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Volume 4, Number 1, Fall 2012

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1013329ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1013329ar>

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Publisher(s)

Groupe de recherches et d'études sur le livre au Québec

ISSN

1920-602X (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Rukavina, A. (2012). “we can all meet, be it soon or late”: E. A. Petherick and his scholarly and publishing social network. *Mémoires du livre / Studies in Book Culture*, 4(1). <https://doi.org/10.7202/1013329ar>

Article abstract

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“WE CAN ALL MEET, BE IT SOON OR LATE”: E. A. Petherick and his scholarly and publishing social network¹

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ABSTRACT

Between 1870 and 1895, Australian bookseller Edward Petherick was an active member of the Royal Geographical Society, Hakluyt Society, and other groups interested in colonial trade and history, as well as increasingly an important figure in the developing international book trade. His surviving correspondence is the physical remnants of his social network and the many connections and exchanges he facilitated, including the sale and distribution of the explorer Richard F. Burton’s *Arabian Nights* in the colonies. Petherick considered it a privilege to engage with his correspondents and help individuals because knowledge did not flow in one direction in a social network. As Petherick assisted others who wanted to sell books overseas and learn about the colonies, he also benefited and gained knowledge that furthered his own interests and scholarly work.

RÉSUMÉ

Entre 1870 et 1895, le libraire australien Edward Augustus Petherick, membre actif de la Société royale de géographie, de la Société Hakluyt et d’autres groupes intéressés par l’histoire et le commerce dans les colonies, joue un rôle important dans l’essor du marché international du livre. Sa correspondance témoigne aujourd’hui d’un réseau de relations qu’il a su exploiter à bon escient, se posant souvent comme intermédiaire, notamment pour la vente et la distribution des *Mille et une nuits* de Richard F. Burton dans les colonies. Petherick privilégiait les échanges avec ses correspondants : en aidant les autres à vendre des livres à l’étranger ou à en apprendre davantage sur les colonies, il enrichissait ses propres connaissances et faisait ainsi avancer ses recherches.

On 2 November 1884, the explorer Richard F. Burton wrote to Australian bookseller Edward Petherick thanking him for his help and noting he had “entered [Petherick’s] ... name and address for one copy.”² The copy in question was the multi-volume *The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night*, otherwise known as the *Arabian Nights*, which Burton would publish between 1885 and 1886. A few letters have survived in the Petherick Collection, held at the National Library of Australia, that indicate Petherick was not only a subscriber of Burton’s *Arabian Nights* but also someone who helped the then British consul at Trieste advertise and sell the forthcoming work in the colonies.

Between 1870 and 1887, Petherick was the manager of Melbourne publisher and bookseller George Robertson’s London office.³ Robertson started his bookselling and distribution business in Melbourne in 1852 and in 1857 opened a London branch. Between 1857 and 1870, his office manager was his brother William Robertson who lobbied British publishers about increasing the number of books being sent to the colonies and made arrangements to work with firms to produce editions of popular works for the colonial market. Prior to the London office opening, Australian booksellers had been at the mercy of the British publishers who at best sent irregular shipments of books and remainders to the colonies. Starting in 1857, Robertson’s London office established the regular shipment of books, though William Robertson’s questionable managerial skills left the London office chronically short of funds. In 1870, George Robertson decided to send a young Australian, Edward Petherick, who had worked in his Melbourne office cataloguing books and showed great promise, to work with William Robertson to get the London office back on track. William Robertson resented Petherick, and after a couple of months butting heads with his brother’s young protégé, he quit, leaving Petherick to take his place as manager.

During his tenure between 1870 and 1887, Petherick helped George Robertson’s London business to grow exponentially.⁴ Petherick encouraged his employer to develop closer ties to British and American publishers in order to develop inexpensive colonial editions of popular books: “By special arrangement with the leading publishers in London, Mr. Robertson acquires the right to issue special editions of popular works for which the demand is large, for Australian circulation exclusively.”⁵ Petherick also developed faster

and more reliable distribution channels between Britain and Australia, including using the Suez Canal to ship books between Britain and the colonies and developing an even quicker transpacific route between Europe and Australia.⁶ Moreover, Petherick was an early adopter of new transportation and communication technologies that expedited the exportation of English-language books from Britain, Europe, and North America to the Australian colonies. Starting in 1872, he regularly made use of the then newly laid overseas telegraph to send book orders to Melbourne and other colonial branches of Robertson's flourishing business.⁷ While cables were expensive, Petherick told his father the cost was offset by the firm's growing profits. He later wrote in his unpublished memoir that the London office, during his tenure as manager, averaged "six tons" of shipments everyday.⁸ While Petherick may have exaggerated the amount and frequency of shipments, he was successful and others in the trade eagerly sought his advice regarding the selling and distributing of their publications in the colonies and overseas.

One particular firm that Petherick worked closely with was Richard Bentley and Son. While Robertson had worked with the British publisher prior to 1870, during Petherick's tenure, he forged closer ties between the Australian and British firms, which would culminate in the production of a joint colonial library series in 1887. In 1873, Petherick successfully negotiated with George Bentley for the publisher to produce a cheap colonial issue of Mrs. Henry Wood's novels for sale throughout Robertson's Australian bookshops. The success of the Wood's deal would lead to the two firms producing a number of colonial editions of Bentley's popular books, as well as a growing friendship between Petherick and George Bentley who at the time was in charge of his father's overseas business.

As Petherick worked to develop Robertson's business, he also pursued bibliographical and scholarly interests, joining learned societies such as "the Hakluyt, Linnean, and Royal Geographical Societies... [as well as] the Royal Colonial Institute."⁹ George Bentley was already a member of the Royal Geographical Society when Petherick joined in 1879. In becoming a fellow of the Royal Geographical Society and other scholarly organizations, Petherick was furthering his professional ambitions as he was able to associate with colleagues like Bentley as well as meet scholars like Burton who were interested in finding publishers for their works and gaining access

to colonial markets. The societies also provided the self-taught bibliographer, who had been born in Somerset in 1847 and had immigrated with his family to Melbourne in 1853, with a sense of community. In 1870, Petherick would remark in a letter to his siblings shortly after arriving in “the great city London—where the millions of people live” how far he was from his family and friends.¹⁰ He described London as “several hundred times as large as Melbourne,” and the letter left the impression he was homesick and found London overwhelming. The learned societies provided him with a social network to which he could belong and in which he would thrive. Petherick was interested in colonial exploration and geography, as well as collected books on or published in Australasia and Polynesia; within 15 years of arriving in “the great city,” he would write two important colonial bibliographies and numerous articles on the growth of the colonial book trade and the people of New Guinea. Petherick’s scholarly output raised his profile in the societies, and by the mid-1880s, his opinion was regularly requested on the colonial book trade and the history and geography of the South Pacific region. Fellow society members regarded him as an erudite and convivial man who was happy to share his knowledge with friends and colleagues alike.

By 1882, George Bentley, the then managing partner at Bentley, wrote to his friend who he imagined “surrounded by walls of books,” asking for information regarding certain imprints.¹¹ In the letter, Bentley suggested his excuse for contacting his friend was “that you have so much information at command of memory, and as already said probably a hoard of books within grasp of hand.” A bibliophile, Petherick often received letters from colleagues and friends like Bentley asking for information that his correspondents believed either he would be able to find in his library or he would know who to ask. Petherick was a member of a London-based community of businessmen and scholars interested in colonial trade, history, and geography. By 1883, Petherick was actively participating in debates held at the Royal Colonial Institute regarding “emigration and trade, railways, and New Guinea.”¹² His surviving correspondence is the physical remnants of this social network, and his letters testify to the fact that many correspondents sought his advice because he was a recognized repository of colonial knowledge.

Petherick belonged to a social network, which refers to a conceptual model that was initially developed as a way to study book history, particularly international book distribution, and as an attempt to capture the complicated interactions and movements inherent to the trade. The social network model builds on the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari and is a rhizomorphic space in which agents like Petherick interacted and communicated with other agents: “Deleuze and Guattari ... define rhizome as an organic and decentred network in which agents continually engage and reengage ... [The model] allows for the complexity of interactions between agents to play out without proscribing the nature of interactions between agents and predetermining the direction of a book’s movement.”¹³ The defining principle of a social network is connection: “the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, ‘and ... and ... and ...’.”¹⁴ The network is comprised of the connections agents like Petherick made with one another, and by the mid-1880s, as his influence in the book trade and academic circles grew, he would become a nexus, a means of connection, in the network for Bentley, Burton, and others. This model does not presume there is one social network but that an agent like Petherick was probably involved in many different social networks during his lifetime. The focus of this paper is to explore his intellectual and business social network(s) that enabled the Australian bookman to circulate among the intellectual elite in London and put him in a position to befriend and help Richard F. Burton sell the *Arabian Nights* overseas. Petherick’s correspondence, between 1870 and 1895, illustrates how he helped his correspondents overcome knowledge deficits and how many of these individuals returned the favour.

In a letter to his father, Petherick wrote about the world as a series of connected “ante-rooms ... In that we can all meet, be it soon or late.”¹⁵ This description that he used to explain to his father why the distance between Melbourne and London was not such a great impediment to him communicating with his family also captures the essence of the social network in which he circulated. As long as mail could be sent and received, he was never that distant from anyone, and if he could communicate with others, by post or in person, he could improve his position in the network. During his time in London, Petherick seized the opportunity to network and try and improve his position within both the book trade and scholarly communities. Connection and communication were the keys to his success, and Petherick was in communication with hundreds of correspondents like

Alphonse Pinart. A French explorer and ethnographer, Pinart wrote to Petherick in February 1885 asking him if it was true that he had rare books on Australia for sale.¹⁶ Interested in the Pacific region, Pinart told Petherick that he had been advised to write to him by a friend at the India Office who knew Petherick was a well-known collector of rare and obscure books, manuscripts, maps, and ephemera relating to Australia. Pinart requested Petherick send him a published list or catalogue of any books Petherick might be willing to sell. Another correspondent of Petherick's who sought his assistance was Archibald Forbes, the British journalist who toured Australia in 1883. Upon his return to Britain, Forbes wrote to Petherick requesting the bookseller lend him books so he could finish an article on the colonies.¹⁷ Petherick was happy to send him the required material. By the end of the decade, Forbes' books would be regularly advertised in *The Torch and Colonial Book Circular*, a periodical Petherick owned in conjunction with the Colonial Booksellers' Agency, an international book distribution company he would open in 1887. Petherick considered it a privilege to engage with his correspondents like Pinart and Forbes in this social network of "ante-rooms" because knowledge did not flow in one direction. As Petherick helped others who wanted to sell books overseas or learn about the colonies, he also benefited and gained knowledge that furthered his own interests and scholarly work.

In a letter dated 20 July 1885, R. H. Codrington wrote to Petherick asking him where he might find original accounts of "the discovery of the Solomon Islands and St. Cruz group? I may be wrong in supposing that the discovery of Espiritu Santo would be found with these. ... I should be glad to know if there is anything else that I can find here in the Bodleian."¹⁸ An Anglican priest and ethnologist who would produce the first study of Melanesian society and culture, Codrington wanted to ascertain if Petherick knew about any sources at Oxford that he might have overlooked. Petherick's reply to Codrington has not survived and in general the Petherick Collection includes few of Petherick's personal papers, except for a quantity of incoming correspondence and letters to his family. Still, two unpublished memoirs and other documents in the Petherick Collection provide a wealth of information about the ambitious man and his business and scholarly pursuits.¹⁹ Moreover, the surviving correspondence includes a large number of letters from individuals like Codrington seeking help with their scholarly work. For example, Sidney H. Ray, a linguist, wrote to Petherick in 1889

thanking him for the opportunity to view his colonial collection. Ray added “I am just now writing on the Oceanic languages and it has occurred to me that from your extensive knowledge of Oceanic books you may possibly guide me to two which I have vainly sought for in the British Museum and Royal Geographical Society Libraries.”²⁰ Codrington’s and Ray’s respective letters are remnants of Petherick’s involvement in the various learned societies and his scholarly interests. By the 1880s, scholars regularly consulted with Petherick who was increasingly well known in scholarly circles for his extensive collection of books, maps, and documents about or published in Australasia and Polynesia.

In conjunction with his library, Petherick developed a bibliography of colonial “printed works, historical records, manuscripts, and articles and other items in periodicals ... wherever they were written, published or created and in all languages.”²¹ The bibliography not only included books he owned but also ones held at the British Museum, Bodleian, and other British libraries, as well as collections he had visited on his travels in Europe and North America, which explained why both Codrington and Ray thought Petherick would know what was available at the various libraries. Petherick wanted to create a resource with his bibliography for anyone interested in the colonies, particularly Australasia and Polynesia, and it was patterned on *The Catalogue of the York Gate Library Formed by Mr. S. William Silver: An Index to the Literature of Geography Maritime and Inland Discovery Commerce and Colonisation* that Petherick had written in conjunction with S. W. Silver. A London shipping merchant and publisher of the periodical *India and the Colonies* and handbooks for immigrants and travellers, Silver amassed a large collection of books relating to the history, geography, and discovery of the British colonies.²² He first met Robertson’s young manager in the 1870s when he employed Petherick, who would become a close friend, to source books for the library and to produce a catalogue of the collection, which was published in 1882 to widespread critical acclaim. With their success with the *Catalogue of the York Gate Library*, Silver and Petherick decided to produce an expanded second edition that was published in 1886. The two editions were “the foundation documents of Australian bibliography.”²³ Moreover, Petherick’s decision to arrange *The Catalogue of the York Gate Library* chronologically was admired and “adopted for *The Catalogue of the Library of the Royal Colonial Institute 1886*.”²⁴ The publication of *The Catalogue of the York Gate Library* in 1882 improved Petherick’s scholarly standing and it was

further burnished when during the course of research for his own bibliography of Australasia and Polynesia, he made a discovery of a “1566 Desliens mappemonde”: “About late 1882 or early 1883, his friends were impressed because he had noticed, on a wall in a corridor of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, a Dieppe map hitherto unknown in London.”²⁵ This discovery coupled with *The Catalogue of the York Gate Library* and his own colonial bibliography, which he published sections of in *The Torch and Colonial Circular* but would never complete, garnered him even more respect in scholarly circles.

Increasingly, researchers like Codrington who were interested in the South Pacific requested Petherick’s help with their academic projects and bibliographies. Petherick supplied, for instance, entomologist and Royal Geographical Society Librarian E. C. Rye with books for the man’s bibliography of New Guinea.²⁶ In 1880, Rye wrote to Petherick thanking him for “the batch of colonials just received.”²⁷ A few years later, Rye further praised Petherick for all his work and effort to obtain Fijian stamps for Rye’s collection.²⁸ James R. Boose, the librarian at the Royal Colonial Institute, also benefited from Petherick’s assistance and often borrowed material from him. In March 1884, Boose wrote to him thanking him for providing a copy of Australian author Marcus Clarke’s 1877 essay “The Future Australian Race.”²⁹ In turn, Boose offered Petherick “a copy of a series of essays” entitled *Political Essays concerning the Present State of the British Empire* for his own collection and added that he had “been reading the articles in the *Melbourne Review* contributed by you, and have found them as instructive as they are interesting.” Petherick described himself as a modest and retiring man who was willing to help others and take “time or pains to ascertain whatever is wanting. In a word he is a man who, if he does not himself know a thing, invariably knows how and where the requisite knowledge may be obtained.”³⁰ He recognized his activity in the social network with Rye, Boose, and others was mutually beneficial for all parties involved and a favour provided was potentially a favour to be repaid. Consequently, he was a man of “tireless industry, and of inexhaustible energy” when it came to helping colleagues and acquaintances who one day might need his or his employer’s services. His active participation in the social network also helped to improve his status and rank both within academic and business circles, which was important to a man who was

proud to be a gentleman but concerned his years in Australia marked him as a colonial outsider.³¹

By the end of 1883, Petherick was at the height of his influence in both academic and business spheres; however, Marie Cullen argues that “[b]etween January and July 1884 ... Petherick’s influence in the book trade and his standing in some intellectual circles suffered major setbacks.”³² Petherick’s employer, George Robertson, sold his company and Petherick’s book orders dropped off sharply between 1884 and 1886 so his “influence as a large book buyer in Britain was soon reduced.”³³ However, it was Petherick’s championing of certain theories regarding the discoveries of New Guinea and Australasia that supposedly threatened his scholarly reputation: “When Petherick’s theories were published ... they provoked the private censure of Coutts Trotter ... and the public vitriol of R. H. Major ... the acknowledged international authority on early voyages.”³⁴ A fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, Trotter had written extensively on the South Pacific, specifically New Guinea,³⁵ and he was angry at what he considered Petherick’s uninformed and incorrect theories.³⁶ Petherick had argued that previously accepted histories of the “discoveries of New Guinea and the east and west coasts of Australia” were flawed.³⁷ In total Petherick put forward eight different theories regarding these discoveries first published in George Robertson’s *The Melbourne Review* and in S. W. Silver’s *India and the Colonies*.³⁸ Boose’s comment at the end of his March 1884 letter to Petherick referenced the *Melbourne Review* articles; he suggested in the letter that he was at least willing to consider Petherick’s theories unlike Trotter and Major.³⁹ He even marveled at the amount of work Petherick must have done to prove his theories. Additional articles were published in *The Argus* in Melbourne and *The Academy* and *The Athenaeum* in London, and it was these articles in the British journals that seemed to set off both Trotter and Major who waged both private and public campaigns to discredit Petherick and his theories.

Petherick’s friends rallied around him as he faced growing criticism. In 1885, Bernard Quaritch, a bookseller and collector, who sold remainders overseas, offered books to Petherick that might help him support and defend his case. Quaritch in a letter to mutual friend S. W. Silver wrote the “[l]ibrary controversy between scholars advances knowledge: Mr. Petherick has much of the patient fighting man in him.”⁴⁰ Silver, Quaritch, and others friends

and colleagues openly supported Petherick in this fight. While Cullen suggests Petherick's influence rapidly waned after 1883 and never rebounded, my research indicates any loss of influence in business and academic circles was temporary. In September 1887, Petherick launched the Colonial Booksellers' Agency, an international distribution, bookselling, and publishing firm, which was financially backed by his friends and colleagues, including S. W. Silver and 10 leading British publishers. With the opening of his company, Petherick would regain his position as one of the largest book buyers in London.⁴¹ Moreover, following the scandal, he was invited in 1884 to become a life member of the Royal Literary Fund and to join the National Scientific Society.⁴² In 1889, the Somersetshire Archaeological and Natural History Society made Petherick a lifetime member. He also continued to be recommended to individuals like Alphonse Pinart who were interested in material relating to the South Pacific. Petherick was not a pariah in scholarly circles, and the publicity his controversial theories of discovery garnered may have even brought Petherick to the attention of groups and individuals who previous had not been aware of his work on Australasia and Polynesia. Certainly, the honorary secretary of the Hakluyt Society, the explorer Edward Delmar Morgan wrote to Petherick in 1891 asking if he would be willing to work with him on a book about the Dutch navigator Abel Tasman's voyages.⁴³ Petherick was even invited to run as a school board candidate in 1888.⁴⁴ While Trotter and others were angered by Petherick's temerity to challenge prevailing theories, others were impressed with his business talents and academic boldness, even going so far as to invite the colonial bookman, who had little formal education, to run for office.

While the majority of Petherick's non-business related letters suggest Petherick was often the one being asked to help or assist others, in a number of instances, such as the development of his own library, the writing of his *Bibliography of Australasia and Polynesia*, and the controversy surrounding his theories of colonial discovery, he reached out to his social network for much needed support. Moreover, he would seek assistance from friends and associates when he would stand for election as a school board candidate. In June 1887, liberal politician Bernard Coleridge, who was a distant relative of the poet, wrote to Petherick in response to a request to attend a political meeting and replied that prior engagements would prevent him from going. Still, Coleridge, who was an acquaintance of Petherick,

assured him that he would have the much more important and influential Sir Charles Russell's backing at the meeting. Russell was the Attorney General in Gladstone's liberal government in 1886, and Coleridge felt that his support was superfluous as Petherick had "Sir Charles Russell and you can want for nothing."⁴⁵ According to Coleridge, with Russell supporting his candidacy Petherick was assured success. However, Coleridge's belief in his eventual victory was sadly misplaced and Russell's endorsement not enough as Petherick lost the election.

While Petherick's social network could not guarantee an election win, he was more successful when he asked his friends and colleagues in 1887 for help launching the Colonial Booksellers' Agency and the journal the *Colonial Book Circular and Bibliographical Record*, renamed the *Torch and Colonial Book Circular* with the second issue. In his memoir, Petherick acknowledged the financial support of S. W. Silver, Richard Bentley, Macmillan and Co., Longman, and other companies and individuals.⁴⁶ In particular, London publishers invested over £4000 in loans and stock in the company, helping Petherick realize his dream of becoming an international distributor and bookseller.⁴⁷ Having successfully worked with Petherick when he was Robertson's London manager to arrange for the colonial and foreign distribution of their publications and to develop joint Australian and British editions of popular works, the publishers respected Petherick and were willing to gamble that the Australian knew the overseas marketplace and would be able to run a profitable global distribution business.⁴⁸

The *Circular* was the Agency's companion periodical that was issued quarterly and compiled by Petherick. It listed books for sale, which the Agency offered to ship anywhere mail could be sent, and included in most issues a section of Petherick's still-uncompleted bibliography of Australasia and Polynesia, as well as articles and other information of interest to book lovers. A number of the books listed for sale in the *Circular* were by members of the various learned societies Petherick belonged to, and he made a point to try and include any books published by the societies in his journal and for sale through the Agency. In 1890, he wrote to the chief clerk at the Royal Geographical Society about being told he could purchase the edited collection *Hints to Travellers: Scientific and General* "on better terms" from the Society.⁴⁹ He wanted to make sure he had the book for sale and "in stock in Melbourne" where he had a bookstore and a warehouse. Petherick also

advertised in the *Circular* the proceedings and publications of some of the colonial scholarly societies, like the Royal Society for New South Wales and the Geographical Society of Australasia, of which a founding member, Douglas Sladen, was Petherick's friend. Moreover, in the September 1888 issue of the *Circular*, Petherick listed letters both he and Sladen had written about the first Australian poet published in the February and March 1888 issues of *The Academy*.⁵⁰ Petherick made use of his personal, business, and scholarly contacts to launch and ensure the success of the Agency and the *Circular*. Initially, Petherick argued in his memoir that his business flourished and was profitable: "In five years 1888 to 1893 with small capital, ... with a few assistants, I disposed of £250,000 of high class literature in these Colonies."⁵¹ The majority of Petherick's sales were in the Australian colonies but he also sold works to readers and booksellers outside of Australia. However, his success would be short lived; in 1894, the Colonial Booksellers' Agency "was thrown into (and wound up in) Bankruptcy, owing to a Bank failure" and, even though Petherick would not admit it, his own mismanagement.⁵²

Prior to the bankruptcy and trade learning he had mishandled his business, Petherick's surviving correspondence revealed publishers and authors alike were acutely aware of the advantage of working with him in order to sell and distribute their books overseas. For example, the Irish nun and historian Marie (Margaret Anna) Cusack, who Petherick would become friends with, would work with him while he was Robertson's London manager to produce Australian editions of some of her publications and distribute her books in the colonies. Cusack, best known for her history of Ireland, wrote on religious and social issues, including emigration, and published her own works through her company Kenmare Publications, which in turn funneled any profits to help the Irish poor. In 1876, Cusack first contacted Petherick about supplying Robertson with the new edition of her history of Ireland "on very liberal terms."⁵³ The Australian colonies were an increasingly important market for English-language publications in the late Victorian period and Cusack wanted to capitalize on this fact. In the same letter, she also offered a new edition of her biography the *Life of Daniel O'Connell: the liberator* that had first been published in 1872. Fortright and determined to sell her books overseas, Cusack would in 1880 tell her now "old friend" that she hoped her new book would "have a very large sale in Australia."⁵⁴

By the 1880s, the Australian colonies accounted for more than 30 percent of all British book exports, and Petherick was a conduit for a lot of authors wishing to enter the colonial marketplace.⁵⁵ In a letter dated 17 August 1884, William Markby, a former British Judge and Vice Chancellor of the University of Calcutta and current reader at All Souls College at Oxford University, wrote to Petherick asking for information regarding a new law publication.⁵⁶ Markby noted that a mutual friend, Douglas Sladen, suggested Petherick would be able to provide advice regarding the distribution of the journal outside of Britain. Markby and other Law Professors at Oxford wanted to create a new periodical, the *Law Quarterly Review*, and send a prospectus to Petherick in order to find out about issues of colonial distribution and who to send the *Review*, which would be launched in 1885, to in Australia. Markby identified Petherick as an expert in the colonial book trade who could provide practical advice on the journal's distribution. Petherick's correspondence illustrates the many connections he made with individuals like Markby, Sladen, and Cusack and the expansiveness of his social network. His reputation as a knowledgeable academic and business figure quickly spread through word of mouth in academic and business circles and was not really damaged by the scandal that erupted in 1883, though his eventual bankruptcy would rupture his social network. However, prior to his business failure, Petherick was a useful intermediary for anyone interested in learning about or selling book in the colonies or other overseas markets.

When Sir Richard F. Burton needed help with the colonial distribution of his *Arabian Nights*, it is not then surprising that he approached Petherick for assistance. Burton had published a number of his works with Bernard Quaritch, a friend and colleague of Petherick, and Burton and Petherick belonged to many of the same learned societies, such as the Royal Geographical Society. Also, Richard Bentley and Son had published Burton's first two books in 1851 and George Bentley, Petherick's friend, had overseen the production of two more works by Burton in the 1870s. Still, it is not clear how Burton knew Petherick. What is known is that Burton wrote to Petherick in the fall of 1884 to inquire about using the distribution arm of Robertson's company to promote and sell the *Arabian Nights* overseas.⁵⁷ However, it seemed that Burton was less interested in a formal arrangement with Robertson's London branch than a personal one with Petherick; Burton sought to capitalize on Petherick's scholarly

connections and knowledge of the trade to increase the potential pool buyers. He wanted to sell the *Arabian Nights* beyond the British and European academic corridors with which he and his wife, Isabel Burton, were familiar.

In November 1884, Richard Burton told Petherick the writing of the *Arabian Nights* was all consuming and asked the Australian to excuse the writing of a postcard because of his “heavy work.”⁵⁸ As Burton was busy writing, it fell to Isabel Burton the task of finding customers and dealing with other practicalities. In her biography of Burton, his wife noted this division of labour: “The translating, writing, and correcting devolved upon him; the copying fell to a lady amanuensis; the financial part devolved upon me.”⁵⁹ Wanting to ensure her husband’s work would be “fully subscribed,” Isabel Burton sent out 34,000 *Arabian Nights* circulars to male friends and colleagues, as well as to past subscribers of Burton’s works published by the fictitious Kama Shastra Society who would not be offended by the sexual content of the tales.⁶⁰ The Kama Shastra Society was run by Richard Burton and his friend Forster F. Arbuthnot to publish their works and distance the men from any legal problems caused by producing erotic books and translations.⁶¹ Before Isabel Burton could even send out the circulars, she “sought legal counsel about the Obscene Publications Act through the criminal lawyer George Lewis.”⁶² His wife was in charge of marketing the *Arabian Nights* but, even though he complained of a “heavy” workload, Richard Burton took the time to contact Petherick directly to ask for help finding colonial subscribers and distributing his volumes overseas. While his wife distributed thousands of circulars for the *Arabian Nights* in 1884 and 1885, initially the couple received only a few hundred orders. With the 1,000 limited edition sets—10 volumes to be published in 1885 and 1886, as well as the additional six supplemental volumes, which would be published between 1886 and 1888—projected to cost the Burtons a great deal of money, they may have been nervous about possible failure. Consequently, Richard Burton may have decided to take a more active role in securing subscribers and contacted Petherick to see about finding customers outside of Britain.

In a letter dated October 1884, Richard Burton thanked Petherick for his quick reply in the affirmative to his initial missive and replied that with this letter “I send some circulars for your 4 houses. Shall I send you any

more?"⁶³ The houses referenced in Burton's letter were Robertson's branches in Australia and his London office. In November, Burton replied to another letter of Petherick's in which the London manager agreed to subscribe to the *Arabian Nights*.⁶⁴ With the October letter Burton sent Petherick two different circulars, one for the general public and trade and a second one for a scholarly audience that included "[t]he Student of Arabic."⁶⁵ The first circular stated, "Captain Burton, having neither agent nor publisher for his forthcoming *Arabian Nights*, requests that all subscribers will kindly send their names and addresses to him personally."⁶⁶ This prospectus also included the statement that "Mr Quaritch has made no arrangement with Captain Burton, as supposed, you are requested to apply direct. Ten per cent allowed to the Trade on no less than 2 copies, and fifteen per cent on no less than 10 copies." While this final line in the prospectus indicated booksellers would receive a percentage of any sales of the *Arabian Nights*, it is doubtful Petherick encouraged colonial booksellers to try their hands at publically selling Burton's work for profit because of the work's potentially salacious and sexually explicit content. It is much more likely that Petherick passed on the prospectus to individual friends and colleagues who he believed would not be shocked by the *Arabian Nights* that would, when published, outrage the general public.⁶⁷ By privately offering the work to individual book buyers in the colonies and overseas, Petherick and Burton then circumvented a staunch Victorian morality that branded the work as pornography and the public purveyors of works like the *Arabian Nights* as smut peddlers. Burton would later argue in the 15 August 1885 issue of *The Academy* that he even set the price of each volume of the *Arabian Nights* at one guinea in order "to keep it from the general public."⁶⁸

Petherick not only helped Burton market the *Arabian Nights* but also was willing to act as his middleman and ship the 16 volumes to individual buyers overseas. The second circular included a note that the author would distribute the work all over the United Kingdom but "[a] London address is preferred"⁶⁹ for direct shipment. Burton could enlarge his pool of potential customers to include international subscribers by working with Petherick to access the Australian's social network, while avoiding additional risks and costs. Burton would post the required volumes, as they were published, to London and Petherick would then forward the packages using the transnational distribution channels he had developed. Presumably the

prospective book buyer would cover the costs of shipping the *Arabian Nights* overseas.

The last letter from Burton in the Petherick Collection, dated 27 January 1885 and postmarked Trieste, was sent with more circulars: “I confess I hoped ... you would have been able to collect me a good number of subscribers & hope you will try. I am most happy to have been able to give you any information that could be useful to you. I am still suffering but able to write.”⁷⁰ The first volume of the *Arabian Nights* came out on 12 September 1885 and one possible reason there are no other letters from Burton in the Petherick Collection is that between the last letter being sent to Petherick in January and the first volume’s publication nine months later the Burtons visited London “partly for Richard’s health, and partly to bring out the ‘Arabian Nights.’”⁷¹ It is possible Petherick and Burton met at some point to discuss the forthcoming work and whether Petherick had been able to secure Burton any colonial subscribers. Still there are no documents in the Petherick Collection to confirm a meeting took place and to illustrate the nature of the arrangement between Petherick and Burton in any further detail. Did Petherick contribute in any way to Richard and Isabel Burton selling all 1000 limited-edition sets? Certainly, Burton’s January 1885 letter to Petherick suggested the Australian had been unable to secure any subscriptions beyond his own, so possibly this was the reason why there was no further correspondence. Whether Petherick was able to secure any additional subscribers or not, the *Arabian Nights* was by the time of its publication “fully subscribed” and profitable for Isabel and Richard Burton.⁷² In fact, the work’s popularity would lead Isabel to author the *Household Nights* (1886), which was “an expurgated edition of the sexually explicit original” that would sell in large numbers.⁷³

In 1887 in the first issue of the *Circular*, Petherick introduced himself to his journal’s readers as “[a] lover of books, and I hope ‘a man of business’... it will be my earnest endeavour so to hold my little candle that any who come within reach of its rays may find it a useful and helpful guide.”⁷⁴ Petherick believed, even before launching the journal, that he was also a guide, someone who could help “English readers at Home and Abroad ... who year by year need ‘more light’.” Of course it was not only readers who Petherick assisted and enlightened, as Richard F. Burton and others also found Petherick to be a helpful “guide” with their business and scholarly

pursuits. Petherick was a nexus within the social network. He was a means of connection through which individuals like Burton gained access to other markets and other agents in the network.

Petherick moved through his community's "ante-rooms" actively engaging and guiding other business men and intellectuals, which in turn further enhanced his position within the network and his reputation as both a bookman and scholar. Burton first approached Petherick in 1884 only a few months after Coutts Trotter and R. H. Major had publically criticized Petherick's theories. It is possible that Burton, who was based in Trieste Italy, was unaware of the scandal or Petherick's loss of influence as a large book buyer for overseas markets. Even if he was aware, Burton might not have cared. Neither the scandal nor Robertson's reduction in book orders altered Petherick's knowledge of overseas book distribution and the individuals who might want to purchase Burton's *Arabian Nights*. Petherick's reputation as a knowledgeable colonial bookman and bibliographer who had a great number of international contacts in both the scholarly and business communities put him in an ideal position to aid Burton. In many ways the scandal was much ado about nothing. Petherick would go on to increase his involvement in the various scholarly societies. In 1886, he wrote to a Mr. Bates at the Royal Geographical Society about updating the catalogue with information he had found, the author's names of two works originally considered anonymous, and offered to continue with this kind of work for the Society: "If there are any papers or notes in the R.G.S. Proceedings which you would like specially catalogued and indexed ... let me know."⁷⁵ Two years later, he would open an international distribution company and publish the *Circular*. While this first scandal did not harm Petherick's reputation in any lasting way, one could not say the same when he faced bankruptcy in 1894.

Petherick's Colonial Booksellers' Agency was initially successful and this led to a rapid expansion of the company with offices and stores opening in Australia, his primary market. Petherick also started publishing books under the E. A. Petherick & Co. imprint in 1889 and developed an inexpensive series Petherick's Collection of Favourite and Approved Authors for Circulation in the Colonies Only. He underestimated the costs of selling books on a global scale and did not raise the price of his publications or the other books he distributed to cover his expenses.⁷⁶ The Agency expanded

too quickly and Petherick had to secure additional financing, which he received from the British publishers. Owing a great deal of money, he was not able to pay back the loans when they came due in 1892. Between 1892 and 1894, Petherick desperately sought to save his company, but a bank failure, the general global financial crisis of the 1890s, and the unwillingness of his creditors to wait any longer finally forced Petherick and his Colonial Booksellers' Agency into bankruptcy.⁷⁷

Petherick's bankruptcy ruptured his social network. He was no longer sought after as a knowledgeable and successful bookman who could facilitate the distribution of a publisher's books overseas, and the flow of letters from individuals like Burton seeking advice on scholarly or business matters stopped. In 1895, his proposal to become a librarian at the Imperial Institute and give them his colonial library was not accepted.⁷⁸ Petherick found many a door now closed to him. Still, it seems, he did not lose all of his contacts and connections, though the bankruptcy was a self-described "terrible loss."⁷⁹ He would continue to work in the book trade becoming a cataloguer for bookseller Francis Edward and Company (1895-1908). Moreover, his creditors, like George Bentley, "enabled" Petherick to sell his "Australasian Collection of books" to other friends and colleagues who then gave the library back to him, so his scholarly work was "saved from the wreck of his business."⁸⁰ Why did they save his library? No documents have yet come to light that provide an answer, but Petherick was certainly grateful that some of his friends stood by him through the bankruptcy and were willing to purchase his books for him. He was appreciative of their intervention, though he would bemoan their lack of funds that stopped them from buying his custom bookcases, which had to be sold at auction at a fraction of their value in 1895.⁸¹ His friends and colleagues possibly helped him also out of gratitude for the assistance he had once provided them. Then again, they perhaps wanted to avoid the library being broken up, which would mean the potential loss of access to rare maps and books. We don't know why Petherick's library was saved, but we do know his social network did not entirely disintegrate with his bankruptcy, which allowed him to salvage his life's work. After returning to Australia in 1909, he gifted his Australasia and Polynesia collection to the Australian commonwealth and it would become, and still is, an important part of the National Library of Australia.

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Notes

¹ The author presented a version of this paper at the American Historical Association 2012 annual convention. Alison Rukavina, "Mind the Gap: social networks bridging Imperial knowledge deficits." American Historical Association Annual Conference, Chicago, IL, 8 January 2012.

² Burton to Petherick, 2 November 1884, Petherick Collection, MS 760/2/178. The word one is underlined in the original letter.

³ For a history of George Robertson see Holroyd, *George Robertson of Melbourne, 1825-1898*.

⁴ Petherick, Draft Memoir, Petherick Collection, MS 760/1/31.

⁵ Petherick, "The Book-Trade in Melbourne," 4.

⁶ Petherick to Peter Petherick, 9 January 1873, Petherick Collection, MS 760/1/189. For an in-depth history of Edward Petherick and his involvement with the development of the Australian and international book trades see Rukavina, *The Development of the International Book Trade (1870-1895): Tangled Networks*.

⁷ Petherick to Peter Petherick, 29 September 1873, Petherick Collection, MS 760/1/172.

⁸ Petherick, Draft Memoir, Petherick Collection, MS 760/1/31.

⁹ Cullen, "A Bio-Bibliographical Study," 150.

¹⁰ Petherick to siblings, 3 September 1879, Petherick Collection, MS 760/2/4.

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- ¹¹ Bentley to Petherick, 16 December 1882, Petherick Collection, MS 8683.
- ¹² Cullen, "A Bio-Bibliographical Study," 161.
- ¹³ Rukavina, "Social Networks: modeling the transnational distribution and production of books," 74.
- ¹⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 25.
- ¹⁵ Petherick to Peter Petherick, 13 June 1872, Petherick Collection, MS 760/1/120.
- ¹⁶ Pinart to Petherick, 28 February 1885, Petherick Collection, MS 760/2/213.
- ¹⁷ Forbes to Petherick, n.d., Petherick Collection, MS 760/2/211.
- ¹⁸ Codrington to Petherick, 20 July 1885, Petherick Collection, MS 760/2/218.
- ¹⁹ For more information about the contents of Petherick's business correspondence please see Rukavina's *The Development of the International Book Trade (1870-1895): Tangled Networks*. For more information about the Petherick Collection in general please see <<http://www.nla.gov.au/selected-library-collections/petherick-collection>>.
- ²⁰ Ray to Petherick, 13 May 1889, Petherick Collection, MS 760/2/280, 81.
- ²¹ Cullen, "A Bio-Bibliographical Study," 148.
- ²² Henderson, "The York Gate Geographical & Colonial Library," 3.
- ²³ Henderson, "The York Gate Geographical & Colonial Library," 3.
- ²⁴ Cullen, "A Bio-Bibliographical Study," 160.
- ²⁵ Cullen, "A Bio-Bibliographical Study," 160.
- ²⁶ Cullen, "A Bio-Bibliographical Study," 151.
- ²⁷ Rye to Petherick, 15 December 1880, Petherick Collection, MS 760/2/63.
- ²⁸ Rye to Petherick, 21 July 1887, Petherick Collection, MS 760/2/266.
- ²⁹ Boose to Petherick, 8 March 1884, Petherick Collection, MS 760/2/66.
- ³⁰ Petherick, Notes for Speech, 1916, Petherick Collection, MS 760/1/36.
- ³¹ Petherick to Ernest G. Petherick, 28 October 1916, Petherick Collection, MS 760/1/366; Petherick to siblings, 3 September 1879, Petherick Collection, MS 760/2/4.
- ³² Cullen, "A Bio-Bibliographical Study," 162.
- ³³ Cullen, "A Bio-Bibliographical Study," 163.

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- ³⁴ Cullen, "A Bio-Bibliographical Study," 167.
- ³⁵ Trotter, Obituary, 512-13.
- ³⁶ Trotter to Petherick, 19 May 1884, Petherick Collection, MS 760/2/165.
- ³⁷ Cullen, "A Bio-Bibliographical Study," 164.
- ³⁸ Cullen, "A Bio-Bibliographical Study," 164-7.
- ³⁹ Boose to Petherick, 8 March 1884, Petherick Collection, MS 760/2/66.
- ⁴⁰ Quaritch to Stephen Silver, 3 February 1885, Petherick Collection, MS 760/ 2/212.
- ⁴¹ Rukavina, *The Development of the International Book Trade*, 125.
- ⁴² List of Honours in letter to the Hon. Sir Frederick Holden, 1 May 1909, Petherick Collection, MS 740/14/AA1980/200.
- ⁴³ Morgan to Petherick, 13 April 1891, Petherick Collection, MS 760/ 2/305. Petherick it seems did not follow up on Morgan's offer to write a book with him.
- ⁴⁴ Coleridge to Petherick, 10 June 1887, Petherick Collection, MS 760/2/261. It is not clear from the letter where Petherick was standing for election to the school board.
- ⁴⁵ Coleridge to Petherick, 10 June 1887, Petherick Collection, MS 760/2/261.
- ⁴⁶ Petherick, Unpublished memoir, Petherick Collection, MS 760/13/25.
- ⁴⁷ Richard Bentley and Son, List of Guarantors on a Colonial Account, *Archives of Richard Bentley*, Reel 42/87/80.
- ⁴⁸ Rukavina, *The Development of the International Book Trade*, 113-34.
- ⁴⁹ Petherick to Chief Clerk, RGS, 19 May 1890, Royal Geographical Society Archives.
- ⁵⁰ "Recent Colonial Publications: Australia," *Circular*, 35.
- ⁵¹ Petherick, Unpublished memoir, Petherick Collection, MS 760/13/124.
- ⁵² Petherick, Unpublished memoir, Petherick Collection, MS 760/13/124.
- ⁵³ Cusack to Petherick, 17 January 1876, Petherick Collection, MS 760/2/16.
- ⁵⁴ Cusack to Petherick, 5 September 1879, Petherick Collection, MS 760/2/41; Cusack to Edward Petherick, 10 December 1880, Petherick Collection, MS 760/2/62. The words "very large" are underlined twice in original letter. The exact book under discussion is unknown at this time.
- ⁵⁵ Askew and Hubber, "The Colonial Reader Observed," 116.

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- ⁵⁶ Markby to Petherick, 17 August 1884, Petherick Collection, MS 760/ 2/175.
- ⁵⁷ Burton to Petherick, 20 October 1884, Petherick Collection, MS 760/ 2/183. This letter it seems is in response to earlier correspondence that has not survived.
- ⁵⁸ Burton to Petherick, 2 November 1884, Petherick Collection, MS 760/2/178.
- ⁵⁹ Burton, *Life of Captain Sir Richard F. Burton*, 283.
- ⁶⁰ Phillips, "Sexual Politics of Authorship," 248.
- ⁶¹ Merkle, "Secret Literary Societies," 112.
- ⁶² Merkle, "Secret Literary Societies," 114.
- ⁶³ Burton to Petherick, 20 October 1884, Petherick Collection, MS 760/ 2/183.
- ⁶⁴ Burton to Petherick, 2 November 1884, Petherick Collection, MS 760/ 2/178.
- ⁶⁵ Second *Arabian Nights* Circular, Petherick Collection, MS 760/2/200.
- ⁶⁶ First *Arabian Nights* Circular, Petherick Collection, MS 760/2/194.
- ⁶⁷ Colligan, "Esoteric Pornography," 31.
- ⁶⁸ Quoted in Colligan, "Esoteric Pornography," 35.
- ⁶⁹ Second *Arabian Nights* Circular, Petherick Collection, MS 760/2/200.
- ⁷⁰ Burton to Petherick, 27 January 1885, Petherick Collection, MS 760/2/180.
- ⁷¹ Burton, *Life of Captain Sir Richard F. Burton*, 283.
- ⁷² Merkle, "Secret Literary Societies," 114.
- ⁷³ Phillips, "Sexual Politics of Authorship," 248.
- ⁷⁴ Petherick, "Opening Letter," 1.
- ⁷⁵ Petherick to Mr. Bates at RGS, 6 April 1886, Royal Geographical Society Archives.
- ⁷⁶ Petherick, "Opening Letter," 1.
- ⁷⁷ Rukavina, *Development of the International Book Trade*, 124-128.
- ⁷⁸ Petherick to Clements R. Markham, 12 January 1895, Royal Geographical Society Archives.
- ⁷⁹ Petherick, Unpublished Memoir, Petherick Collection, MS 760/13/124.

⁸⁰ Petherick, Unpublished Memoir, Petherick Collection, MS 760/13/17.

⁸¹ Petherick to Clements R. Markham, 12 January 1895, Royal Geographical Society Archives.

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