Some years ago, in 2003 probably, I told Gordon Graham about my involvement in the activities of the Dutch Dr. P.A. Tiele-Stichting, a small Dutch organization aimed at furthering the academic disciplines of the History of the Book, and of Typography and Publishing Studies. He was a bit sceptical and wondered how an experienced publisher could be so enthusiastic about academic disciplines that apparently have no real connection to what the book business is about. Most book historians seem to be more interested in socio-historical abstractions and theories, instead of the daily practice of publishers and booksellers. I replied that the Tiele-Stichting intends to overcome this bias, in the Netherlands at least. There are good reasons why the gap between the book professions and academic Book Studies should be bridged. A more holistic approach of the chain of the book, especially where authorship and readership are concerned, may strengthen the social and cultural position of the book within the new media landscape. Gordon, the peerless editor of Logos, invited me some time ago to write about the Tiele-Stichting. I accepted, but postponed my promise from year to year. Now, I am pleased to make up for my omission in this tribute to Gordon Graham.

Why book history matters
Gordon has always followed the developments in academic book history. He has attended SHARP conferences, and he gave space in Logos to quite a few book historians. His fascinating book about the history of “his” firm Butterworths is an important contribution to contemporary book history. He has written many valuable analytic articles in several journals, from The Bookseller to his own quarterly Logos, about recent trends in the book professions, that will be pertinent historical sources about what really happened. He created a number of article series devoted to the historical dimension...
of the trade, such as “Immigrant Publishers” and “Literature of the Book.” Beth Luey, director of the Scholarly Publishing program at Arizona State University and for many years president of SHARP, was kindly invited to explain to the readers of Logos “why book history matters” (that became the title of her engaging contribution, in Logos 15:3, pp. 133-136). She wrote: “Book historians describe and explain trends that have developed over time, as well as abrupt changes. We can learn a great deal from studies of publishing that cover whole nations or even continents.” Her article demonstrates that book history may be useful to the trade because it reveals its constant capacity to adapt to changes in the market and in readers’ preferences.

The Dutch academic world was rather late in acknowledging Book History as a discipline in its own right. It was not until 1954 that a first (extraordinary) chair in Book and Printing History was created at the University of Amsterdam, by the Tiele-Stichting, specially founded for this purpose in 1953. The Tiele-Stichting was named after an innovative Dutch bibliographer and library organizer from the second half of the 19th century. The Dutch book trade had insisted on encouraging more academic interest in the history of the book for nearly a century, and the national Book Trade Association that united publishers, booksellers and antiquarians had started as early as 1886 a series of monographs about Dutch book history. In the early years of Dutch studies in book history, the most meritorious and dedicated authors in that field were publishers and booksellers, such as Wouter Nijhoff, A.C. Kruseman and R. van der Meulen. The book profession of those days was proud of its history, and wanted to record in serious studies the cultural and social significance of books.

The newly established chair in Book and Printing Studies was strongly supported by the professional organizations of publishers, printers and antiquarian booksellers. The librarian of the University of Amsterdam, Herman de la Fontaine Verwey, was appointed as the first Tiele-professor. His weekly lectures were attended by many professionals. In 1962, the three leading academic book historians of that time, Verwey, Hellinga and Ovink, published the excellent and handsomely illustrated history of the book in Holland, Kopij and druk in de Nederlanden; it was sent to most Dutch printers and publishers as a New Year’s present of the Association of Dutch Printers.

However, in the 1960s, a new view of doing business penetrated the Dutch book world. Profit became more important than professional pride; strong trade traditions were gradually replaced by new business models based on efficiency, modernization and growth. The Dutch book trade entered the era of mergers, conglomeration and profit maximization, while the printing industry was swept along by technological innovation (letterpress being replaced by offset print), high investments in new presses and market concentration. A new kind of managers, most of them recruited from other industries, was needed to cope with the financial, commercial and human resource challenges. The support by the book and printing trades of academic book studies lost its momentum.

At the same time, scholars in Book Studies became much more specialist and focused on specific historical issues that did not appeal to the book professionals. Although the Tiele-Stichting had been very successful in providing a permanent place for Book Studies in the curriculum of the University of Amsterdam, soon to be followed by Leiden University, and could appoint several eminent experts to the extraordinary chairs, the interest and support of the book and printing trade, that were so noticeable in the 1950s, nearly disappeared around the year 2000. Because of this, the Tiele-Stichting was considering to eventually accept the estrangement between the discipline of Book History and professional practice, and to close down, leaving the care for its extraordinary chairs to the thriving and ambitious new Dutch Society for Book History (founded in 1993).