

What should we teach? - Collection-oriented approach

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1. We teach postgraduate courses on history of the book and history of communication – a joint system which includes students on full-time and part-time MA and MRes courses being taught in two-hour seminars over ten week terms, and students in LRBS who take the same or complementary courses in a concentrated five-day period over two weeks in the summer, I will concentrate on LRBS as this make things simpler, but essentially the same applies to the MA and MRes programmes. A description the structure of the programme is included in the notes.
2. HoB, being a material-based subject, is almost wholly dependent on students having very close contact with printed books, manuscripts, historical writing materials, printing presses, etc. We are therefore heavily dependent on collections through which students access these remarkable objects.
3. Our courses range from the ‘Book in the Ancient World’, which deals with clay tablets, papyrus rolls, wax tablets and the earliest codexes, to ‘An Introduction to Bibliography’, and from ‘A History of Maps to 1800’ to ‘The Printed Book in the East’. Given this, we cannot rely on just one collection or one library. Fortunately, being in London and with the great collections of books and archival materials in Oxford, Cambridge and Reading within easy travelling distance, we can draw on a range of teaching resources which we can tailor-make for each course.
4. That having been said, travel takes up precious time, and students want to spend whatever time they have either in seminars or working on relevant library collections so, as far as possible, we concentrate on collections within the immediate vicinity.
5. The most obvious, and the most immediately useful, is the Senate House Library, which is the central research library of London University and is distributed among fourteen floors arranged directly above the teaching rooms. Holding about three million volumes including 120,000 printed before 18511, it has invaluable special collections including the Sterling

library with its fine collection of literary first editions, the Durning Lawrence Library with its huge array of sixteenth and seventeenth century material, and the quite marvellous 13,000 volumes of the Harry Price Library of Magical Literature. We are fortunate in having a collection of very enthusiastic scholar-librarians in SHL who provide a remarkable service to many of our tutors and students. For instance, the course on the printed book in Europe 1455-2010 can be illustrated almost exclusively from the collections of the Library.

6. However, for many other courses, we have to target special collections elsewhere in London: the British Library for Maps and Medieval Book; the British Museum for Book in the Ancient Worlds; the V&A for the Illustrated Book and the Children's book course; Lambeth Palace library for the 'Medieval Book'; St Brides Printing Library for 'Bibliography' and 'Handpress Printing'.
7. Currently we also use the Bodleian Library in Oxford to teach 'Children's Books' and the department of Typography in Reading University to teach the 'Illustrated Book' – this is done by incorporating day trips into the teaching week. In these cases, when dealing with collections outside London, we have to ensure that the collection is so essential to the effective delivery of the course that the travelling time is fully justified.
8. A further justification for using other collections is that we can frequently draw on the expertise of the responsible librarians who either teach the sessions relating to their collections, or team teach with the course tutor.
9. Given the demanding nature of the courses, even this rich range of resources is not quite sufficient. For instance, students on the BAW, though they usually has access to the great collections of clay tablets in the BM, need also to understand the nature of papyrus, need to see the sort of phragmites brushes used by the Egyptians to write on the surface, and also the reed pens later used by the Greeks and the Romans. Most of all, they need to get a sense of the problems created by these writing surfaces. And this is where the Museum of Writing comes in.

10. Created by the collector over more than fifty years, the MoW was acquired by the Institute of English Studies about four years ago. Housed in SHL it contains some 30,000 items from Sumerian clay tablets, to the earliest ball point pens. Some of these items are so precious that students can look at them closely but cannot handle them. Others, however, are numerous and robust enough to be directly handled by the students. For instance, the collections hold some eight Roman styli, at least four of which can be used. This allows sessions in which students can be taught to write on modern reconstructions of wax tablets using an original Roman stylus.
11. This highlights an inevitable but frustrating paradox that underlies much of the teaching of book history. We insist, quite correctly, that it is a material subject, and can only be understood by understanding the material objects which it produced. Yet we use special collections to illustrate this and, almost invariably, those special collections are housed in responsible libraries, and cared for by responsible librarians, whose first job is to ensure that these remarkable objects are preserved for future generations. This is best done, of course, by keeping observers at a distance or, at least, ensuring that physical contact between object and student is minimised.
12. For this reason, in London we are in the process of building up ‘teaching collections’. Teaching collections have been used in RBS in Charlottesville almost since Terry Belanger set it up. In part these are to compensate for the limited stock of materials available in the University of Virginia’s Library. Of course, we don’t have that problem but, like Virginia, we need materials that students can handle without worrying about them, material indeed that on occasion, such as in the course on European Bookbinding, is so broken down that you can see the binding structures.
13. LRBS has been lucky enough to attract the support of the ABA, the Antiquarian Booksellers Association of the UK, and some of its members have been most generous in giving us books in an unsaleable condition. That, of course, is exactly what we want, materials that we do not have to monitor, and which students can use almost as thoughtlessly as their

original readers. Other sources – de-accessioned books from SHL, the teaching collections of colleagues who have retired are also available. Together we are accumulating a large collection of useable materials although, of course, at this stage some courses, such as the ‘Printed Book in Europe’ are better equipped in these areas than courses such as the ‘History of Maps’ or the Printed Book in the East. We shall get there, but it is a slow process.

14. LRBS continues to innovate. Every year we aim not just to run already existing courses, but to introduce new, and sometimes experimental courses.
15. In 2015 we hope to introduce a new course on the Renaissance Book, which likely to prove very popular; and a course on the History of Paper, during which we shall be organising a day trip to the archive of Hayle Mill, the best documented hand-made paper mill in the UK. We shall be experimenting with a course on the incunable book, which will combine close attention to some of the most scrappy incunables in SHL (and thus more easily used by students), a day looking at the great collection in the BL, and two days at St Brides Printing Library printing on newly-constructed wooden common press. Our third innovative course for next year will take our collection-oriented approach to new heights.
16. Based upon a major funded research project on the communication history of the Ministry of Information in the UK 1939-1946, we are intending to run a course on communication in the Second World War. We shall, of course, use the great collections in the national Archives at Kew. Already we are accumulating a teaching collection of pamphlets and posters issued by the MOI (still easy to do quite cheaply via the Web). The SHL has a substantial collection of MOI publications as it function the MOI’s reference library during the Second World War. It could do this because the Ministry was housed in Senate House until 1945. We shall be teaching the course in the rooms occupied by those working for the ministry. What George Orwell was later to call the ‘Ministry of Truth’, or ‘Minitrue’ in *Nineteen-Eighty Four* will become a critical part of our material teaching collection.

Modular structure of the MA, MRes, and LRBS

An MA or MRes degree requires 180 CATS points (90 ECTS points).

For an **MA** we require the student to take 6 taught courses (the equivalent of 120 CATS M points (60 ECTS points) plus a 15,000-word dissertation worth 60 CATS M points (30 ECTS points)).

For an **MRes** we require the student to take 3 taught courses (30 ECTS points) followed by a 30,000-word dissertation (worth 60 ECTS points).

Each taught course consists of 20 hours of contact time, 200 hours of student work, and a 5,000-word essay. If successfully completed this leads to an award of 20 CATS M points (10 ECTS points).

In the MA and MRes programme each course is taught over a ten-week term with one two-hour seminar per week. A full-time student would be expected to take 3 courses in the autumn term, 3 courses in the spring term, and devote the summer term to work on the dissertation.

Students successfully completing 3 masters courses can be awarded a **postgraduate certificate in book history**. Students successfully completing 6 masters courses can be awarded a **postgraduate diploma in book history**.

The London Rare Books School (LRBS) offers MA courses compressed from 10 weeks to five days; students then have two months in which to prepare and write a 5,000-word essay.

Students can move between the masters programme and LRBS.

Courses offered in LRBS in 2014

- Children's Books, 1470-1980
- European Bookbinding, 1450-1820
- A History of Maps and Mapping
- The History of Readers and Reading, 1770-2010
- An Introduction to Bibliography
- The Medieval Book
- The Printed Book in Europe 1450-2000
- Book Illustration
 - The Book in the Ancient World
 - The Early Modern Book in England
 - The History and Practice of Hand Press Printing
 - Modern First Editions: Dealing, Collecting, and the Market
 - The Printed Book in the East: China, India, and Japan
 - Western Historical Scripts from Antiquity to 1600

New courses to be offered in LRBS in 2015

- The Book in the Renaissance
- The History of Paper
- An Introduction to Printed Books before 1501
- The Communication History of the Ministry of Information 1939-46