

## The Fruits of Electronic Resources for Book History: An 18<sup>th</sup>-Century Case Study

The past decade has witnessed the increasing availability of searchable, full-text databases such as Gale/Cengage's Eighteenth-Century Collections Online and its 17th and 18th Century Burney Collection Newspapers (Burney) as well as the growing use of Google Books Search (GBS) and similar electronic archives. While the value of these tools, despite their flaws, has been widely acknowledged, their full potential is still being discovered. Drawn from my work on the late 18<sup>th</sup>-century bookselling-publishing firm of Harrison and Co. and my involvement in efforts to improve electronic research tools, this paper will focus on the Burney Collection and, to a lesser degree, GBS, not as text delivery systems but as "discovery aids." As it discusses specific search strategies, this talk will argue that the value of these resources extends beyond accessibility and quickness of obtaining results. Rather the search capabilities of these databases foster our abilities to uncover connections that would almost certainly go unnoticed in manual searches.

To anchor this discussion, I will use Harrison and Co. as a case study. Because of the paucity of extant records for the Harrison firm, both Burney and GBS have enabled me to recover information that otherwise might not have been possible. Not only has Burney afforded a rich archive from which to reconstruct the firm's marketing history within a broader context of promotional trends in the late-eighteenth-century textual and cultural marketplace, but it, along with GBS, has also led to discoveries of its proprietor's identity, business and personal relationships that influenced his enterprise, trial commentaries, trade sales of copyrights and copper-plates, details of his schooling, information about the consumption of his print products, and more.

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### **Brief Biography:**

Eleanor Shevlin is an associate professor of English at West Chester University. A co-editor of *Agent of Change: Print Culture Studies after Elizabeth L. Eisenstein* (with Sabrina Baron and Eric Lindquist, University of MA Press, 2007), she is the editor of volume 3 (1700-1800), *History of the Book in the West* (Alexis Weedon, series editor; Ashgate, forthcoming). Her articles on print culture have been published in journals such as *Book History*. More recent pieces include "The Warwick Lane Network and the Refashioning of 'Atalantis' as a Titular Keyword" in *Producing the Eighteenth-Century Book: Writers and Publishers in England, 1650–1800* (Laura Runge and Pat Rogers, eds.; University of Delaware, 2009), "The Center for the Book and the History of the Book," *Libraries & the Cultural Record* (with Eric N. Lindquist, forthcoming, Jan. 2010). "Right Notions of Art for the Multitude': Book Illustration and the Legacy of Harrison's *Novelist's Magazine*" in *Book Illustration in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Christina Ionescu, ed.; Cambridge Scholars, forthcoming 2010). She is also co-author of the blog, Early Modern Online Bibliography (<http://earlymodernonlinebib.wordpress.com/>).

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