centre for material texts

annual report 2009-10

The Centre for Material Texts was constituted by the English Faculty Board in July of 2009, and was given a start-up grant of £5000 towards the creation of a website and administrative support during its first year of operation. The aim of the Centre is to bring together the Faculty's activities in the field of material textuality (including editorial and bibliographic work, as well as projects of a critical and theoretical nature), to establish interdisciplinary dialogues with other disciplines in the University where appropriate, and to ease access to intellectual resources beyond our walls. As well as overseeing the History of the Book seminar (renamed the Seminar for the History of Material Texts), the Centre holds a variety of colloquia and conferences, and assists with the development of research-grant applications and with the custodianship of web-based materials resulting from research projects. This report summarizes the activities of the Centre in its first year, and offers some pointers to the future.

I   committee

The Centre is run by a Director (currently Jason Scott-Warren) and a committee, the current members of which are: Sarah Cain, Mina Gorji, Fiona Green, Paul Russell (ASNC), Anne Toner, Dan Wakelin, Tessa Webber (History), and Andrew Zurcher. In 2009-10 the Committee met twice, at the beginning of the Michaelmas and of the Easter term.

II   website

Following a workshop held on 2 October 2010, attended by around 40 people, Sebastiaan Verweij begin work on the website. The site—recently completed—has a number of exciting features which we have only just begun to put through their paces. The website comprises:

(1) 'Home' and 'About' pages describing the mission of the Centre and offering reports on major events hosted by the Centre.

(2) 'News' and 'Events' pages, advertising seminars, colloquia and conferences held under the CMT's auspices, and other items of potential interest to members.

(3) A 'members' page, providing photos and brief intellectual biographies of Centre members, to raise awareness of the Cambridge academic community, and of projects currently underway, across a range of Faculties (currently including ASNC, Classics, East Asian Studies, English, History, History of Art, HPS, MML, Music).

(4) A 'gallery' space in which librarians, academics and students can offer detailed and illustrated accounts of the texts that have been absorbing them. To date we have had two exhibits: an account by Karen Begg, librarian of Queens', of the analysis of three masterpieces of 14th-century manuscript illumination that had been lying forgotten in the college's Old Library; and a report by James Harmer on the annotations of Sir John Cheke in Greek books recently donated to St John's College. Over time we hope that these pages will help to increase the intellectual traffic between Cambridge's libraries and its academic community, to their mutual benefit.

(5) A 'teaching' area, which at present offers a series of links to online resources in various fields, but which in future might be developed so as to offer much fuller materials for teachers of bibliography, palaeography, editorial method, critical theory etc.

(6) A 'projects' area, at present linking to 'Scriptorium' and the 'Early Irish Glossaries Database'. Expansion of this area is partly dependent on successful grant applications from members of the Centre, but we hope in the near future to expand the 'Scriptorium'-related materials here, so as to offer a model for the way in which the CMT site might add value to an existing project.

(7) A blog, offering informal comment on matters of topical interest relating to the Centre. The blog offers a valuable way to introduce members of the wider academic community and of the general public to the CMT's agenda, and to demonstrate its relevance to the understanding of events in the wider world.

(8) An intranet 'Members' Forum', RAVEN-password-protected, offering access to a series of discussion boards which are open to posts from any Centre member. Although it looks wonderful, and is easy to use, take-up of this feature has to date been extremely limited; we are currently working to make it more visible.

We are extremely grateful to Sebastiaan Verweij for his work on the website; we welcome comments on it, and suggestions for improvement, from the Faculty. Jen Pollard has promised to ensure that there will be a link from the front page of the Faculty website to the CMT site in the near future.

III events and activities

Seminars

The former 'History of the Book' seminar was relaunched in January 2010 as the **Seminar for the History of Material Texts**, and immediately discovered a new energy and purpose. As part of the relaunch, the seminar diversified its format to encourage dialogue and debate, and held several meetings which brought together short papers, often on diverse but related subjects, or which solicited discussion of recent work in the field. These included:

21 January   Ruth Ahnert and Becca Weir on 'Reading, Occasion and Media in

18 February	Hester Lees-Jeffries on 'Shakespeare: Text, Memory, Object'; and Kit Grover (designer), in conversation, on literary souvenirs (a seminar to which participants were invited to bring literary souvenirs and memorabilia for a 'show and tell')
29 April	A discussion of Leah Price, 'From the History of a Book to the "History of the Book"', *Representations* 108 (2009), 120-38 and Bill Brown, 'Obects, Others, and Us (The Refabrication of Things)', *Critical Inquiry* 36 (2010), 183-207, led by Anne Toner and Lucy Razzall
27 May 2010	Subha Mukherji, 'The voice of things: some archival evidence', and Christopher Burlinson on 'Maps and letters in the early modern archive'

All of these seminars were very well attended and each generated richly interesting discussion, demonstrating the appetite of the Cambridge community for new work in this area.

Conferences

The main event hosted by the Centre this year was the **Inaugural Conference**, held in the Faculty of English on 5-6 April 2010. Despite what appeared to some to be rather quixotic scheduling (the 5 April was the Easter Bank Holiday) and a threatened rail strike, just under 100 people were able to attend, and across the course of two packed days the event demonstrated to all of its participants the extraordinary vitality and interest of current work in this field.

The conference was designed to survey as many approaches to material textuality as possible, across as many periods and disciplines as possible. Many of the panels were accordingly diverse in content. 'Making Maps' took us from medieval world maps (Alfred Hiatt), via a conflict between cartographers in the Lake District (Heather Glen), to the rise and rise of the Ordnance Survey (Rachel Hewitt). A panel on what happens to texts when they cross national borders set out from late Arthurian cycles (Miriam Muth), moved on to consider the exchanging of texts in early modern diplomatic contexts (Joanna Eastwood), and concluded with a paper on the marketing of women's Arab anglophone fiction (Rachel Bower). Gary Tomlinson pushed the conference's chronological boundary at one end, taking us into the current state of thinking about the forms of cognition embodied in 1.5 million-year-old tools, while at the other extreme there were explorations of hypertext novels (Rose Hepworth), RSC souvenirs (Hester Lees-Jeffries), and CGI movies (Ian Christie).

Even those panels that attempted to stay within period boundaries were usually stymied, by accident or design. 'Writer's Remains', which began with papers on romantic literary souvenirs (Samantha Matthews) and the cult of the annotated book (Rea Köppel), finally moved on to consider the way in which we represent eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writers through their shrines—Shandy Hall (Patrick Wildgust) and the Clare House (Paul Chirico). A session which moved deftly through the

censorship of James Joyce's writings in serial form (Rosie Šnajdr), the visual codes of the modernist magazine (Andrew Thacker), and the relative materality or immateriality of T. S. Eliot's letters (Hugh Haughton) ended with a bravura jeremiad concerning the likely fate of literary studies in the age of the E-Reader (Robin Schulze). A concern with the transformative potential of digital media, for good and ill, was also at the heart of the most controversial session of the conference—a panel on 'The Future of the Library', in which David McKitterick and A.S.G. Edwards weighed the value of costly digitization projects against the more traditional work that rare books libraries do in cataloguing, conserving, and managing access to texts.

Another aim of the conference was to press into areas that might be thought liminal or extraneous to its project, and to test how far the notion of 'text' in particular might usefully be extended. Thus we heard papers on the history of cinematic representation (David Trotter, Ian Christie); on the relationship between music, material culture, and the written transcription of sound (Flora Dennis, Ardis Butterfield, Stefano Castelvecchi); and on the power of palm-leaves, photographs, buildings and cityscapes to unsettle our sense of colonial history (Sujit Sivasundaram, Andrew Jarvis, Su Lin Lewis). There were numerous correctives to the logocentrism implicit in 'textuality': papers on scientific illustration (Sachiko Kusukawa, Katharine Fletcher), graphic satire (Adam Morton), and the enigmatic 'Fylfot' commissioned by an early modern gentleman for his memorial in stained glass (Juliet Fleming). Several contributors explored relationships between writing and memory (Ruth Ahnert, Désha Amelia Osborne, Trudy Ko, Joanna Bellis), while Lucy Razzall examined the hidden filaments connecting early modern texts to relics.

Other speakers brought a density of critical attention to bear on words that writers chose to erase (Abigail Williams, Gavin Alexander), and on the development of new kinds of rupture between words (Henry Woudhuysen). Molly Murray reinvigorated formalist critical modes by replacing the well-wrought urn/stanza with a well-sealed prison-cell. A panel on editing displayed the kinds of sharp scholarly detective-work that might be demanded by a parliamentary speech (Richard Serjeantson), an official letter (Andrew Zurcher), and a medieval gloss (Paul Russell). The aim of many of these papers was to train our attention on the invisible; to render what had appeared to be transparent freshly and helpfully opaque.

The two days of the conference were each rounded off with plenary talks that were intellectual firework-displays of the highest order. On the first day, Leah Price gave us a foretaste of her impending counterblast against 'bookish liberalism'—that mythology which obliges us to think of all our reading experiences as transformative encounters with a book that we have chosen and which has chosen us. Price replaced the received image of the nineteenth-century as the 'age of the novel' with a more accurate account of it as the age of the religious tract, and paid detailed attention to past cultural anxieties about what your servants might be reading when they are supposed to be dusting your bookshelves; in the process, she set a new agenda for work in the history of the book. On the second day, Peter Stallybrass argued that 'the history of the book' was an entirely inadequate label for the study of hands and presses that were, most of the time, not producing books at all. Printers generated their profits not through books, but through jobbing work (forms, receipts, indulgences) which required completion by hand—an emblem of the way in which print as an institution created manuscript as a category. And a whole species of press-

products that look like books—including the early texts of Shakespeare's plays—were no such thing; rather, they were pamphlets, which because they were not made to be bound were not made to survive. Instead of the history of the book, then, we are left with the non-history of the non-book—in many ways a more vibrant object of enquiry.

One of the wonders of Stallybrass's talk was its ability to hold an audience entranced with images of tiny holes in the margins of printed pages. In general it was striking how many of our speakers made use of Powerpoint images—which might prompt some reflection on the role of modern image-processing technologies in allowing us to appreciate past technologies more fully. The materiality of the presentations was matched by the care given to material *sustenance* during the breaks—excellent food and drink, supplied by Origin8, for lunch; an array of delicious home-made cakes, Easter nests and edible letters to accompany coffee and tea; and wine receptions on both evenings, sponsored by the History of Material Texts Seminar. For these, and for much of the running of the show, we were indebted to the hard work of Ruth Ahnert, Jo Bellis, Sarah Cain, Lucy Razzall, Dan Wakelin, and Andrew Zurcher. Thanks are due to them, to our chairs, and to all the speakers for their trenchant contributions; and to the Faculty of English and AMARC for financial support.

Workshops

The main workshop planned during the past year, a **Symposium on Extra-Illustration** involving Luisa Cale (Birkbeck) and Lucy Peltz (National Portrait Gallery), scheduled for 21 May, unfortunately had to be postponed due to personal circumstances. We hope to reschedule this event in the coming academic year.

IV research grant applications

The Centre was involved in two grant applications, neither of which was successful, in its first year. These were:

(1) **Mellon Sawyer Seminar: Communication, Technology and the Word** (call sent out mid-November 2009)

The Mellon Foundation's Sawyer Seminars program was established in 1994 to provide support for comparative research on historical and contemporary topics of major scholarly significance. The aim of the program is to engage imaginative and productive scholars in multi-disciplinary and comparative inquiry that would (in ordinary university circumstances) be difficult to pursue, while at the same time avoiding the institutionalization of this work in new centres, departments or programs. Further information is available at http://www.mellon.org (search for Sawyer Seminar).

This application was for a cross-disciplinary, cross-period (ancient to modern) faculty/postgraduate seminar placing the current communications revolution in historical perspective. The seminar consisted of a series of themed workshops (entitled 'Fantasy and Fear', 'Cultural Amalgams', 'People and Skills', 'Who Pays?', and 'Power and Authority') involving invited experts from Europe and North

America, concluded by a conference. The bid included funding for 2 postgraduates and 1 research fellow, each for one year. As well as the CMT, parties to the project included the Media, Culture and New Technologies Group and the Cambridge Victorian Studies Group; academics from History, Sociology, Classics and English assisted in developing the bid. The proposal was initiated and put together by Dr Phil Withington in the Faculty of History, and submitted in January 2010. Any enquiries about this application should be sent to him at <pjw1003@cam.ac.uk>

(2) **AHRC Digital Equipment and Database Call** (Deadline 5 November 2009)

This call was specifically directed to projects which had been successful in the AHRC's earlier Resource Enhancement competitions, among which was the English Faculty's 'Scriptorium' project. It had two strands (quoting here from the text of the call):

"1. Enhanced access to Digital Technologies for innovative research in the arts and humanities. This part of the call is concerned with ensuring that the UK's world leading arts and humanities research base has continued and enhanced access to the latest digital technologies through supporting the purchase and associated implementation costs of leading edge digital equipment, resources or facilities.

2. Sustainability, Innovation and Enhanced Impact of AHRC–funded Digital Outputs, Databases and Resources. This part of the call is concerned with the development of AHRB/C funded digital research outputs to ensure that they remain at the cutting edge of technological developments, are compatible with requirements for long-term sustainability and/or to enhance the accessibility of these resources to a wider range of audiences and broaden their usage and impact."

Our application was targeted at (1), though it would have had an impact on the way in which users interacted with 'Scriptorium', and in the medium term would have made it a far more powerful resource.

The proposal was to develop an open-source software tool for the viewing, manipulation and analysis of images from rare books and manuscripts. The software would have offered students and scholars an electronic workspace in which to handle, annotate and store copies of digital research materials. As a freely-available plug-in, the image handler would have been available for customization by other websites, and so would have prevented projects from having to 'reinvent the wheel' in their viewing interfaces. The software could also be expanded to incorporate future developments (e.g. digital collation facilities).

An innovative feature of the image handler was the proposal to harvest data from users' image-handler sessions. This data would (with the user's permission) have been preserved in a central database and would be made available to subsequent users. Copies of the images (degraded or watermarked so as to negate copyright issues) would be linked to data supplied by users, libraries and archives; related images would be linked to one another. The aim was to create an integrated

research environment for scholars working with digital images, which would federate research data for the benefit of the broader academic community. The harvesting facility of the software would be a core component, ensuring that it continued to function as the code mutated in response to the needs of particular projects and institutions.

The project would have required two IT developers working for 6 months each, and a Research Associate working for 12 months. The full economic cost of the project would have been around £190,000.

The project was developed by Andrew Zurcher, with some assistance from Jason Scott-Warren, and in consultation with CARET and DSpace. Any enquiries about it should be addressed to Andrew at aez20@cam.ac.uk.

In addition to these submissions, Andrew Zurcher was centrally involved in putting together a substantial AHRC bid related to the Thomas Browne edition, of which Claire Preston is General Editor.

V   the future

A great deal has been achieved in this busy first year of the Centre's existence. The completion of an attractive and multi-purpose website; the staging of a substantial inaugural conference; the launch of a dedicated seminar series—all have been great successes which we hope the wider Faculty can join us in celebrating. The future development of the CMT will to a certain extent be unpredictable and adventitious, dependent on particular meetings of minds and the seizing of opportunities as they arise. Nonetheless, insofar as it is possible to define immediate goals, they are as follows:

(1) to continue to widen the reach of the Centre. It is important that we get as wide a representation of Faculty members as possible, and that the Centre does not become dominated by the interests of a particular period or subject grouping. We also need to draw in more graduates and academics from the wider university. The likelihood is that the Centre will draw a large part of its intellectual electricity from its interdisciplinarity.

(2) to integrate the CMT into graduate training by offering a series of bespoke workshops to graduate students grappling with bibliographical, editorial, critical or theoretical issues within the Centre's purview. Professor McKitterick, the Wren librarian, has offered to trial these in the coming year. In the medium term, we would like to survey the training in book history offered across a range of disciplines, with a view to integrating teaching materials and pooling expertise in this area.

(3) to strengthen links between the Centre and the Cambridge library community. This will require more regular communications between the CMT and the Cambridge Libraries Forum. In the medium term, we would like the CMT

website to offer an online guide to local collections, including up-to-date contacts and access information, along with finding aids, detailed descriptions of important collections and even individual items, and associated bibliographies.

(4) to run a major international conference every 2-3 years, and to continue to host regular series (often linked series) of workshops, over and above the regular provision of HMT seminars.

(5) to support several major (>£100K) research funding applications each year, and to continue to support the applications of its members to funding bodies for graduate studentships, research-leave funding, etc. We will liaise with Faculty and Departmental Research Officers to step up the level of grant applications, with the aim of having two to three funded PhD studentships in place within the next three years.

(6) to compile a costed list of desiderata, including perhaps: a postdoctoral student who would offer some cross-departmental book history/bibliographic training within the university whilst also pursuing their own research; two to three PhD studentships; funding for a research seminar bringing major players from overseas; money for 'pump-priming' (provision of administrative support, online/physical space and seedcorn funding for research applications in their early stages), etc. The Centre has already been approached by CUDO re a potential £50K donation but has so far been unsuccessful in obtaining this funding because of a perceived lack of clarity about what money would be spent on and what the academic impact of the donation would be.

(7) to acquire dedicated office space and administrative time for the transaction of Centre business. The CMT office would collate and circulate information about current events and funding opportunities in regular newsletters; would update the website and solicit content from across the University; and would store and make available past funding bids for the benefit of those engaged in putting together new bids of their own. It would also provide a space for a collection of donated books in the field which could be borrowed by members.