

Informal Northern Thai Group Bulletin

5 February 2017

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1. MINUTES of THE 412th INTG MEETING

Tuesday, 10 January, 2017

“What is the Use of Old Books?” A talk by Graham Jefcoate

1.1. PRESENT : Hans Bänziger, Saengdao Bänziger, Dianne Barber-Riley, Mark Barber-Riley, Mike Barraclough, Robert Bowles, David Clay, Amy D'Apice, Eric Eustache, Louis Gabaude, James Geir, Frederic Gloor, Paul Gray, Steve Haight, Eva Mazharento, Peter McGuire, Patrick Morel, Barbara Needell, Geoff Pimlott, Lorri Pimlott, Aileen Roantree, Horst Sitch, Angelie Sitch, Paul Sullivan, Suriya Smutkupt, Dorothy Tarrant, Dagmar Waters, Tony Waters, Rebecca Weldon. *29 signed. 31 were counted.*

1.2. THE TALK

1.2.1. THE PROBLEM

The advent of the Internet and the digitisation of text raise many questions about the role of printed collections in our libraries. E-journals have replaced printed journals in many fields and many academic monographs are being issued exclusively as e-books. The general public too is embracing post-print technologies. For example, e-readers like Kindle are found to be convenient devices for storing and transporting personal libraries by many of us living part of the year here in Northern Thailand. All in all, the age of print and the printed book seems to be coming to an end.

But what of the legacy of print - the huge collections of historic printed texts accumulated in our great libraries? As these too are increasingly accessible on the Internet as digital facsimiles - a format that is

convenient to use and search – can the originals simply be mothballed or even discarded? After all, they are expensive to store, maintain and preserve.

When I became Director of the University Library at Nijmegen in The Netherlands in 2005, we provided our readers with access to some 1,200 English-language books printed before 1801 – the physical copies we had accumulated over time and preserved in our stacks. When I left the Library in 2011, we were providing access to over half a million early English books – digital facsimiles of copies in other great libraries made available on subscription through an Internet database. And this number didn't include those that had been digitised by Google (and others) and made available on the Net free of charge.

What possible use could our 1,200 physical copies still be? Who would use them, and why?

1.2.2. MY BACKGROUND

I'm a retired professional librarian and a specialist in early printed books. In the 1980's I learnt much of what I know about early print culture by cataloguing a collection of early printed books held by the University of Göttingen in Germany. I later went on to lead the Early Printed Collections of the British Library in London, the world's most extensive holdings of printed books in European languages, from Gutenberg to the early 20th century. Before retirement, I spent much of my spare time researching and publishing on my specialist field, the 18th century Anglo-German book trade. Since taking retirement, writing and lecturing on the topic has become more-or-less a full time occupation.

But I've also been interested in networking and the digitisation of text almost from the beginning of these information technologies. In the 1980's I worked at the British Library on an Anglo-American project to catalogue English-language books printed before 1801 in an online database.¹ In the early 1990's I became interested in "gopher", an early way of making information available on the Net before the advent of the World Wide Web. Soon we were developing a website. For a time in the 1990's I project-managed the British Library's programme to introduce the use of the Internet and the World Wide Web into the work of the Library's departments. Later I worked on a website linking the members of the consortium of European national libraries, a distant precursor of today's *Europeana* service.²

In other words, I've worked with print collections and with services based on networking and digital technologies. I've never seen an interest in early print as somehow in opposition to an interest in digitisation. That's probably why I want to argue here that that our printed heritage and the opportunities offered by the digitisation and online accessibility of texts should be seen as a part of a single "continuum".

1.2.3. MAPPING OUR PRINTED HERITAGE

Both block printing and printing with moveable types originated during the first millennium A.D. in East Asia. The world's earliest dated printed item is the British Library's *Diamond Sutra*, a Buddhist devotional text from the T'ang dynasty, printed in 868 A.D.³ Centuries later, Johannes Gutenberg re-invented the technology in the west, printing his famous 42-line Bible in Mainz around 1455.⁴ For a time, print and manuscript technologies existed side-by-side, perhaps much as print and digital technologies exist together today. Finally though, print became firmly established as the primary medium for public communication and the dissemination of ideas. Indeed, print in the form of books, journals and newspapers has underlain our whole literate culture for the (nearly) five centuries since Gutenberg's invention. If we are to understand our civilisation as it has developed, then we must concern ourselves closely with the heritage of print.

It would be impossible to quantify this legacy. Our libraries great and small hold tens of millions of copies of printed books. They are almost certainly the most numerous manufactured items that have come down to us.

1 The English Short Title Catalogue, URL: http://estc.bl.uk/F/?func=file&file_name=login-bl-estc

2 See <http://www.europeana.eu/portal/fr>

3 There are even earlier printed items from East Asia, but they are undated.

4 Both the Diamond Sutra and the Gutenberg Bible can be seen among the digitised treasures on the British Library's website, URL: <http://www.bl.uk>.

Even so, many individual printed items are rare – or even unique. Texts that once were plentiful may now be difficult to trace. Millions of copies and whole editions have been lost.

Since about the turn of the last century, great efforts have been made to trace and record (nowadays we might say “map”) our printed heritage. For the English and Dutch-speaking worlds, for example, we have comprehensive national bibliographies that cover a large proportion of the surviving editions printed in those language areas up to 1800. The obvious place to find them was of course in national, research and university libraries. But in the past such libraries often collected only works they regarded worthy of the attention of scholars. The overwhelming majority of historic printed items were often regarded as having little or no scholarly value – children’s primers, school text books, devotional leaflets, popular pamphlets of all kinds, cheap fiction, advice manuals, flyers, advertisements, and so on. In other words libraries often failed to collect and preserve print that reflected how the great majority of people lived their lives.

As I always point out, the Gutenberg Bible is not an especially rare book (nearly 50 copies are recorded, plus fragments) but popular print is excessively rare, and it’s this that (in my view) urgently needs to be traced and recorded. Unless we find and record such material, it cannot be digitised nor made available for research. Our knowledge of our own past will remain woefully incomplete.

This alone should mean that we cannot yet neglect the heritage of print.

1.2.4. BOOKS AS EVIDENCE

David Pearson, a former colleague at the British Library, has explained in a number of publications⁵ that books can tell us more than simply the information conveyed in their texts. The text is clearly central to their *message*, but the *medium* in which it is presented (the physical book) is also of great interest and importance. Pearson mentions the “unique properties” individual copies of printed books may derive from “the ways they have been printed, bound, annotated, beautified or defaced”. He calls this variety in ostensibly identical books “individuality beyond mass production”.

Books are therefore important as evidence, as Pearson says, “beyond their texts”. Owners may try to stamp their individuality on copies, for example, by binding books in a special way (most copies of early printed books being sold unbound), or by adding such marks of ownership as bookplates, book labels or stamps. Owners or users may have added manuscript emendations or notes. In the past, when books were more expensive and difficult to obtain, such annotations might derive from several users. Bibliographers and rare book cataloguers record all these things as “copy-specific information”. Of course, digitisation projects might also conscientiously capture such information – but, if only one physical copy of a title is digitised, much will inevitably be missed.

Pearson also refers to the “collective value of historic collections”. Marks of provenance might help us reconstruct collections that have long since been dispersed. The study of all such marks and accretions is important if we are to understand how texts were received and disseminated in the past.

If this is true (as surely it is), then there is an intrinsic value in being able to access and use books in their original format. But this value doesn’t only consist in marks and accretions. When I read *Nicholas Nickleby* on my new Kindle in the Dickens bicentenary year 2012, for example, I was of course aware how different my reading experience was to its first readers. They would have read the book in twenty parts issued over nineteen months, an experience resembling following a modern TV or radio serial. The rhythm of the book as conceived by Dickens, for example the “cliff hanger” endings at the end of each part, are no longer apparent to the modern reader. The illustrations, integral to the presentation of Dickens’s text, are often inadequately reproduced in e-books, and the original advertisements (for health-restoring lozenges and so on) are almost always excluded completely. The modern reading experience focuses on the *text* and everything *beyond the text* is missed. To understand the text as presented by Dickens, we need access to it in its original context.

Simply to *read the text* we can of course use digital versions, but to *get beyond the text* - and to understand *context* - we still need to access books in their original, physical format, as printed and published.

⁵ See especially his *Books as history: the importance of books beyond their texts*. British Library and Oak Knoll 2008.

1.2.5. BOOKS FOR PLEASURE

When I was young I was an avid reader of Penguin Classics, enjoying not just the texts but also, for example, the physical qualities of the editions. I can remember noticing the fonts designed by Eric Gill (and especially his *Perpetua* and the sans serif font *Gill Sans*) or the elegant page lay-out pioneered in the 1940's by the German book designer Jan Tschihold. Physical books held in the hand can provide an aesthetic or sensual experience it would be difficult, or probably impossible, to reproduce in digital formats. It is of course another way of relating to a book *beyond the text*.

As we have seen, in the past owners of books often bound them to their own taste, another aspect of the value and meaning that can be added to physical books beyond the texts themselves. Craft binding remains happily one of the most active and creative of the applied arts today.

And we must not forget the continuing affection for traditional library spaces as places for study. When asked, students will often say they value traditional libraries lined with physical books, even though they have no longer any need to consult them and work exclusively with digital resources accessed through their laptops. But the aesthetic properties of traditional, physical libraries, great and small, are surely a topic for another lecture.

In summary, experiencing physical books and libraries can be *pleasurable* – and this pleasurable experience seems to be something that people still value.

1.2.6. SOME CONCLUSIONS

More than twenty years ago, at the advent of the digital age, I spoke about the uncertainty pervading the book world. Everyone concerned in book production and consumption – whether as author, editor, publisher printer, bookseller, reader or student – knew that change was coming, but predicting what that change would mean seemed impossible. Today, a few things seem a little clearer, for example the primary, or more often exclusive, medium for producing, distributing and reading many texts (for example, encyclopaedias, scientific journals and many scholarly monographs) is already digital. In other fields, however, analogue, physical text seems to making something of a comeback if we read that Amazon is opening physical bookshops in major US cities where traditional books can be read. Perhaps we are seeing the advent of a “hybrid” age, in which print and digital formats can and will live side by side.

To return to the question I posed at the beginning: What use are our collections of old printed books in this increasingly digital age? I hope I have successfully argued the case for a “hybrid” approach to them too. While recognising the primacy of digital text, we should also recognise the continuing importance of print and the physical book. In any case, vast quantities of print still need to be traced, recorded and preserved before they can be digitised. And once this has been achieved, there will always be an inherent value in accessing books “beyond their texts”. Collections of historic print allow us to reconnect with the pre-digital age in order to understand how our literate culture developed as it did. And physical books will continue be appreciated as designed objects.

My vision is therefore of a “continuum” spanning both physical and digital formats. Students of *Nicholas Nickleby*, for example, might first read the text on an e-reader or online. But in the rare books reading room of their university library, they will still be able to handle the individual parts and to appreciate the text in its original context, as intended by its author and publisher, and experienced by its first readers. Apart from enhancing their reading experience, it may also awaken in them an appreciation of the pleasures of print and the printed book.

FURTHER READINGS ON PRINTING, BOOKS AND PAPER IN ASIA (By the editor)

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Srisakul Bootrachart = ศรีสกุล บุตรชาติวี. *Improvement the primitive process of sa-paper making* = การศึกษาและพัฒนาระบบการผลิตกระดาษสาแบบดั้งเดิม. A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of science (Appropriate technology and resource development), Faculty of Graduate Studies, Mahidol University, 1991. Text in Thai, Abstract in English. Paper version available at the Chiang Mai EFEO Library: THAIL. E. SC./TEC. S774I : Inv. EFCM 05396; PDF version available at: <http://mulinet11.li.mahidol.ac.th/thesis/scan/17949.pdf>

2. Next INTG meeting (413TH): Tuesday, 7 February, 2017, 7:30 pm
at the Alliance Française, Chiang Mai
“Kindred Spaces: Painting Across Worlds”
A Presentation by Amy D'Apice

The presentation: *Kindred Spaces* is a multimedia presentation featuring the work of painter Amy D'Apice. A melding of visual art, music, and high-energy storytelling, *Kindred Spaces* provides a behind the scenes look at the painting process and the creation of an exhibition featuring Eastern and Western motifs. By revealing the beauty in forgotten spaces like alleys, backs of buildings, and abandoned lots, this passionate, expansive body of new paintings reminds us that we are more alike than not.

The speaker: Amy D'Apice is a painter, writer, and performance artist. After receiving her Master's Degree from the University of Washington in 1997, she became a teacher and mentor, employed by the University of Washington, Northwest College of Art, and the Seattle Art Institute. Ms. D'Apice also co-founded The Art Center on Bainbridge Island, a community based school. Presently, Amy lives and works in Chiang Mai.

3. February second meeting (414TH): Tuesday, 21 February, 2017, 7:30 pm
at the Alliance Française, Chiang Mai
“ Sansai Mahawong 1969/2017: Changes in a Northern Thai Village”
A Talk by Michael & Kay Calavan

The presentation: The talk will explore initial findings on Tambon Sansai's dramatic demographic, economic, political-administrative, and socio-cultural transformation from 1969 up to 2017, giving particular emphasis to:

- The causes and results of a striking shift in population profile;
- Transformation of farming from intensive rice production to lamyai orchards and corresponding changes in the labor market;
- The grafting on a new local government system on to an older one, and the services they jointly provide;
- An exploration of what it means to be Northern Thai in 2017;
- A sea of change in consumption patterns and everyday life.

The speakers: Anthropologists Mike and Kay Calavan undertook doctoral research in Sansai, a village in Saraphi District, Chiang Mai Province, in 1969-70 and published their findings in a number of publications. After university teaching in the 1970s, they shifted to work on international development programs in South

and Southeast Asia. Since retiring from USAID in 2002, they have undertaken numerous consulting assignments, while managing to spend several months each year in Chiangmai. In 2015 they initiated a re-study of Sansai that will continue over the next couple of years.

4. Mailing Problems

1. "Dorothy TARRANT" has requested that we « resend minutes from last meeting [= December 2016] ». This will be done when we get a working address... Thank you.
2. The following addresses do not work. They will be phased out right after this mailing unless I get some reaction or another address. LG

andrew@silkwormbooks.com
bohemianusa@hotmail.com
brccm@loxinfo.co.th
cstrat@vermontel.com
gallery@loxinfo.co.th
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tiger@loxinfo.co.th
tnewman@loxinfo.co.th
tubtim@loxinfo.co.th

5. List of FUTURE INTG MEETINGS

Tuesday, 7 February, 2017, 7:30 pm at the Alliance Française, Chiang Mai : “**Kindred Spaces: Painting Across Worlds**”. A Presentation by **Amy D'Apice**.

Tuesday, 21 February, 2017, 7:30 pm at the Alliance Française, Chiang Mai: “**Sansai Mahawong 1969/2017: Changes in a Northern Thai Village**”. A Talk by **Michael & Kay Calavan**.

Tuesday, 17 March, 2017, 7:30 pm at the Alliance Française, Chiang Mai: “**"Past Presenting": Heritage based Urban Development in Chiang Mai**”. A Talk by **Acharn Komson Teeraparbong**.

Meeting to be scheduled in April, 7:30 pm at the Alliance Française, Chiang Mai: A Talk on “**Rong Wongsawan - the modern Thai writer and National Artist**” by **Tony Waters**.

6. INTG CONTACTS : Convenor - Secretary - Website

- 1) **Convenor : Rebecca Weldon** : e-mail : <rebecca.weldon@gmail.com>. Mobile : **087 193 67 67**.
- 2) **Secretary : Louis Gabaude** : e-mail : <gabaudel@yahoo.com>. Mobile : **087 188 50 99**.
- 3) **INTG Website : Clarence Shettlesworth**: e-mail : <nugentsr@gmail.com>. Mobile : **081 980 6909**.

Informal Northern Thai Group (INTG)
32 years of Talks!

**KINDRED
SPACES :
PAINTING ACROSS
WORLDS**

A Talk by **Amy D'Apice**

Tuesday, 7 February 2017, 7:30 pm

At The Alliance Française - Chiang Mai

138, Charoen Prathet Road, (Opposite EFEO)

Informal Northern Thai Group (INTG)

32 years of Talks!

**SANSAI
MAHAWONG
1969/2017:
CHANGES
IN A NORTHERN
THAI VILLAGE**

A Talk by **Michael & Kay Calavan**

Tuesday, 21 February 2017, 7:30 pm

**At The Alliance Française - Chiang Mai
138, Charoen Prathet Road, (Opposite EFEO)**

Informal Northern Thai Group (INTG)

32 years of Talks!

***"PAST
PRESENTING"***
**HERITAGE
BASED URBAN
DEVELOPMENT
IN CHIANG MAI**

A Talk by Prof. Komson Teeraparbwong

Tuesday, 17 March 2017, 7:30 pm

**At The Alliance Française - Chiang Mai
138, Charoen Prathet Road, (Opposite EFEO)**

