

## English Trade Cards -- *Elevator Pitch*

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Newberry Library Case Wing ZC 27 .T763, cataloged under the title *English Trade Cards*, is a single volume of 217 English trade cards for merchants and manufacturers primarily in London between approximately 1780-1810.

The cards are essentially business advertisements for jewelers, upholsterers, engravers, milliners, candlemakers, bakers, distillers, and for products like soap, guns, fur, and candy.

Trade cards began to appear in the early 18th century, often with illustrations of shop signs to help customers find the store. This was also a time when the idea of shopping as a leisurely activity became rooted and reinforced in the public imagination. As numbered addresses became standardized, trade cards focused more on functioning as a portable, elaborate, and privately distributed paper object, intended for the elite customer's possession and use. A trade card was a graphic advertisement with shop logistics, services offered, and through elegant print choices, promoted the idea of a consumer lifestyle. They served as a memento and map of a customer's personal interaction with a merchant, and could be either disposable or collectible.

These 217 cards are primarily letterpress or engraved, with a few handwritten scraps or newspaper clippings. Annotations in what appear to be the same hand run throughout the book, evaluating businesses and goods with phrases like, "A very civil man," "for turning tools," and "better than shops of this sort"; therefore, the annotations form a trail of commercial preference and tableau of commercial self.

Some of the peculiarities of this book are:

- The book's brown paper, which can most easily be compared to contemporary construction paper
- The innovative and unusual homemade binding
- The handwritten alphabetical subject index at the beginning of the book
- The meticulous arrangement and adhesion of the trade cards throughout the book
- The updated annotations (as evidenced by strikethroughs of businesses as they closed)
- The unknown author
  - Was this a man or woman? Was a servant instructed to assemble this?
  - Who created this book, and what was their intention? What understandings of textuality were they informed by?
  - Was this used as a functional object? Much of collecting at the time was performative, a curation of self, but this object seems more utilitarian...

Ultimately, this book is an exciting opportunity to consider the intentions and receptions of ephemeral print at a time when its commercial potential was just being uncovered, along with the idea of a DIY archive or generation of one's own data.

For this project, I am especially excited to consider what data the book has to offer and how it might be digitally represented. It makes the most immediate sense for me to begin with a map as a way to view the spatial

representation of the trade cards' circulation throughout the consumptive community, in the hope that by reconstructing the data digitally will shake loose further insight into the *who* and *why* of this book object.

I'm interested in the ways in which this book is already a map, a landscape with trails of annotation and curation informed by values of social knowledge, and in how a geospatial map might augment our understanding and appreciation of the book; so thinking about this as a digital companion, a speculative edition, a book of its own.

I'll most likely use either Leaflet or QGIS to generate the map, but first I'm generating a comprehensive spreadsheet with metadata for each trade card; I'm hoping that this tedious process might lend further insight into what functionality for the map might be desirable. I'd like for the map to show the location of each trade card's shop, with images and metadata about the associated card; and am eager to further consider ways of visualizing this metadata, perhaps alongside current or other historical maps.

Ultimately, through creating this digital companion as a mapped archive, I hope to continue researching and writing about the temporality of the cards and the book itself, the historical and contemporary challenges of handling fragments of media excess, and how textual and informational details might further reveal the intention, function, and journey of this textual object, considering this book as a microcosm that rapidly bleeds into a macrocosm that might allow us to enter larger conversations about the sociohistorical context of print and consumer culture.