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New Evidence at Hand:
Mapping 19th Century London Trade Bindery
Production Practices and Business Relationships

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Archives of 19th century London trade binders are scant, if not non-existent. Records that survive do not address bindery production practices or a binder's business relationships. Therefore, one must look elsewhere for this information. A prime source is the books themselves. A recent discovery in a collection of bindings may uncover the shop practices of the London trade binder James Burn & Co. These books also reveal Burn's business relationships with publishers and printers. Together, they reconstruct part of this binder's world.

The trade binder's ticket is the starting point of this paper. It is usually glued onto the front or back pastedowns of many 19th c. publishers' bindings. The ticket is a small inconspicuous piece of paper, normally rectangular and printed in two colors, advertising the binder as the maker of the book. In addition to naming the binder and his occupation, it may list also a street address and a city. The binder's ticket is much like a business card in miniature. Burn used a succession of tickets (as well as other identifying marks) for more than fifty years, from the 1830s-1880s.

The collection of trade bindings examined for this paper contains more than four hundred books ticketed at the Burn bindery. A discovery during the examination revealed that these books contain a series of recurring pencil marks, ostensibly put there by Burn's bindery production workers who gathered, sewed, and forwarded them. These marks appear to identify piecework by individual workers (so that they could be paid), indicate that a particular process had been completed (such as the insertion of plates), and serve as a quality control apparatus (to identify the worker completing a process, especially when done incorrectly or carelessly).

Other information in these ticketed bindings allows one to map out Burn's business relationships with publishers and printers. This mapping may determine when Burn contracted directly with a publisher (as it did with Macmillan & Co.) or with a printer (who contracted directly with a publisher and then subcontracted binding work to Burn).

Finally, this paper shows that it is also possible to reconstruct production practices and to map the business relationships of other major 19th c. London trade binders by closely examining the books they manufactured and ticketed. These binders included Bone & Son, Leighton, Son and Hodge, Remnant and Edmonds, Edmonds and Remnants; and Westleys & Co.