

Letterpress printing: past, present, future

University of Leeds, 19-20 July 2018



During the twentieth century, printing changed from a craft-based to a technology-led process. The composing room moved from hand- to machine composition, from photo-setting to digital; while the press room shifted from letterpress to off-set lithography and latterly digital methods of production. Technical progress, however, failed to completely usurp traditional printing and today there is a marked increase in those engaged with older methods of production, whether for pleasure, profit, or scholarship.

For example, housed in the basement of the School of English at the University of Leeds, there is a range of letterpress machines and moveable type. Originally used to teach bibliography, this facility fell out of use as academic fashions changed. Today it has been resurrected by a new generation of scholars curious to practice craft techniques in order to enhance their understanding of the past.

Similarly, when the printing industry jettisoned letterpress in favour of contemporary technology, some of the equipment survived and was appropriated by artists as tools for creativity, or salvaged by museums as relics of the past. Some of this historic equipment was requisitioned by a new generation of printers keen to satisfy market demands for traditional printing and often used in tandem with contemporary techniques.

Featuring a key note lecture by Johanna Drucker, this two-day conference explores the survival, legacy and relevance of letterpress printing in the digital era.

We welcome proposals for papers or for panels that address:

- the place of letterpress printing today;
- the legacy of letterpress: practices and equipment;
- the position of letterpress in contemporary learning and scholarship;
- the function of letterpress in art and design today;
- the delights of printing for pleasure;
- the teaching of letterpress today;
- the appeal and importance of letterpress today;
- the role of letterpress in shaping who we think we are;
- the future of letterpress printing in a digital age.

Proposal for papers:

Please send a suggested title, synopsis (400 words) and biography (200 words) via a Word attachment to centrechop@gmail.com by **13 April 2018**.

Proposal for panels of three speakers:

Please send a suggested title, synopsis of each panel paper (400 words per speaker) and biography (200 words for each speaker) via a Word attachment to centrechop@gmail.com by **13 April 2018**.

Organisers:

James Mussell (Centre for the Comparative History of Print, University of Leeds) and
Caroline Archer-Parré (Centre for Printing History & Culture, Birmingham City
University/University of Birmingham)

Please send queries to centrechop@gmail.com.

About:

This conference is the culmination of the AHRC Research Network '[Letterpress Printing: past, present, future](#)', which brings together scholars, printers, and heritage professionals, amongst others, to discuss the role of letterpress.



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