



Perspectives

Between 1534 and the end of the seventeenth century, England lived through Reformation and Counter-Reformation, and two constitutional revolutions. Its population increased from *c.* 2.8 million in 1541 to *c.* 5.1 million in 1701.¹ In 1534 its foreign policy was dominated by Rome. By 1700 it had possessed itself of an empire, and had become a world power.

Thus stated, the nature and the circumstances of these experiences, two concerns fundamental to historical understanding, are obliterated by the beguiling summariness that usually characterizes chronology. Yet for all their periodization – a periodization determined by the critical dates in the history of printing in a small university town in East Anglia – they do hint at how great a change took place, one that affected every aspect of society. Changes in the manufacture, appearance and use of books and printing were no less profound; and with them the assumptions of authors and readers were modified also. Although it is conventional, and convenient, to divide the history of printing between the periods of the hand press and the machine press, the division falling in the early nineteenth century, it is important to realize that this distinction is defined by only one agent, the printing press, in a long series of processes involving production and consumption in all their several aspects.²

The recent rapprochement between historical, literary and textual studies has not only emphasized the integral structure of these disciplines, but also made plain the importance of recognizing and comprehending the nature of bibliographical change.³ Textual criticism, and therefore the history of texts, is defined not only by its attention to verbal detail, authorized or otherwise, the creation of author, amanuensis, editor, compositor or proof-reader, but also by the unfolding interplay of social context, process of manufacture, assumptions as to physical appearance both on the page and in the surroundings of a volume or other form of publication, and the frame of reference, both preceding and contemporary, provided by other similar or related works. It thus draws on books both *en masse* and in particular: on editions and on individual copies. Such study, which is the essence of any historically motivated investigation of a literate or partially literate culture, requires understanding not only of the mechanics of textual manufacture and reproduction (including, in this instance,

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but by no means solely, the manner in which type is composed and printed off, within the small world of the printing house), but also of the circumstances governing choice of one alternative rather than another, whether in type design, format, printer, bookseller, binding or, finally, price. Insofar as religious, economic, political and (especially but by no means exclusively in the case of the presses at Oxford and Cambridge) educational requirements influenced these decisions, and even provide an environment in which a decision-making process is possible, they, too, influence the final form of the books and other printed matter eventually sent out for readers' consumption – and the continuation, therefore, of the cyclical interplay of writer and reader.

In other words, and to summarize the consequences of this, the following chapters have been conceived as more than the annals, recounted once again, of the history of printing in Cambridge. Their structure is chronological, beginning with the Letters Patent granted by Henry VIII in 1534 that enabled the University eventually to appoint a printer, and then to engage in direct competition in a trade otherwise dominated, in England, by London. The beginning falls before the incorporation of the Stationers' Company in 1557, an event whose consequences dominate much of this volume;⁴ and the end coincides with the effects of the lapse of the Licensing Acts after 1695. But while the succession of University Printers has been allowed to dominate the book, their sequence is punctuated by more general considerations, some in separate chapters, of the press and its relations with authors, booksellers and the University. Their concern is with the printed word, rather than the manuscript, although for many purposes the manuscript remained an equal partner until after the close of this volume. This was true both of administration and of literary composition. 'Mens hearts may be poisoned, and seduced, as well by Manuscripts, and written Bookes and Pamphlets, as by those that be Printed, especially after they be once scattered and dispersed abroad into diverse mens hands', wrote Sir Christopher Sibthorp in 1625. His target was Roman Catholicism, but he was giving vent to what his contemporaries would have regarded as a truism: that for many purposes, circulation in manuscript was as acceptable as print.⁵

During the seventeenth century, the book trade underwent a revolution in the manufacture of books second only to the invention of printing itself, though it is one that has been less appreciated. The revolution was gradual rather than sudden; but it came to affect every aspect of book production, from printing house to retail customer, and was accompanied by changes in the sale, circulation and readership of books that were to prove equally enduring.

In changes in the outward presentation of books, in their binding materials, in their decoration and in the uniformity gradually applied to multiple copies of the same work, the trade responded to reader and market stimuli in ways whose origins can only in some respects be traced back to the fifteenth century. A larger reading public, with more money to spend on greater quantities of

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books, implied also a degree of uniformity. The trade was expected to produce more finished articles, while customers sought the social as well as the intellectual reassurance of conformity – a reassurance manifested both in the uniformity of print itself, and also in uniform pricing and uniform materials and finish.

The emphasis in the retail trade shifted from meeting the cost of printing and binding separately – the first as a fixed figure, the second as one that could be adjusted to individual circumstance – to an emphasis on the establishment of a range of prices scaled according to a clearly visible and easily compared range of economic, aesthetic and material values. That which was introduced as a trade convenience for large-scale sales of the more obvious works of education or devotion, or for the clearly focused requirements of legal publishing, became also an essential of large-scale consumer expectations. Formats of books, paper sizes and type sizes and designs, all of which affected and helped dictate the size of books on the shelf or in the hand, were combined with defined ranges of outward presentation, whether turkey leather, calf or sheep, or blind or gilt tooling of the leather. Thus, a much greater range of printed matter than ever hitherto available was presented in a clearly defined range of consumer choice, to meet both new lavishness in the increasing numbers of more wealthy households and the greater purchasing power of those with more middling incomes. It is conventional to speak of the emergence of a consumer society in the eighteenth century and later. In many manufactured goods the birth took place much earlier.⁶ For the book trade at least, in its concentration on mass production at every stage (not simply in the act of printing), in its insistent attention to cost-cutting from type design to finished binding, and in its response to and manipulation of reader demand, many of the attributes of a consumer revolution are to be seen falling into order in the second half of the seventeenth century.

The sheer quantities of books published annually, to join the ever-growing accumulations from previous years, burgeoned during these years at a rate which every generation found difficult to comprehend or accept. ‘The *Press* spawns *Books* and *Pamphlets*, in as great abundance as the *River Nile* doth *Frogs*’, Edward Polhill commented in 1682, more tolerantly than many who had complained at the seemingly excessive numbers of printed books almost since the beginning of printing itself.⁷ Though the inspiration for complaints was perhaps to be found both in the biblical ‘Of making many books there is no end’, and in Juvenal’s ‘scribendi cacoethes’, their increase became a conventional *topos* in the late sixteenth century, one justified even more by 1700.⁸

Although the precise figures that might support such claims are now irrecoverable,⁹ the evidence remains of catalogues, inventories, surviving libraries and, particularly, of books themselves – witnesses to their own history and thus, as witnesses, subject to examination. Many of those whose

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complaints were most vociferous had in mind a spawning pamphlet literature, much of it rapidly written and rapidly produced, whose speed of production added zest to theological argument and animosity to personal comment. Others, such as the Newcastle-upon-Tyne bookseller William London, spoke of the phenomenon in a context of learning and knowledge, and of ‘our slippery memory’ made good by books.¹⁰ But quite apart from the increasing numbers of titles, numbers of books grew as well. The chapbook and ballad trade existed alongside that for the kind of books with which this volume is principally concerned, impinging on it insofar as both were involved in the Bible and almanac trade but otherwise having little contact. This trade dealt in the most popular of all literature, and it is here that some of the most noticeable quantities were to be found. The London chapbook publisher Charles Tyas left in 1664 a stock of perhaps as many as 90,000 books, almost all of them with a price of sixpence apiece or less, and over two-thirds of them priced at twopence to fourpence.¹¹ Much of the stock consisted of long-standing and traditional stories. Though a few publications, such as newspapers or topical pamphlets, might be expected to be printed in unusually large numbers, the larger editions were often of the most established books or other forms, whether the Bible, schoolbooks, almanacs, ballads or chapbooks.¹² For all the vast numbers of stock held by Tyas or others like him, there is little evidence that editions of many ordinary new books were much greater at the end of the seventeenth century compared with a century earlier.

In the 1580s, the decade that marked the beginning of University printing at Cambridge, there were perhaps as many as three hundred books or pamphlets published in most years. By the 1630s, this figure had more than doubled. The increase in new publications was by no means regular, whether measured in titles or in editions, and political crises in the 1640s, late 1670s and 1680s, for example, produced exceptional flurries of activity.¹³ In 1680, there even appeared, ‘very useful for Gent. that make collections’, a *Compleat catalogue* of all the stitched books (or pamphlets) and single sheets printed since the discovery of the Popish Plot. Two continuations were published, to cover most of the rest of the year, but the first issue alone of this short-lived venture had listed almost seven hundred titles.¹⁴ But amidst this vast increase in the amount of print in circulation, it is far from clear that a larger proportion of the population could be considered literate (in the sense of being able to read, write and understand) at the end of the seventeenth century compared with a century and more earlier.¹⁵ The growth in population – again, not constant, though clear in its trend – coupled with the increasing stock of new and of old books or other printed matter, meant that each generation faced the world of books and reading anew. Fresh means had constantly to be found to enable more books to be produced for, and used by, more people. In the face of inexorable expansion, almost every aspect of the manufacture, marketing and storage of the printed word underwent radical change.

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Libraries, both private and institutional, became larger and more plentiful, the most voluminous demanding in their turn increasingly detailed classification of knowledge,¹⁶ while ownership of printed books spread to ever further levels of prosperity, education and achievement, even to some of the poorest, in an expanding population. Wren's new library at Trinity College, Cambridge (the largest such building to be erected in England in the seventeenth century), its great windows raised above the bookcases so as to provide extra space for books as well as light by which to read, provided for much-needed expansion, and turned its face against the tradition of centuries of design for such buildings, both in its fabric and in its fittings. It was completed in 1695, only months before Bentley (still Royal Librarian, and not yet Master of the College) took the initiative in establishing the new University Press at Cambridge. Where other libraries at both Oxford and Cambridge had been modified, or (as at Peterhouse at the end of the sixteenth century) rebuilt on traditional lines, Wren's design was constantly innovative. The sixteenth-century stall system, still visible in the Bodleian Library, Merton College and elsewhere, was itself a development designed to increase the amount of shelf-space provided by the lectern system.¹⁷ But Wren introduced tables at which to read instead of shelves, and furnished the tables with revolving stands for books in use. Readers were not only faced with more books, stored in a different way; they were also expected to use them in a different manner.¹⁸

This increased acquisition of books, whether in private houses, modest or grand, or in institutional collections, affected authorship, printing, binding, bookselling and reading equally, as printing houses multiplied (and some increased in size) and booksellers strove to put before the public a variety and quantity unimagined by each generation's predecessors. Permanent changes were wrought in a more and more heavily stocked second-hand trade, and in book collecting, with the advent of auctions as a means of selling books, first developed in Holland in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries and introduced to England by 1676. Though clearly popular with private customers, such sales were viewed with suspicion and anxiety by some booksellers, of both old and new books, who felt their livelihood threatened.¹⁹ For readers and booksellers alike, the need to find a path among so much, and to choose between it, was paramount. This demand was met on the one hand by trade lists, beginning in 1595 with Andrew Maunsell's *Catalogue of English printed bookes* – Maunsell 'thinking it as necessarie for the Booke-seller (considering the number and nature of them) to haue a Catalogue of our English Bookes: as the Apothecarie his *Dispensatorium*, or the Schoole-master his *Dictionarie*'.²⁰ In 1657 William London justified his catalogue of 'the most vendible books in England' with an analogy drawn from Sir Walter Raleigh: 'he knew there was a mine, but knew not how to find it and there seems to be no less, then as great need of a Register of Books, which else may be buried

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with their Authors'.²¹ In the seventeenth century at least, such lists reached their apogee in the Term Catalogues, with their associated cumulations by Robert Clavell. On the other hand, the appearance of new reviewing journals (of which the *Philosophical Transactions* of the Royal Society offers an early example), some in London but most of the more successful in Holland or France, catered for a market, always international with respect to scholarly printing, whose size and complexity required increasing bibliographical sophistication. Both Clavell and the new reviewing (or often, more properly, abstracting) journals reiterated by example England's continuing dependence on imported titles.

Finally, the manners of publication and sale changed, and with them literary form. John Ogilby, having over-invested in engravings for a series of exceptionally heavily illustrated books, resorted idiosyncratically in the 1660s to lotteries as a means of selling stock and recouping investment.²² Much more importantly, the advent of newspapers and other regularly issued periodicals, providing opportunities for advertisement and for review, wrought changes that eventually affected virtually every form of book and every subject. Although the first English newsbook is usually held to have been an account of the battle of Flodden in 1513, listing the principal dead, and printed soon after the event, and although newsbooks became common in the 1590s, the first English newspapers were not published until Pieter van den Keere's short-lived series of small folio broadsheets in Amsterdam in 1620–1.²³ But once created, the newspaper remained, for much of the century, in quarto, reverting to folio with the founding of the *London Gazette* in 1665. By the end of 1695, the last year of the *ancien régime* in printing at Cambridge before the first formal movements towards the foundation of the modern Press, London had several newspapers appearing twice or more a week.²⁴ A periodical press brought the opportunity to advertise in a regular and organized manner, and to widely distributed markets. Innovations in publishing itself, such as the development of the prospectus (and with it publication by subscription), the emergence in the latter part of the seventeenth century of a new breed of publishers, the commercial collaboration of congers, or the invention and successful application of part-publication, were all intended, at least partly, to spread costs, for stationer or for customer. Though serial, or part, publication affected the form of texts most obviously, the application of these other innovations also assumed texts requiring, or amenable to, such manipulation.²⁵

These changes affected every subject, and in some subjects entirely new forms of publication or presentation made their appearance, such as coasting pilots, engraved sheet music, pocket engraved atlases, road books or commercial handbooks and summaries.²⁶ But even in those genres already established, the form and the appearance of books changed dramatically.²⁷ Reasons for this were complex, some social and others economic, and some

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a mixture of the two. Cheaper means of production were sought, imposed partly by the supplies of raw materials, while appearances grew more diverse even as paper-making, printing and binding imposed their own tendency to uniformity.

A few books can be kept on a shelf, lying on their sides. But as collections expanded, both public and private, so bookcases became necessary, their design modified according to the purpose or building for which they were intended.²⁸ And instead of being shelved with their fore-edges facing outwards (as they were in both chained libraries and in private collections), with their titles written on their fore-edges on those occasions when the number of volumes made it seem requisite, books were turned spine outwards, in a fashion introduced from France in the mid-seventeenth century but which can be traced back to Italy in the first part of the sixteenth. Like all such revolutions, the change was not brought about overnight. One of the first documented English examples of the very practical consequences of this, the introduction of spine-titles or title-labels, dates from 1660, though there are earlier isolated instances. In Cambridge the bookseller John Dennis owned ‘a rose for the backe of a booke’ in the 1570s, but this was merely for decoration; at Eton another bookseller, Williamson, was lettering the spines of some books as early as 1604.²⁹ By the time that Evelyn’s translation and adaptation of Naudé’s *Advis pour dresser une bibliothèque* (1627) appeared in 1661, the practice had become general in France, while in England old habits persisted. As usual, Naudé was unenthusiastic about gaudiness or show, preferring to spend money on the contents of volumes rather than their dress. But for England his remarks about the treatment of books’ spines were opportunely timed:

As to the binding of Books, there is no need of extraordinary expence; it were better to reserve that mony for the purchasing of all the books of the fairest and best editions that are to be found; unless that to delight the eyes of Spectators, you will cause all the backs of such as shall be bound as well in Rough, as in *Calveskin*, or *Morroccin*, to be gilded with fillets, and some little flowers, with the name of the Authors...³⁰

The nature of cover decoration changed also. The heavy blind-stamped decoration, extending over most of the covers and characterizing so much of late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century calf binding in England, died out gradually during the sixteenth, and had become unusual by the early seventeenth century; panel stamps had fallen out of fashion first, by about the middle of the sixteenth.³¹ The bindings from the shops of Nicholas Spierinck and Garrett Godfrey in Cambridge, and of their contemporaries in London and elsewhere, were essentially medieval in conception, both structurally and decoratively.³² They were the last of their kind in Cambridge. In their place, there emerged a diversity of styles. Ordinary decoration was achieved by smaller centre-pieces, sometimes accompanied by corner-pieces – tools that in turn gave way to a general use of still smaller tools that could be used in

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combination to give yet greater variety. One of the seventeenth century's most distinctive decorative innovations, the rectangle impressed gilt or blind, with fillets or with rolls, and for the better or more showy work having ornaments at each of the rectangle's corners, lasted well into the eighteenth century. The earliest gold-tooled bindings made in western Europe were executed in Northern Italy in the first half of the fifteenth century; but the earliest so far discovered from England dates from 1519, and only a few survive from the 1520s.³³ Dennis, again, was equipped to provide gilt bindings in the 1570s in Cambridge, his shop including a 'gilding coushin with the kniffe to cut gold': numerous gilt bindings survive executed in late sixteenth-century Cambridge, and they were common in London. By the turn of the century gold was being used to decorate even relatively cheap bindings.

In a market with very diverse sums of money available to spend on books, the choice and nature of the materials of bindings changed as well. Though wooden boards can be found on seventeenth-century books, they had passed out of general use, even for substantial volumes, by the 1590s: in Cambridge, as elsewhere, wood was used in the second half of the sixteenth century principally for books destined for libraries rather than for personal ownership. By the end of the first half of the seventeenth century, wood boards were rare. So, too, boards composed of laminated sheets of waste paper, frequent in the early and mid-sixteenth century, were replaced by pulp boards of varying degrees of hardness and flexibility.³⁴ Rope-fibre millboard was introduced for better-quality work in the late seventeenth century. The choice, preparation and suppliers of leather changed equally markedly. The calf leathers used in the latter part of the seventeenth century were not only noticeably thinner than those used previously, but were also of a lighter colour: this was the result partly of the tanning and other preparatory processes, and partly of the use of much younger calves.³⁵ With the introduction of goatskin, or turkey leather (an allusion to the part of the Mediterranean whence the skins were first imported), much greater variety was possible in both colour and finishing, or tooling. These skins were first used in England in about 1550, and at first were a luxury.³⁶ They always remained superior to, and more expensive than, calf or sheep, but by the third quarter of the seventeenth century they were widespread. Sheepskin, so common in seventeenth-century schoolbooks and other cheap work, seems to have been used less even for cheap books in the sixteenth century, though Dennis left a dozen forels, or unsplit sheepskins, valued with a rabbit vellum at 3s.4d. Quarter-leather bindings whether of calf or sheep, and providing another means to cheapness, do not seem to have been employed in England until the mid-seventeenth century.³⁷

This reshaping in fashion and design of books is illustrated in the deliberate archaism of the binding Pepys commissioned for his copy of Speght's edition of Chaucer (1602) – a binding so important to him that it is the only one mentioned in detail in his diary:

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So to Pauls churchyard about my books – and to the binders and directed the doing of my Chaucer, though they were not full neat enough for me, but pretty well it is – and thence to the clasp-makers to have it clasped and bossed.

The result, one of the most instructive of all the bindings in his library, was a 1664 pastiche of a ‘medieval’ binding, complete with metal corner-pieces, central boss, brass clasps and blind-tooling arranged in an admixture of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.³⁸

There were also modifications in the structure of bindings. Sewing structures, rarely properly visible, betray an overall trend towards cheapness and speed in execution. Among the more visible parts, vellum or parchment endleaves and pastedowns, a useful strengthening and protection to the text-block, remained plentiful until the supplies of medieval manuscripts regarded as waste became exhausted. These supplies, released by the declining value set on them and many of the texts they contained, or by the gradual accumulation of modern printed editions, increasingly depended also on the tolerance or uninterest of book-collectors or of other tradesmen: the extent to which monastic libraries contributed to the supply remains unclear, but is likely to have varied from one part of the country to another, depending on local interests.³⁹ Medieval manuscripts used in this way had become rare by the 1590s, and their heyday in Oxford and Cambridge is dateable between approximately 1520 and 1570, when they featured regularly. In London, they were little used for this purpose after about 1540, though both there and in the country they are to be found in use as a cheap form of wrapper well into the seventeenth century if supplies permitted it.⁴⁰ By the second quarter of the seventeenth century the use of second-hand vellum as a strengthening material was usually restricted to small slips employed as joints between text-block and cover: with the disappearance of supplies of medieval manuscripts, binders resorted to unwanted legal documents.

As the bulk of books diminished, and as they were assumed to be destined to be stored upright on shelves, tight against one another, rather than to lie flat with a few of their fellows, so the squares, or parts of the boards projecting beyond the text-block, were cut smaller, and clasps became unnecessary: by the late seventeenth century clasps were rarely found on new books other than Bibles, prayer books, almanacs and a few other titles designed similarly for table, rather than shelf, use. The materials used for sewing also affected appearance. Leather thongs, on which gatherings of leaves were sewn, were often displaced in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries by the lighter cords. By the end of the sixteenth century the continental practice of sewing on recessed cords or thongs, a method which achieved a flat spine rather than one divided into compartments, had become widespread for smaller books especially, and was markedly so in Cambridge by the second quarter of the seventeenth century. By the later part of the century marbled edges were

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beginning to make their appearance, in place of the ordinary colouring or sprinkling: marbled endpapers were not common until about the same time.

But bindings, imposing their obvious uniformity of taste, and clothing both old and new books, not only emphasize changes in the appearance of new books. They also express changing evaluations – literary, historical, aesthetic or commercial – of earlier ones, and thus can to some extent mask the true relationship of new to old, earlier to current publications. Bookbinders' price-lists were, however, aimed principally at modern books requiring binding for the first time; and such documents as *A generall note of the prises for binding all sorts of bookes* (1619) assumed a congruity, if not conformity, represented by a search for a clearly distinguishing uniform price structure for such work.⁴¹ For so long as booksellers were usually responsible for binding, or customers were expected to pay for binding separately, the degree of uniformity was obviously limited: not surprisingly in these circumstances, identical bindings on quantities of the same book made their appearance first among the cheaper educational or devotional works, which could be expected to be sold quickly or in quantity.⁴² Booksellers' stock, divided between more or less simply bound volumes and unbound sheets, meant also that several copies of the same title might be bound up identically: examples are not difficult to find. Wholesalers' and, ultimately, publishers' bindings followed as a natural development; and though it is inaccurate to speak of edition bindings until later, there is some evidence to suggest that a few books in the mid-seventeenth century were provided with uniform bindings in quantities well beyond those required by individual booksellers. The volumes of verses issued at Cambridge to mark public occasions were one marked exception to this practice, since the University regularly paid not only for presentation copies of more or less splendour, but also for many dozens to be bound up in cheaper uniform styles – often, in the early seventeenth century, limp vellum.⁴³ In the ordinary trade, outside quasi-private publication of this kind, the two best known examples of uniform bindings, each of them decorated in the centre of their covers with a specially cut stamp bearing the title of the book, were Francis Roberts' *Clavis bibliorum. The key of the Bible* (1648) and James Howel's *Δενδρολογία. Dordona's grove* [1649]. Both were published in London.

By the late 1660s, many books were published ready bound, rather than in quires, both bound and unbound copies being advertised at a price named by the stationer. This trend became especially noticeable among the more popular or readily saleable books, though it was by no means confined to them.⁴⁴ Within a decade, it was affecting Cambridge-printed books as well: Lily's grammar and Tate and Brady's version of the Psalms were among those now offered not simply in sheets, or in quires, but put up in plain and uniform calf. The effect for the book trade was to impose uniformity on the external presentation of books just as typography had on the internal.

The controlling factor in the size and shape of books was, however, not