

Material Cultures 2010 Conference Proposal
Dr. Mark Curran, Research Fellow, University of Leeds

The Business of the Société Typographique de Neuchâtel, 1769-1794.

For the past 3 years, the AHRC funded 'French Book trade in Enlightenment Europe' project, based at the University of Leeds and led by Prof. Simon Burrows, has been cataloguing the sales and purchases of the Société Typographique de Neuchâtel (STN) between its foundation in 1769 and demise in 1794. Through the resulting database, it is possible for the first time to reconstruct almost the entirety of the STN's book-selling business. The STN traded in over 4,000 different editions, selling roughly 450,000 units during the period to over 200 destinations spanning the European continent (from Moscow to Lisbon, London to Rome). Our database traces, where possible, the source and destination of these works, the routes by which they were sent or received, the precise editions traded in along with their complete bibliographical details, the STN's stockholdings across time and even the numbers stamped on the boxes that books were shipped in. As such, it gives us an unprecedented view of both the day-by-day functioning of a late-eighteenth century publishing house, and the French-language book trade across Europe on the eve of the French revolution. Once complete, it will be freely available to all scholars, and at this conference I intend to demonstrate the resource and present some of the preliminary findings of the project. In honour of the presence of Roger Chartier at the conference, I will discuss how the database can be used to analyse one of the key questions that has haunted cultural historians for the past half century: what did Frenchmen read before the French Revolution?