

David Pearson, *Books as History: the Importance of Books beyond their Texts*. Rev. ed. London: British Library, 2011. 208 p., illus. ISBN 9780712358323. £16.95.

“This book should be required reading for all librarians and information managers,” wrote Professor Mirjam Foot of the first edition of this book, “It should be a set text for all library students.” I certainly added it to the initial reading list for the UCL module on Historical Bibliography, and with the advent of the affordable paperback, it joins Gaskell’s *New Introduction to Bibliography* in being recommended for purchase and annotation by students.

Affordability is not the only improvement. As Pearson indicates in his foreword, he has “taken the opportunity to review the text and make a number of changes and additions, particularly in the first and last chapters, updating them in the light of recent developments in the landscape of e-books.” The inclusion of brief discussion of the British Library’s *2020 Vision* report (published 2010), Darnton’s *Case for Books* (published 2009) and the rise of the Kindle supports the holistic and critical thinking about information that we wish to encourage in new entrants to the rare books profession.

“In this evolving world, what are the criteria that should be applied to decide whether or not a book is a valuable object worthy of preservation?” Pearson asks in his penultimate paragraph. With the weight of his arguments from previous chapters behind him, he asserts, “We should focus not solely on its text but also on the other things it has to offer researchers.”

This must be one of the strengths of *Books as History*. In it the beginning rare books librarian is presented with wide-ranging examples not only of the book as physical object, but why this physical object matters. The range and accessibility of the examples makes this book a useful acquisition for anyone who has to demonstrate the value of their collections, or their role in curating them.

If this does not persuade you to buy, or at least borrow, *Books as History*, a list of the chapter titles reads like a syllabus for an introduction to Bibliography: (1) Books in History; (2) Books beyond Texts; (3) Individuality within Mass Production; (4) Variety through Ownership; (5) Variety through Binding; (6) The Collective Value of Libraries; (7) Values for the Future. The final section is a gift for the teacher: a case study demonstrating the differences between five copies of Bacon’s account of the reign of Henry VII just the right size to get students thinking about enumerative bibliography and copy census.

The only criticism I have is one of design: pictures spreading across the gutter have lost a good half inch in the perfect binding – particularly unfortunate for copy 3 of the Bacon case study. Perhaps The British Library can do something about this for the inevitable next edition? And, on the subject of future publications, perhaps a series of *Books as History in Depth*?

Anne Welsh
Lecturer in Library & Information Studies, University College London

Wordcount: 502 words, excluding bibliographic details, reviewer name and affiliation