

## BOOK REVIEWS

### **A BOOK OF BOOKSELLERS, conversations with the Antiquarian Book Trade Sheila Markham, Privately Printed 2004 (Edition of 500 copies) £25**

For anyone who has however remotely paused to consider life on the other side of the counter of a dealer in old books, this collection of interviews will be compelling. It provides a risk-free look at the psychology and motivation of a distinctly diverse batch of individuals most, however they started out or developed, seemed to find themselves alone, which will itself strike a cord with binders.

Sheila Markham has appreciable experience of the trade and this is clear from the progress of the conversations and the sympathetic understanding shown for her subjects. Having written a column in the *Bookdealer* for a number of years she was invited to contribute profiles of some of the people who achieved recognition within the trade. Here is her selection of them. It runs chronologically from 1991 to 2003, a period of quite outstanding change. This arrangement, and the individual addenda, open a window on the change in the prevailing trade pre occupations. Concern voiced over the printed catalogue gives way to issues of the internet, and the book-fair to that of the global market. This will be seen in time to have been a pivotal period and one in which the trade has been 'deregulated' by technology so that anyone with a book to sell, a computer and an internet connection can be a trader, with all its ominous consequences.

Familiar names, Rota, Traylen, Rosenthal and Waterfield among them appear, while the majority are those who, while not perhaps having scaled the highest heights, have found a place and have developed expertise of inestimable value. It is important in reading this book not to forget the countless individuals, who for one reason or another have been lost to the trade.

Sheila Markham is a skilled writer whose prose is highly readable. She has put together stories of struggles against seemingly overwhelming odds that are intensely human and pierced with touches of humour. I particularly like the subject who suffered the stricture that "*Sellotape is an aid to packing and not a packing material in itself*". As a former bookseller's assistant and, much later and briefly, a book packer I can identify with much that is written. Here is a book to savour and one that will surely establish itself as a significant reference in the ongoing study of the trade.

*Alan Isaac*