

London Rare Book Summer School: The Modern Rare Book Trade – report.

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In my current role, my responsibilities cover the design and delivery of our access services, maintaining a standard of customer service excellence, and the management of a team of Archive & Library Assistants. Through completing a skills assessment for my Chartership submission and monitoring published job adverts in the sector, I identified my lack of applied collections management experience and curatorial skills as an obstacle to career progression. I was keen to undertake CPD to fill this gap and therefore applied for the CILIPS Professional Development Fund to attend a London Rare Book Summer School course on the Modern Rare Book Trade.

An understanding of the trade is crucial to managing an active collection on behalf of a heritage institution. The remit of the course was a broad exploration of the contemporary market led by two experienced antiquarian book dealers, Leo Cadogan and Angus O'Neill. Like myself, the other students were largely librarians who needed to engage with the trade in their work and were seeking a greater understanding of its inner workings.

This was certainly what we received, and more. Topics covered over the week included the imprecise science of valuing books, the key concepts of collectability, how to read a bookseller's catalogue, tracing provenance, techniques of research, and spotting fakes and forgeries. The seminar format allowed for open discussion and fruitful tangents, including the impact of lockdown and travel restrictions on the trade, etiquette and competition between booksellers', and many stories of the books bought and sold by the tutors throughout their careers. In addition, we heard from two guest speakers with vast experience in their fields; Ariane Adeline, a book dealer and medieval manuscript specialist working in the auction world, and Joan Winterkorn, a librarian-turned-dealer, who had worked on high-profile sales such as the acquisition of the Honresfield Library on behalf of a consortium of UK public institutions.

Through the course, I gained a full understanding of the place of bookseller's in the ecosystem of the rare book trade and the work they do for themselves and on behalf of institutions. Particularly valuable were two site visits to Bryers & Bryers at Cecil Court and Bernard Quaritch and the generosity of the hosts in answering our questions. In our final seminar we discussed the role of the Antiquarian Bookseller's Association in governing the profession and providing a code of ethics for bookseller's to abide by. We also considered changes to the trade, including the loss of shopfronts and the rise of online selling, resulting in the decentralisation of London, book collecting prizes to encourage new young collectors, and changing diversity, including an increase in female booksellers' but a decrease in social mobility.

Throughout the week I built a glossary of trade terms to refer back to and a bibliography for further reading. It is now my intention to put this learning into practice by shadowing our curatorial staff through the acquisitions process and attending a rare books fair, increasing my curatorial skillset and my future employability.