Introduction

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Dates

Unlike the date that marks the beginning of the previous volume in the *Cambridge history of the book in Britain*, the year 1830 has no exceptional significance for the trades of printing and publishing. In 1695, the last of the Licensing Acts was allowed to lapse, and with it the legislation that had (amongst other matters) prevented the expansion of printing in England outside London and the university towns of Cambridge and Oxford. The year thus marked an end to ways of thinking about the book trade that could be traced back at least to the founding of the Stationers' Company in 1557; and it proved to be the beginning of a long period in which the eventual abolition of perpetual copyright signalled the end of control of publishing and the book trade by a cartel whose interest lay in dominating, and often restricting, growth and, frequently, in maintaining high prices.

If there is no equivalent dominating and determining event in 1830, there are nonetheless strong reasons for dividing the sequence of the history of the book in Britain at about this date. They have nothing to do with the preoccupations of historians who have seen in the passing of the 1832 Reform Bill a severance with a conservative past in favour of a period of reform under the Whigs. More general historians have justifiably moved away from insisting on the 1830s as so straightforward a watershed; and in seeking the roots of the nineteenth century in the last two decades of the eighteenth, they have also pruned – or, rather, lopped – the long eighteenth century.[1] Others have identified a watershed with the Regency and the reign of George IV. Certainly in one critical area of publishing, the caricature, by about 1830 there was a new sense of restraint that drove bawdiness underground. Where self-importance had once been pricked, self-improvement took its place. The conversion of the caricaturist

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1 Hilton, *A mad, bad, and dangerous people?*, pp. 664–71. Cf. Asa Briggs's apologia for what he termed an 'unconventional' period, in his *The age of improvement*, p. 1.

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George Cruikshank from a drunken sot to a campaigning teetotaller seemed to epitomise a period of extraordinarily rapid change in social outlooks.[2]

On the other hand, historical bibliographers, writing about the relationship of printed text to its manufacture, have habitually divided their tale between the so-called hand-press period and the machine-press period, the date falling conventionally at 1800. But even Philip Gaskell, who thirty-odd years ago constructed his standard *New introduction to bibliography* round this date, wrote also of two periods in the history of printing technology being 'separated by developments that took place soon after the beginning of the nineteenth century'.[3] In other words, the year 1800 was not entirely sacrosanct. Indeed, there is no reason why it should be, save in the most approximate of terms. The first machine press was not introduced until 1812. No less importantly, this was but one aspect of book production. The first paper-making machine in Britain was installed in 1803. Though David Bruce patented his typefounding machine in America in 1838, and it found favour with German manufacturers, it was not used by a British founder until Miller & Richard installed his equipment in 1853. Typesetting machines could be dated from the invention of William Church, in London, in 1822; but it was almost twenty years before such equipment was installed for regular use.[4]

Clowes, subsequently printer of the *Penny Magazine*, installed steam machinery in 1823, and had eighteen steam-driven presses by 1832, each printing between 700 and 1,000 impressions per hour.[5] For most book printers, the cost of machinery, the need to overcome employees' resistance and to retrain them, the physical confines of the printing house, and the slow return on outlay, meant that investment in new equipment was always cautious, even slow. Partly because of the extra care required by them in make-ready, the new machine presses tended also to be more suited to long runs. It was partly for this reason that expensive new machinery tended to be introduced first in the newspaper trade. In 1828 *The Times* installed the first cylinder press, capable of delivering 4,200 impressions an hour – far more than required by most book printers. In its turn, this was replaced by successively faster machines. But it was the slower Napier platen press, first marketed in the mid-1830s, that attracted the interest of book printers and that held their support until it

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2 Gattrell, *City of laughter*, ch. 17. For the watershed see also Patten, *George Cruikshank's life, times, and art* 1, pp. 390–402.
3 Gaskell, *A new introduction to bibliography*, p. 2. For the principal dates, see Berry and Poole, *Annals of printing*.
4 See further below, chapter 1.   5 Timperley, *Encyclopaedia*, p. 920.

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was displaced after 1858 by David Payne's Wharfedale. In its turn, this stop-cylinder machine and its derivatives remained in use in many printing houses even in the second half of the twentieth century.

For decades after 1800, books, periodicals, newspapers and all kinds of minor work continued to be set by hand, with type cast by hand, and printed by means of hand-presses (admittedly increasingly often of iron, rather than wood) on paper made by hand. Books were bound by hand. In their turn, publishers changed their practices at different paces again.[6] This confused and often tardy process of change, piecemeal and at varying speeds according to needs, opportunities or resources, was not unique to the book, magazine and newspaper industries. The same can be seen in the introduction of mechanisation and new labour practices to most other industries. But, nevertheless, by about 1830 some of the major changes in manufacture, materials, market demands and economic possibilities had become sufficiently widespread for it to be possible to claim that a revolution of some kind had been effected.

If conclusions are as important as innovations in identifying moments of change, then death must also be a measure. Within the space of six years around 1830, there died several leading members of a generation of printers who had both established the term 'fine printing' and begun to address the implications of mechanisation. Miller Ritchie, of Edinburgh, and Luke Hansard, printer to the House of Commons, both died in 1828; William Bulmer died in 1830; Andrew Strahan and Thomas Davison in 1831; John M'Creery in 1832; John Ballantyne of Edinburgh in 1833; and Thomas Bensley in 1835. Among the newcomers, the printer Charles Whittingham had established himself in Took's Court, off Chancery Lane, in 1828. He succeeded his uncle as proprietor of the Chiswick Press in 1840, and by then his relationship with the publisher William Pickering had for several years commanded notice in their attention to typography, presswork and binding.[7]

National politics had their own indirect reflections on the book trades. The death on 15 September 1830 of William Huskisson, when he was struck by a train drawn by Stephenson's steam locomotive *Rocket* at the opening of the Liverpool and Manchester railway, was one of the defining episodes in the development of a means of communication that was to transform the country intellectually as much as socially or economically. At the Board of Trade, Huskisson had worked vigorously to extend Britain's trading interests as an imperial power, and thus contributed substantially to the shaping of political thought

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6 St Clair, *The reading nation*, ch. 11.   7 Keynes, *William Pickering*.

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as well as to subsequent commercial evolution.[8] Wellington's government did not last long after the death of George IV. The confused politics of autumn 1830, culminating in defeat on the civil list, finally saw Lord Grey take his place, and a coalition government on a route that was to lead to electoral reform. The running sore of Ireland and Catholic emancipation had been partially and temporarily resolved with the Catholic Relief Act in 1829, leaving a substantial body of conservative opinion discontented, but isolated. The July revolution in France, which placed Louis-Philippe on the throne, brought to Britain an influx of Bourbon refugees including Charles X. Elsewhere in Europe, revolt at Brussels in August led to independence for Belgium from the Netherlands; and in November Poles revolted against Russian rule in Warsaw. Fears of major social unrest in England eventually proved unfounded. It was an uncomfortable year, but not, in the British Isles, one of political revolution. The years covered by this volume witnessed changes in the political, social and financial structures of Britain that are not least remarkable for being achieved without violent upheaval.

The closing year of this volume, 1914, provides its own political frame. In some ways, and despite the watershed that is so often, understandably, perceived in this year, for much of the world of books and publishing it marks not so much an end as an interruption of developments that can be seen in embryo during the last few years before the outbreak of war.

1830: the book trades in a new mood

For the publishing trade in 1830, the dominant recent event in popular memory was the disastrous year of 1826–7, following a bank crisis in December 1825 that left the country short of cash, troubled and apprehensive. Notoriously, the firm of Archibald Constable had been made bankrupt thanks to over-exposure to its London agents Hurst & Robinson. Even Murray had been forced to retrench. The memory lingered for years, kept green by chroniclers of the trade such as Charles Knight, who had been severely affected, and by the exaggerations of Thomas Frognall Dibdin's *Bibliophobia* published in 1832. The Constable disaster left Sir Walter Scott liable for debts that chained him to his pen for the rest of his life.[9] The events of the mid-1820s were a reminder of the risks of working on credit in a tightly interdependent industry, and of the endemic shortage of capital in the book trade as a whole. The problem was not

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8 Hilton, *Corn, cash and commerce*.
9 Sutherland, 'The British book trade and the crash of 1826'. See also Hilton, *A mad, bad, and dangerous people?*, pp. 398–401. For Knight, see Gray, *Charles Knight*.

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unique to Britain.[10] Much of the success of the expansion of the British book trade in the following decades was the result of spreading risks, and extending the sources of profit.

For the literary world, the publishing event of the year was a two-volume work from Murray, the *Letters and journals of Byron*, with a life by Thomas Moore. As a piece of book design, it was generous, a reflection of the esteem in which Murray held its subject. It provoked editions in France and America. John Murray claimed to have lost at least £300 in the publication by May 1831, but this did no harm to his reputation as he assembled the copyrights to enable him to publish, at last, a properly collected edition of Byron's works.[11] The year also witnessed the appearance of the first part of Lyell's *Principles of geology*, of *Rural rides* and *Advice to young men* by William Cobbett, and of the first of Thomas Hood's *Comic annuals*. Tennyson's first solo volume of poems, *Poems, chiefly lyrical*, was widely and on the whole favourably welcomed: his career spans almost the whole of the present volume, until his death in 1892. The first parts of the seventh edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* appeared from the firm of Adam Black, who had acquired the title following the collapse of Constable in 1827. Coming hard on the heels of the *Encyclopaedia metropolitana* (1828–) and a reissue of Chambers's *Cyclopaedia*, it was completed only in 1842.[12]

Publishers were seeking fresh ways of presenting their work to broadly middle-class audiences. The launch of the weekly *Spectator* and *Athenaeum* in 1828 had been followed in 1829 by two publishers' series of books at prices designed to appeal to a middling market. Some of this was simply a dress for cheap editions of older work, but many other books were specially written for these series. The new projects were not entirely innovative. In the mid-1820s, J. F. Dove and the proprietors of a publishers' library of British classics had offered dozens of books at prices mostly between four and six shillings a volume. The list included Byron and Paley, but most of the titles were out of copyright. Bound first in paper boards, and later in cloth, the duodecimo volumes were advertised as being set in type 'more than usually distinct and clear', with emphasis on the first three words. The new ventures moved away from established literature, to more recent work. Murray launched his five-shilling Family Library, with lives of Napoleon and Alexander the Great. Charles Knight produced the first volumes of his Library of Entertaining Knowledge, at 4s 6d

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10 For the French crises of 1826, 1846 and 1890, the latter partly the result of over-expansion, see for example Parinet, *Une histoire de l'édition à l'époque contemporaine*, pp. 160–5.

11 Smiles, *A publisher and his friends* 2, pp. 305–28.   12 [North] *Adam and Charles Black*.

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a volume and with books on menageries, vegetable substances and insects.
G. L. Craik's *Pursuit of knowledge under difficulties* was an early inclusion, fol-
lowed immediately by a study of New Zealanders that was inspired by the
prospects (and profits) offered by the introduction there of western civili-
sation. In 1830, *Fraser's Magazine* was launched under the editorship of the
independently minded William Maginn, a refugee from *Blackwood's Maga-
zine*.[13] In the same year, Longman launched both Dionysius Lardner's *Cabinet
cyclopaedia* and his Cabinet Library: the *Cabinet cyclopaedia*, at six shillings a
volume, was eventually to run to 133 volumes, contributors including Scott,
Thomas Moore, Southey, Mary Shelley and Herschel. Undercutting all of
these, volumes in Constable's Miscellany, published by Whittaker, cost just
3s 6d each. In Edinburgh, *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal* and *Tait's Edinburgh
Magazine* were both launched in 1832, the latter posing a direct challenge to
Blackwood's.

Novels are discussed in more detail in chapters 3 and 11, below. The first
edition of *Pride and prejudice*, in three volumes, had cost eighteen shillings in
1813. The three volumes of Scott's *Waverley* (1814) cost a guinea, or twenty-
one shillings. In December 1815, *Emma* (dated 1816) was published, also in
three volumes, at a guinea. But *Kenilworth* (1821), *The pirate* (1822 [1821]) and
The fortunes of Nigel (1822), each likewise in three volumes, all cost 31s 6d, a
guinea and a half, and this was to remain an industry standard.[14] The three-
volume format, with its set price, dominated the market in new fiction, and
hence much of publishing, for the next seventy-odd years. Its high price often
supported other kinds of publishing, but it was too much for casual buying
by most individuals. After Robert Cadell launched the 'Author's edition' of
the Waverley novels at five shillings a volume, public appetite was whetted
for different price structures. Cadell's venture proved an immense success.[15]
In his pioneering series of Standard Novels, launched in February 1831, the
publisher Richard Bentley offered a six-shilling series as means of republishing
all kinds of recent novels at lower prices. Imitators followed, notably Colburn's
Modern Novelists in 1835. Roscoe's Novelists Library, launched in 1831, was
deliberately of older titles, the publisher Cochrane & Co. 'disclaim[ing] any
intention of trespassing on the ground occupied by other publishers'.[16] But
none of Bentley's competitors proved as successful as Bentley himself.[17] The

13 Thrall, *Rebellious Fraser's*; *Wellesley index* 2, pp. 302–521.
14 For Jane Austen, see Gilson, *A bibliography of Jane Austen*; for Scott, see Todd and Bowden, *Sir
    Walter Scott*.
15 Millgate, *Scott's last edition*; Todd and Bowden, *Sir Walter Scott*, pp. 885–931. For trends in novel
    prices, 1800–40, see St Clair, *The reading nation*, p. 203.
16 Advertisement in *Tom Jones* (1831).   17 Sadleir, *XIX century fiction* 2, pp. 91–122.

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emphasis was constantly on reduced prices, though publishers were not always candid. Dove's British Classics, taken over by Scott & Webster and reset in slightly larger type, were advertised as having been reduced by a third, a claim that was only partially true.

As a genre, the new novel offers a uniquely long-term measure against which to set other retail prices, its price and format depending not so much on the number of words as on packaging for a market to whom familiarity was crucial. Its artificially high price, supported by a market dominated by circulating libraries for whom three volumes meant thrice the income that could be obtained from just one, remained a retail benchmark long after it could no longer be justified by the ordinary costs of production. Copyright books were usually liable to higher costs for publishers than those that were out of copyright, but books of all kinds tended to rise in price in the years after 1815. In the various activities of the late twenties designed to marry the economics of printing and publishing to growing markets anxious for self-improvement (a more complex desire than simply the accumulation of knowledge), and with the money to afford entertainment, are to be seen some of the preoccupations, practices and debates of the rest of the century.

The first meeting of the British Association in 1831, and the enthusiastic audiences that crowded into lectures and demonstrations at the Royal Institution, were but two measures of public thirst for knowledge.[18] For the artisan, the new mechanics' institutes and their several imitators, in town and country alike, were intended to provide for similar needs.[19] When in 1833 the disgraced but now contrite former Scottish minister Thomas Dick followed a series of books on Christian philosophy with a more general consideration *On the improvement of society by the diffusion of knowledge*, he gave much of his space to arguing for both social and theological links between scientific (for him that meant largely astronomical) knowledge, mechanical knowledge and divine revelation.[20] Like others, he had a strong sense of change, the scientific advances of the previous half-century presaging a period, now imminent, for a 'general diffusion of knowledge'. In a passage that followed, he summarised the signs and means of this expansion:

> from the numerous publications on all subjects daily issuing from the press;
> from the rapid increase of theological, literary and scientific journals, and the
> extensive patronage they enjoy; from the numerous lectures on chemistry,

18 Berman, *Social change and scientific organization*; Caroe, *The Royal Institution*.
19 Traice, *Handbook of mechanics' institutions*; Tylecote, *The mechanics' institutes of Lancashire and York-shire*.
20 For Dick (1774–1857), see Astore, *Observing God*.

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> astronomy, experimental philosophy, political economy, and general science, now delivered in the principal cities and towns of Europe; from the adoption of new and improved plans of public instruction, and the erection of new seminaries of education in almost every quarter of the civilized world; from the extensive circulation of books among all classes of the community; from the rapid formation of Bible and Missionary societies; from the increase of literary and philosophical associations; from the establishment of mechanics' institutions in our principal towns, and of libraries and reading societies in almost every village; from the eager desire now excited, even among the lower orders of society, of becoming acquainted with subjects hitherto known and cultivated only by persons of the learned professions . . . [21]

Dick's book, repeatedly republished, and widely read in America, caught a public mood, if not always in the particularities of his religious and philosophical claims. His alert topical sense of possibilities offered confidence; and even if reality sometimes proved different, he touched on issues that persisted, in one form or another, long into the future.

The same sense of engagement, fertilised and trained by the weekly and daily newspapers, was to be seen in later theological and scientific controversies.[22] Novels, poems and theatre responded to, and developed, the terminology and expectations of theology and the natural sciences. Inevitably amongst all this, pseudo-science and scientific and religious quackery flourished, whether in the study of phrenology or in Mme Blavatsky's later theosophy.[23] True or false, established wisdom or passing fads, all depended on printing for their success. In a different way, it is also to be seen in an insatiable demand for biographies and memoirs. The possibilities of illustration in all kinds of publications, from the most expensive folios to penny newspapers, further extended public knowledge, enjoyment and debate. But, though efforts were made to reduce the prices of some categories of books, prices for many new publications remained high; and at the other extreme there were few substantial titles costing less than two shillings save for children's books and some schoolbooks.

The radical literature of the 1820s and earlier, fuelled by the phenomenal public interest in 1820–1 concerning the trial of Queen Caroline and the confusions of the coronation of George IV, had provoked over-enthusiasm in some parts of the printing trade. When excitement died down, the demand for work diminished accordingly. William Hone, whose many radical pamphlets on the trial and on contemporary politics had enjoyed best-seller status in 1820–1,

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21 Dick, *On the improvement of society by the diffusion of knowledge* (1833), pp. 15–16.
22 Secord, *Victorian sensation*. See chapter 12, below.
23 For Blavatsky, see Richard Davenport-Hines in *ODNB*.

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was bankrupt in 1828. But the energies of the 1820s re-emerged in 1831–2 as activists worked with printers to ignore stamp duty, and thus publish at the lowest possible price, often as low as one penny: since stamp duty on newspapers in 1830 was fourpence a copy, the difference was considerable. For many people, newspapers took the place of pamphlets as the preferred means of exhortation. Political and ecclesiastical scandal peppered the pages of hundreds of titles published between the early 1830s and 1836, when the genre was brought effectively to an end with the reduction of duty to one penny.[24] Few of the unstamped papers had lasted more than a few months, or even weeks, but they outnumbered the regular press. While many of them were deliberately offensive to church and state, others pursued a milder course. For their circulation, they depended chiefly on agencies and itinerant salesmen and women: few were stocked by regular booksellers, and even then there was disagreement as to what was a risk. Though they were generally published in London, their circulation was national: Henry Hetherington, one of the most active of their promoters, had agencies in Glasgow and Edinburgh as well as Darlington and Newcastle, and as far west as Falmouth (an important port) and even Land's End. In South Wales, he had agencies in Carmarthen, Swansea and Newport: the nearest to North Wales was in Liverpool.[25] In part, the so-called war of the unstamped was about the price of knowledge. In part, it was born out of working-class and middle-class radicalism. Apart from objections to the tax, there was no single motive. As a consequence, politicians at Westminster and many of the clergy were often not merely sympathetic, but vociferous in their support. While the demand for cheap news was frequently linked to working-class radicalism, it was not exclusive to it. And, just as in eighteenth-century France,[26] the necessarily clandestine nature of much of this market, combined with the need to make money in difficult circumstances, provided natural allies to the trade in pornography.[27]

With irregular patterns of population went irregular patterns of book ownership and of reading. Put at its simplest, it was usually (if by no means universally) easier to buy a book in a town than it was in villages or hamlets; and the choice was greater in the middling or larger-sized towns with their own clienteles than in those whose weeks were more shaped by the influxes of money and

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24 Wiener, *The war of the unstamped*; Hollis, *The pauper press*; Wiener, *A descriptive finding list*; Haywood, *The revolution in popular literature*.
25 An advertisement of 1834 listing Hetherington's stock is reproduced in Haywood, *The revolution in popular literature*, p. 115.
26 Darnton, *The literary underground of the old régime*; Darnton, *The forbidden best-sellers of pre-Revolutionary France*.
27 McCalman, *Radical underworld*.

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people on market days. The dearth of booksellers in thinly populated Wales north of Aberystwyth was reflected in *Hodson's booksellers, publishers and stationers directory*, published in 1855, though Ireland and Scotland were hardly better served in a list that was defined by the needs of the London trade. Much of the country, and by no means only the countryside, continued to depend on itinerant salesmen and, for newspapers or more substantial books, on businesses such as grocers or on general stores whose primary concern was not the sale of print.

Defining Britain: politics

By 1830, for many purposes the British Isles were under a single jurisdiction. The Scottish Act of Union (1707) and that for Ireland (1800) left many rights in the controls of the respective countries, but the fortunes of the book trades in each were to prove very different during the period covered by the present volume. The Dublin trade was in decline in the 1790s, and once the 1710 Copyright Act was applied to Ireland from 1801 it was no longer possible to enjoy a profitable reprint business for the English market.[28] In both Ireland and Scotland, as in Wales, language issues played a large part in the shaping of publishing, bookselling and reading; but only Scotland found a way of profiting from the city that continued to dominate the book industry: London.

While the principal constitutional structures within the British Isles were set out in 1707 and 1800, many long-standing issues about different parts of those islands remained confused.[29] On the one hand Tennyson included two overtly English patriotic poems in his 1830 volume, neither of which he retained in later collections.[30] On the other, there was real confusion over

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28 Cole, *Irish booksellers and English writers*, pp. 152–3; Pollard, *Dublin's trade in books*.

29 Cf. Edward Wells, *A treatise of ancient and present geography* (1701): 'In the Northern Ocean over against France and Germany lies a body of Islands, which, as they were anciently call'd *Insulae Britannicae*, so still go under the common name of the British Isles' (p. 43). Modern studies of searches for definitions are legion. For the concept of England, see for example Kumar, *The making of English national identity*; for early sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century tensions between English and Welsh, see Schwyzer, *Literature, nationalism and memory*; for the 'three kingdoms', and the 'Atlantic archipelago', see Pocock, *The discovery of islands*. See also Grant and Stringer (eds.), *Uniting the kingdom?*, especially Eric Evans, 'Englishness and Britishness: national identities, c.1790–c.1870', pp. 223–43. Parry, in *The politics of patriotism*, believes that Peter Mandler underestimates the ability of many writers at the time to think about the English as a nation: see Mandler, '"Race" and "nation" in Victorian thought', pp. 224–44. Withers, in *Geography, science and national identity: Scotland since 1520*, builds on ideas advanced by Patrick Geddes in the early twentieth century, and for further related contexts may be read alongside Nora (ed.), *Les lieux de mémoire*. Lord, in *The visual culture of Wales*, extends the creation of national identity to the visual and industrial record.

30 'English warsong'; 'National song'. Tennyson, *Poems, chiefly lyrical* (1830): *Poems* ed. Ricks, 1, pp. 274–6.