

Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC

Graphic Arts Collection

Stan Nelson : 9 Aug 2002

Mr Nelson's comments were a discussion on the value to future generations of conserving our industrial heritage. Salient points are extracted here.

He also stated clearly that there are no museums known to him with collections of artefacts like standing jobs and engravings showing the body of work in progress, nor of a realistic number of linecasting machines to simulate a major composing room.

"We all know that this is a time of transition, a time of re-examination. It is also a time for decisions which will have a permanent impact on the historical record we leave for future generations.

"Complicating matters is the general trend towards questioning the value of industrial history. For many in the printing profession, the past is dead.....Also, much of the material simply isn't "sexy". Mr Nelson contrasts the market value of a famous painting against that of a room of heritage equipment.

"Rather than sound too gloomy, I do think that there is some 'light at the end of the tunnel'. These decades of change are showing the promise of discovery by a new generation of students, artists and designers who find **letterpress printing worthy of their interest**. And growing numbers of social historians see a need to document industrial history.

"More and more, museums are becoming the only place where these machines and processes are taught.

"But you cannot judge the value or relevance of a collection by how many people show up at the door, demanding to work with it.

"In many cases, the importance of a group of objects will not be obvious for some time.

"......these decisions must be made very carefully, with full awareness of their permanence. It is hoped that the baby will not be thrown out with the bath water!"