

REPORT

Casebooks Launch Workshop, 12-13 March 2015, Weston Library, Oxford

Participants

Members of the Casebooks Project; our Advisory Board; Silke Ackermann, Leah Astbury, Jonathan Barry, Elma Brenner, Felicity Callard, Lauren Couch, Richard Dunn, Gavin Francis, John Gallagher, Laura Gowing, Mark Jenner, Stephen Johnston, Eric Ketelaar, Philip Kreager, Elaine Leong, Angela McShane, Carla Nappi, Margaret Pelling, Andrew Prescott, Jennifer Richards, Graeme William Toby, John Harley Warner, Mike Webb, Olivia Weisser

The Workshop

The project team introduced the project. Lauren Kassell underlined that a major question for innovative, expensive projects like this one is 'Is it research?' If it is research, is it scholarly editing dressed up as something new? Does it help us to ask new questions, or provide new answers to old questions?

Four sessions, led by participants, centred on:

1. Records—does the project do justice to the nature of these records?
2. Topics of consultation—do the project's topics work?
3. People—who are they and what to do with them?
4. Audiences—advantages and constraints of a digital edition?

The Advisory Board summed up challenges for the project in a brief, final session.

Recommendations

Discussions were wide-ranging and fruitful, and there seemed to be a consensus around the following recommendations.

1. Maintain a sense of the materiality and unfamiliarity of the records, while embracing new media, methods and questions.
2. Our edition/data should be our priority. Search facilities and the website will follow, but should not dictate the content of the durable output.
3. Do more work to include the astrological chart, judgment and treatment in the edition. This includes more interpretative work on the astrology.
4. Review our topics, people and other coded content to ensure that it fully represents the richness of the records and the ritualised processes that created them.
5. Enhance our search facilities, e.g. free text search with intelligent prompts.
6. Make the site less channelled and rigid; encourage users to play.

What next?

The project team will think through these recommendations holistically in the coming months. A starting point will be a (playful) thought experiment:

What would this project look like if we had had images of the manuscripts from the outset? How would it be different if the Wellcome Trust funded the history of astrology instead of the history of medicine?

The recommendations from the workshop will be developed and refined through further engagement, structured and unstructured. We encourage ongoing communications from the participants of the workshop, and hope to reassemble in autumn 2016.

Lauren Kassell (20 March 2015)