

HOW NOT TO PRESENT A BOOK

We are still very busy entering books onto the database which runs the website. You probably can't see it, but since christmas we have entered rather more than 1,500 new items. For all those that think that this is easy, just stop and think for a moment, yes, sure it is all done by computer, but every detail has to be entered onto the computer: title, author, date of publication, number of pages, number of plates, page size. This is followed by a brief description of the contents, unless they are obvious from the title. This is all followed by the condition of the book. We never used to bother about this unless there was something wrong with the book – but it transpired that people wanted to know that the book was alright. So we now tell whether the book is new, or secondhand, and whether it is nice and clean, or otherwise.

However, the main amount of time is spent finding the main details about the book. You would think that this is easy, but amazingly, it isn't. Even in this wonderful age of communication, people still fail to understand that the book is the way of communicating their thoughts and information to others. More importantly, it is necessary for the publisher and the author to know that the easier that information is to access, the more likely the book is to sell. It is also necessary to know that this is the age of the computer, and that computers do not store information in the way that our minds do.

Consider the following :

1. How do you find your way round a book ?

I don't know how you do it, but most people use page numbers, and certainly, if you are trying to tell someone else where to find something in a book, then quoting a page number is the easiest way to do it.

How do find your way around a book that has no page numbers ? It is like using a map, with no scale and no names of towns for an area you do not know. And yes, there are some numismatic books without page numbers !

Why do we use numbers ? We use them because they have several interesting and useful characteristics, the most important of which is that numbers are unique and sequential. Where do numbers start ? If we are considering whole integers, then they start with unity, i.e., 1.

What sort of numbers do you use ? That may sound like a daft question, so I suppose that I ought to have asked what sort of number system you use. Many people do not know that they are using a system that uses base 10. However, this is so, for most things we use base 10. We used to use a crazy system in pre decimal days, when we used pounds, shillings and pence, which used multiple bases, and we still do so for linear measure, though children in Britain, and most people, in civilised nations, anyway, use metric measure. I am one of that group of people who handle either system equally well.

However, some folk, for some reason best known to themselves, still like to use roman numerals; please don't. Why not ? Firstly, they confuse a lot of people and although our base 10 system numbers can be made compatible with computers, providing you put a zero, or two, in front of the first 9 integers, with roman numerals, however, there are several ways of writing them, do you use IV, or IIII, IX, or VIIII ? They cannot, without a great deal of trouble, be made computer compatible.

Why confuse people ? If you start with page 1 in the book and continue, it is even easier to spot if there is a page missing, and for someone who is thinking about what a book is like to imagine exactly how big it is. Yesterday, for example, whilst looking at a victorian

book about coins I discovered that there were five groups of differently numbered pages in one book ! An introduction numbered in roman numerals. A main section using arabic numerals, a set of plates numbered with roman numerals, an index numbered (not sequentially with the main text) in arabic numerals, and a goodly section of adverts inserted by the publisher, many of them more interesting than the text, which were not numbered !

So, if you are writing, publishing, or designing a book, please number ALL of your pages, and to make things nice an' easy for everyone do not use more than one system in a book. Writing is all about communication and the reason you write is to communicate to others, not to confuse them, so the simpler you can keep things the better.

If you don't believe me take a look at *Istanbul Arkeoloji Muzeleri Teshirdeki Islami Sikkeler Katalogu*. Just in case you don't have a copy of volume 1 of this slightly esoteric work on your shelves, I'll tell you how the plates are numbered:

1 – 48, i.e., I to XLVIII, they are fine, then we have :XLIX, LI, LII, LIII, LIV (now take your shoes off) XL (sic) , LVI, LVII, LVIII... I rest my case. Yes, sure, I coped, but in the end I was not sure that I wanted to bother !

Table of contents, or index ? It is good to have both. Where do you put them ? Logically, a table of contents goes at the front of the book, so that you can see what you are about to get, and the index (*index rerum*), goes at the back. Don't labour the table of content, you don't want to anticipate the book too much, or repeat the index, simple details are sufficient. Why have an index ? So that the reader can go back to a point if they want to, and are able to find it quickly and easily. Besides, you will find a lot of errors whilst you are compiling an index !

Now some points for designers.

People handle books. Not even *your* hands are clean all the time. If you give your book a cream or white cover, it is like a virgin bride on her wedding day, pristine and shining brightly. However, unless the cover is made of a washable plastic, it can begin to look grubby after a very short while.

How do you find a book if it is standing up on a shelf with others alongside it ? The answer is the title on the spine. So please make sure that the spine is titled ! How can you make your book stand out at a distance, so that people can find it immediately ? Use contrasting colours. Gold on practically any colour works well, so does white on black, or even better, but perhaps a bit garish, is black on yellow. Should it be shiny, or matte ? One colour, or many ? A point to bear in mind as far as future saleability is concerned, inks on a dust jacket can react with those on the next cover if they are crammed together, one against the other. Almost half of the instances of us describing a book as "shop-soiled" are because of this ! Make the lettering large and the title short and snappy. Just consider, for example: ***Annals of the Coinage of Great Britain and its Dependencies from the Earliest Period of Authentic History to the Reign of Victoria.***

And once they get started they can't stop ! 3rd edition: *corrected, enlarged and continued to the reign of her present Majesty: to which is added, an entirely new index of every coin engraved, and where referred to throughout the work.*

Faced with all that the average reader might be put off this wonderful book, which ought to be on the shelves of every collector of British coins.

Consider, for example, the ***Bulletin de la Societe Nationale Des Antiquaires de France*** - I was looking at some volumes of this and to separate a load of volumes one from another I wanted to find the things in them that I could list as being interesting, but couldn't. So, come on you guys; how about a table of contents at the beginning of the Bulletin? Much more important than a listing of your officers, which could easily be printed on the rear cover!

Every now and then one comes across something good, and then when you get another one, you want to either share it, or sell a copy to customers. For example: Arent Pol's 'De verspreidingsgebieden van in Nederland geslagen Merovingische gouden munten der 7e eeuw.' Now this otherwise esoteric article tells that four of these coins were found in England. Where can it be found? Answer - ***Westerheem*** AWN XXVII-3-1978. For those who, like me, had not previously heard of it, *Westerheem* is the organ of the Archeologische Werkgemeenschap voor Nederland (AWN). Now, ***Westerheem*** Yes, I can cope with that, AWN, yes, I can manage a modicum of acronyms, but the rest I find is overload. What does XXVII-3-1978 mean? Frankly, I don't know, and I don't care, and perhaps, after a little thought, I have forgotten all about *Westerheem*, when what you want me to do is to remember it, so that I can have the joy of consulting it. But why give me three things to remember, when my poor overloaded brain can only cope with one or two? Issue number 196, or whatever would have been sufficient - and no scope for confusion. So, make life nice and easy, not only for those who come in contact with a stray copy of your journal, but for your own members - and this goes for all the other learned societies throughout the western world. The secret is that you number your organ. Remember those lovely things, numbers and their interesting properties of being sequential and unique. You begin with number 1, the next one is 2 and so on. Please, not fancy roman numerals (computers can't cope with those) and they become longer and more confusing the larger they get, use proper numbers.

Now, I have probably offended someone, but let's look at it in another way, this applies to piano concerti too. I am not a trained musician, so such and such in e flat major, doesn't mean a thing to me, nor to a fellow musician in China, or even France and Germany, I suspect. But, I can easily remember that for Mozart that I especially like concertos numbers 7, 18, 20, 22 and 23. But if someone says that they like the one in E flat, is that number 9 or number 14? Or the one in C, is that no. 21, or no. 13?

Another thing, where is *Westerheem* published? I can find out all sorts of things from the edition I am looking at: the names of no fewer than twelve editors, the amount of the annual subscription and where to send it, the date and time of the excursion planned for Saturday 11th November, and where I can find details of exhibitions in national and provincial museums, but nowhere can I find the place of publication of the Journal.

There also seems to be a problem with many exhibition catalogues, particularly continental ones, which often seem to have no name for the person *really* responsible for the text, or the exhibition, though there are plenty of other names: the minister of culture, local mayor, director of Arts for the region, Old Uncle Tom Cobley and all sorts of other political plonkers, who probably couldn't organise an exhibition, much less write a meaningful text to do with say Celtic coins, but merely wanted to get their name(s) into the limelight!

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