charge, notices for teaching, research, or archival jobs in book history. SHARP News depends largely upon its readers to serve as correspondents; so if you have any news, or have recently published a book or article on book history, or want to report on a conference, contact Jonathan Rose, History Department, Drew University, Madison, NJ 07940, USA.

In our next issue, to be published in May, we will run a report on "History of the Book—On Demand Series." Michael Turner and Simon Eliot are working on this program, which will make publishing history data available on demand for cost plus postage. Future issues of SHARP News will probably be fatter—but not fat enough to accommodate full-length research articles or book reviews. For those, we refer you to our friends at Publishing History and Publishing Research Quarterly.
About the SHARP Listserv

In addition to this newsletter, SHARP has set up more avant-garde machinery to establish lines of communication among book historians. Working out of Indiana University, Patrick Leary has launched the SHARP Listserv, an electronic bulletin board. Anyone with access to an e-mail terminal can use this system to exchange information with other book historians. The addresses to contact are PLEARY@IUBACS for Bitnet and PLEARY@UCS.IU.EDU for Internet.

Jonathan Rose
Drew University

Other Conference Announcements

As a regular feature, SHARP News will announce forthcoming conferences on the history of authorship, reading and publishing. The last two pages of this newsletter reproduce information about an international conference on "The Practice and Representation of Reading in Britain from the Fourteenth to the Nineteenth Century," to be held at Magdalene College, Cambridge 20-22 March 1992. James Raven, the moving spirit behind this meeting, has also been sponsoring a series of fortnightly seminars on the study of reading at Pembroke College. The program for the 1991-92 has been:

October 16: Dr. Peter De Bolla (King's College, Cambridge): "On Reading and Theory"

October 30: Prof. Jesper Svenbro (Centre de recherches comparées sur les sociétés anciennes, EHESS, Paris): "Reading in Ancient Greece"

November 13: Dr. Usha Goswami (Department of Experimental Psychology, Cambridge University): "Phonological Influences in Reading"

November 27: Dr. Barbara Bodenhorn (Pembroke College and Girton College, Cambridge): "'People Who are Like Our Books': 'Reading' among Inupiat (Eskimos)"


February 5: Prof. Eric Lunzer (University of Nottingham): "Schools, Reading and Education"

February 19: Dr. Patricia Wright (Churchill College, Cambridge): "Reading in the Workplace"

March 4: Dr. Andrew Brown (Magdalene College, Cambridge): "The Enthused Reader: Barthes and Domenico Scandella"

We also call your attention to "Reclaiming a Lost Tradition:
A Conference on Women Writers of Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Britain, which will be held 30-31 May 1992 at the University of Oregon at Eugene. Send papers (ten-page maximum) or 200-word abstracts by 15 March 1992 to Prof. Cindy LaCom or Prof. Pamela Parker, English Department, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403, USA, telephone 503-346-3911.

The Research Society for Victorian Periodicals will hold its 25th Anniversary Conference 10-12 July 1992 at Manchester Polytechnic. The conference topic is "Reading Victorian Periodicals: Research Methodologies, Representations and Localities." The program will include a reception in Manchester Town Hall, lectures on and tours of Victorian Manchester, and exhibitions at Manchester's historical libraries. Papers are being accepted up to March 1992. Contact Margaret Beetham or Alan Kidd, Department of English and History, Manchester Polytechnic, Ormond Building, Lower Ormond Street, Manchester M15 6BX, England, FAX: 061-247-6308.

Your president will be carrying the SHARP banner at the above meeting and at "Trans-Atlantic Connections: Books and Publishing on the Anglo-American Scene in the Late Twentieth Century." This conference will discuss multinational ownership of publishing firms and its impact on British and American culture. It will meet 29-31 July 1992 at Royal Holloway and Bedford New College, on the outskirts of London. For information write to The Centre for the Book, The British Library, Great Russell Street, London WC1B 3DG, England; or The Center for the Book, Library of Congress, Washington, DC 20540, USA.

How You Can Participate in SHARP

As a newborn society, SHARP is still flexible and malleable. It will become whatever its individual members make of it, and there is still room for people with ideas and energy in our highly improvisational governing structure. If you have suggestions, brainstorm, or just a desire to do your bit, we would be delighted to have your participation on any level. For example:

Publicity: A notice announcing SHARP's existence and calling for papers has been sent to more than 100 journals around the world. If you happen to be connected with a scholarly newsletter by all means tell your readers about us. We can also send you publicity flyers; just let us know how many you want to post up.

Newsletter: We salute Barbara Lee of Folio Consulting, who designed our masthead and logo. If you are in the New York area, you too can help with editing and producing SHARP News. And wherever you are, send us all your book history news.

Local Arrangements: Hands are needed (again, in the New York area) to help organize the conference at the CUNY Graduate Center.
Fundraising: Drew University got SHARP started with a $700 grant, but the expense of mailing out the call for papers and this newsletter has pretty much exhausted that. There are additional start-up costs, particularly the legal fees involved in incorporation, and we would like to establish a financial cushion for the 1993 conference. We are going to apply to private foundations for grants. If you can alert us to other sources of funding, you would be performing a great service for book history.

Membership: Join us. And if you know of people who might be interested in SHARP, tell them about us—or tell us about them. We would be happy to send each of them a free copy of this newsletter, which has already gone out to over 600 book historians throughout the world. The membership fee is breathtakingly inexpensive: only $10 in the United States, $15 elsewhere. British residents may, alternatively, send L7 to Simon Eliot. If you join now as a charter member, you will receive a subscription to SHARP News through the summer of 1993 (six issues for the price of four). You will also receive, shortly after the 1993 conference, a directory of SHARP members listing their addresses and research interests. (Please let us know if you would prefer not to appear in this directory.) For the same low price, your university library can order a subscription to SHARP News. And a SHARP membership makes a perfect gift for that special someone who is struggling over a dissertation on the book trade in eighteenth-century Rutland. Just fill out and mail in the slip below.

SHARP has two contact men working each side of the Atlantic. Membership fees paid in US dollars—and all correspondence concerning SHARP News, publicity, and arrangements for the New York conference—should be sent to Prof. Jonathan Rose, History Department, Drew University, Madison, NJ 07940, USA. Membership fees paid in sterling—and all correspondence concerning paper proposals and the program committee—should be sent to Dr. Simon Eliot, The Open University, 4 Portwall Lane, Bristol BS1 6ND, England. This arrangement is for your convenience; but if it totally confuses you, just write to us, and we'll sort things out.

I would like to join SHARP. Enclosed is a check, payable to SHARP, for $10 (US) or $15 (elsewhere) or L7 (UK).

Name: 
Research Interests: 
Address: 

Professional Affiliation: 
Check if you prefer not to be listed in the SHARP Directory: 

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