Editorial Comments

Barbara Beeton

A day at a small press book fair

Early this fall, over the weekend of the Columbus Day holiday (in the U.S., this is celebrated on the Monday closest to October 12, especially in locations with a sizeable population of Italian descent) I had the opportunity to attend a book fair organized by my favorite bookshop, Oak Knoll Books of New Castle, Delaware. Oak Knoll deals in "books about books" — typography, printing, design, ... bibliography — and has a strong commitment to the continued health of the book arts. In support of this, the proprieter, Bob Fleck, and his staff have undertaken to arrange "events" where small presses and craftsmen in the traditions associated with printing can get some exposure and meet prospective new customers. The book fair was the second in what promises to be an annual tradition.

The highlight of the fair was a talk by Ian Mortimer, the head of the printing house I. M. Imprimum, London, on the printing of a definitive edition of specimens of decorative wood types created in the early 1800s by Louis John Pouchee. The wood blocks, carved in solid boxwood, and intended as masters for stereotypes, were found among the effects of the Caslon type foundry at the time of its closing, without identification. The blocks are now held by the St Bride printing library in London, and the printing was undertaken under library auspices.

At the beginning of the project, nothing was known about the provenance of the types, not even the name of the creator. Nonetheless, the quality of design and workmanship of the types was exceptional, and no printed specimens were known. Aside from the effects of age — 150 years of disuse and lack of attention was evidenced in some minor warping and splitting and in the absence of some letters in a couple of the alphabets — the condition of the blocks was such that it is believed they had never before been used directly for printing, so the work described is in a very real sense a first edition.

Mr. Mortimer illustrated his description of the printing process with slides that illuminated the steps to even the least knowledgeable of the audience. I learned a great deal about printing from "real" type in order to ensure uniform distribution of ink on the printed surface — how to ensure that the type heights are even, how to use "make-ready" to permit greater pressure on areas of solid black, how to apply differential inking so that areas of great detail will not be blurred, how to use a frisket to cover those portions of the paper that should remain ink-free, ... even how to create a "rainbow" border on a traditional press (although this last was not part of the main project). Many of these techniques are simply impossible on "modern" printing equipment; however, the fine quality of the results is a fitting goal for craftsmen in the newer technologies.

Continuing his discussion of the decorative types, Mr. Mortimer showed several slides of contemporary (i.e., 1820s) posters on which they had been used; these were mainly for the theater, agricultural shows, and masonic events. The present printing project took about two years. Near the end of that time, one of the assistants in the printing house remembered seeing a specimen book with some of the designs, and undertook a search — which met with success. The cover of the specimen book identified it as being from the firm of Louis John Pouchee, and several of the types were prominently displayed there. Apparently, Pouchee was an upstart in the type business and antagonized some of the other, larger firms (typefounding was a very competitive business in the 19th century). It isn't known what actually happened, but it seems likely that a competitor bought up Pouchee's holdings and promptly made them disappear from public view, but was not so thorough that the types themselves were destroyed. The timing of this solution to the mystery was especially satisfying, as it permitted the creator of the types to be identified in the printed catalog.

One small additional fillip to the project was the use of another font of type that had apparently also not been used extensively. This was a very elegant sans serif that had been created about 1820, but failed to gain popularity at that time and was abandoned. (Sans serif types were "invented" anew at mid-century and became staples of the industry from that time.) The ability to print with such a contemporaneous type was clearly a source of great pleasure to Mr. Mortimer, and I can vouch for the highly satisfactory appearance of the results.

Following Mr. Mortimer's talk, a panel of the small press owners gave their views on questions such as these.

- Where will the book be in five years? The best answer: "where it damn well wants to." No one thought the book as produced by the small press is about to disappear, although several felt that reference and trade books would be heavily influenced by the techniques of electronic distribution.
- Does anyone running a small press (as represented on the panel) have an e-mail address? No, not one; one panelist pointed out that it

takes too long to clean the ink off one's hands for a computer to be particularly useful on an ongoing basis. But perhaps there is an intermediate approach wherein an engaged and knowledgeable bookseller can represent small presses and provide the means of introducing them to a wider audience, to the benefit of all.

- Is knowledge of the traditional printing crafts of any use to modern students of typography and design? An adamant and vocal response by Mr. Mortimer that this is the only way students are going to learn to handle space was seconded by a young woman in the audience who said that she had been in one of Mr. Mortimer's classes several years earlier and thanked him for what he had taught her.

The afternoon was occupied by a show of wares by nearly 20 small presses, and by demonstrations of printing (on a *very* small press, one made originally as a toy in a size suitable for printing business cards), bookbinding, and typefounding by current practitioners of those crafts. All the exhibitors were unfailingly helpful and the enthusiasm of the audience was obvious. I've come home with some fine new treasures and am already looking forward to next year.

For anyone interested in "books about books", Oak Knoll now has a presence on the Web, at `http://www.oakknoll.com`, or you can write to `oakknoll@ssnet.com`.

Sources of information on printing and book arts on the Web

In addition to the Oak Knoll Web page, which is also accessible through the Antiquarian Booksellers' Association of America (ABAA) World Wide Web Server, at `http://www.clark.net/pub/rmharris/booknet1.html`, several other Web sites devoted to printing and the book arts have come to my attention.

William S. Peterson, at the University of Maryland, College Park, has created a Web page "devoted to British and American fine printing of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with particular emphasis on William Morris and the Kelmscott Press." The address is `http://www.wam.umd.edu/~wsp/home.htm`. Even a quick glance at the page shows the hand of one who respects traditional book design. Pointers to numerous sources are given, as well as essays on the stated area of coverage. This site is under construction, and will surely expand into an even more interesting collection than it is already.

An announcement by the Catholic University of America Libraries and the School of Library and Information Science at CUA introduces "A Guide to the Book Arts and Book History on the World Wide Web", accessible at the address `http://www.cua.edu/www/mullen/bookarts.html`. This guide is "an organized list of links to Web pages that deal with book arts and book history."

From L'École des Arts visuels, Université Laval, Québec, comes the page IKONQuebec, at `http://www.ulaval.ca/ikon/HOME.HTML`. This site deals with graphic design including and beyond the book, and contains a bibliography of "les 700 meilleurs livres sur le graphisme", most of which are in either French or English.

Check them out!

A TEX Users Group for Spanish speakers

At the very end of December, a message from José R. Portillo Fernandez announced the formation of a new TEX Users Group — Grupo de Usuarios de TEX Hispanoparlantes, GUTH.

Some of the activities of GUTH will be the maintenance of a FAQ, publication of a *Boletin*, creation and maintenance of hyphenation dictionaries, styles, and a Babel package, and an FTP site. A Web page has already been installed: `http://gordo.us.es/Actividades/GUTH`.

If you are interested in the activities of this new group, but don't have Web access, you can get in touch with

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There is also a newsgroup about Spanish-language TEX, `es.eunet.spanish-tex`, and an associated discussion list, `spanish-tex@goya.eunet.es`.

A brief comment on the merger of *TUGboat* and *TEX and TUG News*

As you have already read in Michel Goossens' introduction to this issue, *TTN* has ceased publication after issue **4**(3). *TTN* was created as an attempt to attract members to TUG who didn't feel ready for the heavy technical matter of *TUGboat*. Although there have been differences of opinion over whether such a separate forum was necessary or successful, it is a fact that *TTN* has gathered much interesting and useful material, in a form that could easily be slipped into a purse or briefcase and carried onto an

airplane for easy reading, and I am sorry to see it end.

What I don't want to happen is for the ongoing in-print forum for this material to disappear too.

Technical material submitted to *TUGboat* is subjected to considerable scrutiny, refereed, and often edited heavily in an effort to present the facts in a style suitable for a technical journal. This will not change. However, "lighter" material, what appears in *Typographer's Inn* or '*Hey — it works!*', for example, will be accommodated without any attempt to make it hew to an inappropriate "higher standard". Peter Flynn and I will be working together to incorporate this material as a distinct and recognizable sub-publication that will retain its own personality. We have not yet had an opportunity to discuss the real details, but the current columnists will be invited — and I hope that they will agree — to continue in new surroundings.

The new, combined *TUGboat/TTN* will become reality with the next issue, **17**(1).

Let me take this opportunity to thank Peter Flynn, the present editor, and Christina Thiele, the founding editor (there have been no others), for their hard work. Well done!

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Some thoughts on TEX and TUG News

Peter Flynn

In one way I was very fortunate to become the next editor of *TTN* after Christina Thiele. Her lead broke the new ground well, so my own spadework was much reduced. In another way she is always a hard act to follow, but I appreciate having such a high standard to work to.

As Barbara says, *TTN* was aimed at those members or potential members who did not feel the need for the technical depth of *TUGboat*, or who wanted something comprehensible which they could show to non-TEXies. I think we have been very fortunate in having writers of the technical caliber displayed in *TTN* to date who are nevertheless capable of expressing and explaining their topics in a form that doesn't require pre-reading of chapters 20–26 of *The TEXbook*.

I am looking forward to this continuing in the new format of publication, because I feel strongly that one of the best ways to persuade the less technical TEX users to start reading *TUGboat* is to get them reading *TTN*. I certainly remember my own early days with TEX, struggling to learn the operating system, editor, print spooler, job control language, and TEX all at the same time . . . I would certainly have appreciated something to cut my teeth on before I developed an appetite for raw Knuth or Lamport. User support people in companies and universities have mailed me to say 'thank you' for providing this entrée to TEX, and I know some of them are now reading this.

The technical minutiæ of production are still being worked out. We have considered (and discarded, I am happy to say) suggestions like printing the *TTN* components on coloured stock, or having them bound on a perforated stub like a booklet on bowel control inside the *Reader's Digest*. I hope that our contributors, both occasional and regular, will continue to write, and I hope that the new proximity of *TTN* to *TUGboat* will mean that we can be even more encouraging to users in the future.

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Editor's note: Peter expresses very well what I find to be the major failing of *TUGboat* — it doesn't often contain much that can be comprehended immediately by someone who is not already relatively skilled in using TEX. Despite frequent invitations welcoming tutorial material and articles on modest but useful techniques, and an annual harangue on the subject at the summer TUG meeting, almost nothing of this sort appears in my in basket.

Even more than articles sent to me, I would very much like to find one or more volunteers who feel the same way, who are willing to listen in on the various electronic TEX discussions, talk to other TEXies, follow up on items that they think will be of general interest, and solicit even very small contributions for publication. Now that *TTN*, with its "smaller is better" flavor, is joining *TUGboat*, there will be an even greater scope for this material.

If you are such a person, and would like to help find good material to fill our pages, please send a message to `TUGboat@ams.org` or to Peter or me, and we will put you to work.

– bb