

This is the first of a three-volume history of the oldest press in the world, a history that extends from the sixteenth century to the present day. Although there was, briefly, a press at Cambridge in the early 1520s, the origins of the modern University Press spring from a charter granted to the University by Henry VIII in 1534, empowering it to appoint printers who would be able to work outside London and serve the University. In the event, no book was printed until fifty years later, but from 1583 to the present the line of University Printers stretches in unbroken succession.

Covering the period from the Reformation to the end of the seventeenth century, and drawing on a wealth of unpublished or unfamiliar material, this volume explores the University's attitude to its Printers, the books they chose to print and the circumstances in which they worked. For the first time, the early history of the Press is set in its context – of authors, University authorities and readers – and its activities are fully related to the wider issues of the book trade in Britain and overseas.

A HISTORY OF
CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
VOLUME I

A HISTORY OF
CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

VOLUME 1
PRINTING AND THE
BOOK TRADE
IN CAMBRIDGE
1534–1698

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PREFACE

On 21 January 1697/8, by Grace of the Senate, the University of Cambridge appointed a group of thirty-seven men as the first *Curatores* of a University Press. This unwieldy body, made practical by a quorum of five, consisted of the Vice-Chancellor, the heads of the colleges, the various professors, and a number of others drawn from the more sympathetic senior members of the University.¹ *Curatores* rapidly gave place to Syndics as a term to describe those charged with responsibility for one of the University's most public activities; and as the eighteenth century wore on, syndicates, temporary or permanent, became a familiar feature of University government.²

The new foundation that was the subject of this legislation was inspired by, and in its initial stages the creation of, the classical scholar Richard Bentley, Keeper of the King's Library since 1694 and in 1700 to be installed, aged thirty-eight, as Master of Trinity College.³ It existed, for a few years, alongside the last in the succession of presses embarked on 115 years previously by a former Fellow of King's eager to provide texts and other aids for University teaching. Only with the death of the last of the University Printers under the old dispensation, in 1705, could the new Cambridge University Press claim an exclusive position. By the 1690s the concept of such a press as that formulated by Bentley, at once institutional and, by virtue of its parent body, learned, was familiar thanks to the example set by John Fell and his associates at Oxford over the previous three decades.⁴ Through the University, the Cambridge press could also count itself as the latest embodiment of an authority that went back ultimately to a charter granted by Henry VIII in 1534, on which the modern Press still relies.

Though much was later to be made of this charter, the events of the late 1690s owed little to the expediences of privileges granted in the midst of the Reformation. These privileges had been critical to the establishment of a press at Cambridge in the sixteenth century and to its continuing survival. In the eighteenth century and subsequently, the charter was a legal and financial armour. Until the 1690s it defined the press's very being.

In 1534 the University was given the right to print *omnimodos libros*, a phrase that was gradually and painfully demonstrated to over-ride any other printing

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interests. Henry VIII's charter was intended primarily to protect the interests of local booksellers, not of printers. No reason was recorded for thus extending a printing privilege as well, though the king and his advisers may have seen potential advantage in the support of a University able to wield such a right at a time when Henry VIII was pursuing a vigorous propaganda campaign via sections of the London press.⁵ Certainly, there does not appear to have been any suggestion that a university must necessarily require an associated University Printer and press: such a suggestion could, in the 1530s, have been demonstrated only inconclusively among other university towns on the continent.⁶ A press at Cambridge, subject to the University's Chancellor (who was appointed by the Crown) might prove a valuable ally: if such was the thought, nothing was said. In fact, no printing took place until 1583. But even from 1583, with a hierarchy of authority that set the University Printers, Thomas Thomas and his successors, answerable to the Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, heads of houses and professors, the concept of this earlier press was quite different from that eventually formulated by Bentley and his associates in the 1690s. The lapse of the last of the Licensing Acts in 1695, and with that the requirement for a licensing authority, brought an end to the need for the University authorities to be charged with the duties and responsibilities placed in London with ecclesiastical or other legally empowered bodies or individuals. Until the 1690s, the press at Cambridge was always a privately based business, whatever degree of responsibility the University officers of the day assumed for its legal (and therefore by implication financial) well-being. It was subject to, but was not part of, a University that as yet could boast only one department, the University Library. From 1698, under the hands of a Syndicate, the Press became another department of the University.

This distinction was a fundamental one, since it meant that Thomas Thomas and his successors until John Hayes at the end of the seventeenth century enjoyed an independence – commercial, economic, and in many respects legal – directly comparable with most of the London printing trade. However, in two exceptional, and crucial, respects, they were different. First, since Cambridge lies at some distance from London, the press could never pursue other than a severely circumscribed policy with respect to London stationers. Second, and even more importantly, the charter of 1534 offered a freedom to print, and publish, regardless of other, later, monopolies or interests. The frequency and vehemence with which London stationers challenged this privilege, and the frequent compromises that proved necessary, are measures of the power wielded by the press at Cambridge, and of its practical limitations. Poised between the corporate interest and institutional authority of the University, and the commitment of successive Printers, the press was defined finally by the interpretations and activities of a series of men more or less skilled or committed to a concern that some saw merely as a business, and others as a trust.

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Whatever the perspective, the focus was the same: the production of editions of books for sale both locally and elsewhere. If printing is defined as the replication of ostensibly identical texts, in editions each of several hundred copies, then it is defined merely as a process of industrial manufacture. But while this process is indeed essential to its definition, it takes into account neither the materials required, such as paper, type and ink; nor the vagaries, preferences, skills and interests of those involved in setting type, preparing illustrations or printing off copies; nor the use to which the finished product, a printed image, was put. Furthermore, it does not address the initial encounters between author, bookseller and printer. The process broadly described as printing involves not merely those in the printing house; but rather, it is the culmination of a series of literary, technical and economic operations that in turn lead to a further series culminating in the reader. At each stage, individuality impinges on what is most readily defined by the central act of repetitive imitation, the act of printing. And even at the press, the text that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries passed under the platen was liable to change in a process that implied uniformity but that often provided variation.

It has been rightly stressed by others that while printing achieved a degree of uniformity impossible in a manuscript tradition, however highly organized, there remained, at least until the nineteenth century, an element of variation within editions as a consequence of press corrections, or of confusion within editions of printed sheets drawn from more than one stock. This emphasis on but one aspect of book production – the composition of type – is, while indeed crucial, also inadequate. First, it neglects the relationship between the reader and the printed word set before him that was, for most classes of books, generally assumed at least until the end of the seventeenth century. The exhortations accompanying so many lists of errata, that the reader should amend with his pen the various faults described, assumed that when printed sheets left the printing house they were not to be regarded as finished: they had merely reached the most textually advanced stage that was practical under a particular set of circumstances. The occasional examples of such manuscript correction carried out not by the reader, but in an organized way in the printing house, confirm the tentative, rather than final, status of the act of printing. Second, printing itself, defined as the activities of a printing house, is but one sequence of events in a much longer manufacturing process. It is therefore only one element in a reader's experience. The materials of a book or pamphlet, the quality and size of the paper, the format chosen, the quality, materials and design of the binding, and the context of a pamphlet or short work if bound up with others in a single volume, all contribute to the reader's critical response.

This volume is not the occasion to examine, in the detail they deserve, the varying reactions of readers to the books issued by the Cambridge University Printers. Its purpose is instead, partly at least, to make such study possible. Nevertheless, to a great extent, no account of a printing or publishing

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enterprise can ignore the powers which control its continuing existence: on the one hand the authors and on the other the readers in the market-place, these two of course being not infrequently synonymous. The demands and requirements of university teaching were put forward by Thomas Thomas in 1583 as the very reason for his establishing a press where none had been for sixty years. Booksellers, as publishers and customers, dictated the course which he and his successors took, and in the end brought about the demise of the University Printers in the form established in the sixteenth century. Although in the 1580s opposition to Thomas's press by the London trade focused on the addition of another press to a small and tightly restricted world, where (it was alleged) one more press would threaten the livelihood of London printers, the real danger was to the booksellers, who would, by virtue of the University's charter of 1534, lose control of what might be printed, and where.

In no sense was the University Printer only a functionary of the University with respect to printing or publishing.⁷ He was licensed by the University authorities, and he was appointed by Grace of the Senate. But his livelihood came from the book trade, in competition with other printers, and in negotiation with booksellers. The books he printed were required to be licensed (in the words of the 1534 charter) by the Vice-Chancellor or his deputy and three doctors. As the only printer in Cambridge he was also frequently the most convenient. For its official printing, whether administrative or celebratory, the University expected to turn to him (and to pay him, like any other tradesman, for work done). In all this he was subservient to the University, most immediately in the person of the Vice-Chancellor. But that did not give the Vice-Chancellor the power to coerce, or to assume the responsibility for making what were, for all books, essentially commercial decisions.

For these reasons, this volume is concerned not only with the University Printers, but also with the manner whereby what they printed was a function of demands and limitations set by others, whether in Cambridge or in London, in Oxford or overseas. Like any other manufacturing process, the details of the physical creation of an object (in this case printed matter) are a poor explanation if its purpose and inspiration are not expounded also. For the Cambridge press, the functional context was in the first place (but, as will be seen, by no means overwhelmingly) the rest of the Cambridge book trade. Each book was an individual creation, the fruit of collaboration involving a sequence including at least author, bookseller, printer, retail bookseller, binder and eventually readers. But the impulse, at every stage, was a collective one — epitomized in the printing of an edition. This account of the Cambridge press focuses on some of those collective impulses, whether personal, institutional or bibliographical, balanced against the intentions, hopes, achievements and responses of individuals, whether authors, legislators, book trade personnel, readers or sometimes simply spectators.

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The Cambridge press, like that at Oxford, was provincial only in an ambiguous sense. The nature of this ambiguity, the tension between on the one hand central authority personified in the Crown and in the legal and commercial powers of the Stationers' Company and on the other the authority vested in the University, forms a central theme of this book. It sets the context within which the Cambridge press had to operate. But other questions are no less important; and for some the Cambridge press has provided an opportunity to explore topics equally germane to the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century book trade generally. I have therefore also examined (when the surviving evidence has suggested that it is profitable to do so) such matters as book trade capitalization, the relationship of authors to printers and booksellers, the limitations of the Cambridge press compared with those in London, the manufacture and costing of some of the most popular books of all – including the Bible, almanacs and school-books. In the seventeenth century, as in the twentieth, the well-being of the Press came to depend on the assured income generated by a reliable stream of contractual regular orders. I have also given attention to the personnel at the Press. On the one hand, University Printers were drawn either from the Regent House, that is, the senior resident members of the University, or from the book trade: for much of this time, the academic had to complement the practical, but each might perceive the means to a profitable livelihood – or, sometimes, a comfortable sinecure. The University Printers naturally dominate the more personal aspects of this book: they are the figures most frequently alluded to in the archives, and they appear regularly in imprints. On their decisions or legal adventures depended the list of books printed at Cambridge. But their journeymen, apprentices and casual assistants, the men responsible for the manufacture of each book or pamphlet, have proved to be a less shadowy group than is sometimes assumed. Their backgrounds, their conditions of work, even, occasionally, their personalities, add a touch of humanity as well as factual evidence to the dry bones of bibliographical evidence and theory. Intermittently, the history of the Cambridge press provides details in this respect unparalleled in the London trade, and comparable even with those recorded in such exceptional detail in the Plantin archives at Antwerp. The implications for our understanding of the London trade, to which masters and men alike looked for comparison and guidance, scarcely needs to be stressed.

There were fundamental differences in the organization of the control of the Cambridge press compared with the much larger and more complicated presses in London. Similarly, there were differences in the daily organization of some aspects of the work of a London press, and one having no near neighbours with whom to share skills, equipment or tasks. But the extent of what was similar, or held in common experience, has suggested that the evidence *of* London, as well as *for* London, is sometimes more than comparative.

The retail book trade in Cambridge during this period deserves a study to

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itself. Even more than the University Printers, the local booksellers depended on London – not only for supplies, but also, as will be seen in their involvement with the printing house, as a market. For the first time, the production of books at Cambridge at the end of the sixteenth century created locally made goods that had a direct exchange value in the London book trade. The fortunes of the local stationers are inseparable from the history of the University Printers; and though I have referred to them frequently, much more remains to be rediscovered and analysed of their activities. Linked to them, the curriculum (or rather, curricula, for many different courses of reading, prescribed more by individual teachers in colleges than by statute, existed simultaneously even in the ordinary undergraduate career) pursued at Cambridge in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries still calls for further attention, despite much recent work. It underwent a fundamental change in the first half of the seventeenth century, and University Printers responded with more or less zeal. I have referred to it only in order to illuminate aspects of Cambridge printing and bookselling, and the relationship of these activities to the London trade. Related also to this there remains the question of the circulation of books in manuscript – not only of sermons, political controversy or poems, but also of teaching materials. This essentially individual activity, in the private production of copies of educational works, has, like many aspects of the act of reading itself, had to be set aside for another occasion.

In other words, from the simple economic fact that printing depends on demand, and on a profitable return, it is inescapable that the history of a press must take into account not just what was printed and published. The changing reasons for its existence, its sources of raw materials, the degree of local enthusiasm and encouragement, local willingness to provide support in recessions, the requirements made of the press, its attractiveness or otherwise for authors without whom it could not flourish, and the reception its works were accorded in the trade, form but one group of considerations. In the arena created by them had to be made decisions as to what should be published, in what manner and in what appearance. For all the larger questions respecting book manufacture and trade, it was the customer, and reader, for whom books were printed, and to whom all of these questions were therefore ultimately addressed. The press at Cambridge had an institutional foundation; but in such circumstances only part of that foundation could be considered firm. As successive University Printers discovered to their pain, neither was their market guaranteed, nor did the privilege granted to the University by Henry VIII in 1534 provide a monopoly. In the period covered by this volume, the University Printers demonstrated that, as part of an institution, their business could survive. But like the University itself, it did so only by a continuous process of adaptation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This is the first of three volumes conceived during the celebrations in 1984 that marked the four-hundredth anniversary of University printing and publishing in Cambridge. I intend in subsequent volumes to examine the periods from the end of the seventeenth century to the reform of the Press in the late nineteenth century, and from then until modern times.

In this first volume, I have sought to extend the scope, as well as the scale, of my investigation and comment beyond the University Press's two official histories, by S. C. Roberts (1921) and Michael Black (1984). It will nevertheless be clear how much I owe to these two previous studies by the Press's own officers. Michael Black has placed me further in his debt by reading most of this book in an early form, and making many suggestions towards its improvement, bringing his own experience as a publisher to bear on matters that must sometimes have seemed familiar despite the time when they occurred.

Of all those who have helped in the research for this book, whether by consultation, advice or practical assistance, I am first and foremost grateful to Elisabeth Leedham-Green, who has been a vital and generous guide to the papers relating to the Press and to Cambridge's book trade in the University Archives. I also owe particular thanks to Don McKenzie, most of whose two-volume study of the Press from 1696 to 1712 falls, strictly speaking, outside the period of this volume, but whose own work on the earlier printers has helped pave the way, and who has given of his time and knowledge with characteristic wisdom and generosity.

Most of the work for this book has been done in Cambridge University Library and in Trinity College Library, whose staffs, in all their various capacities, have accommodated my demands with continuing and much appreciated helpfulness. Apart from these two libraries, I am grateful also to staff in the libraries or archives of Christ's College, Corpus Christi College, Downing College, Emmanuel College, Gonville and Caius College, Jesus College, King's College, Magdalene College, Peterhouse, Queens' College, St John's College, Sidney Sussex College, Trinity Hall, and Cambridge Central Library; outside Cambridge in the British Library, Lambeth Palace Library, the Public Record Office, the Guildhall Library, the Corporation of London

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Records Office, the Stationers' Company, the Bodleian Library, Balliol College, Eton College, the National Library of Scotland and Edinburgh University Library; and overseas in the Plantin-Moretus Museum in Antwerp, the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York, the Houghton Library at Harvard, and Yale University Library. Materials from the archives of the Stationers' Company are quoted by permission of the Master and Wardens; I am particularly obliged to the Honorary Archivist of the Company, Miss Robin Myers, for her ready interest.

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The staff at the University Press have balanced their natural curiosity about their predecessors with tolerance and patience as I have completed the book. Both during the time they have awaited the manuscript, and in their care as it has made its way through the Press, they have once again earned my gratitude. But neither they nor any of the others named above have seen as much of the book as has my wife Rosamond. Her occasional wonder at the amount of evidence available for the history of the book in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, compared with the fragmentary nature of the evidence for her own much earlier period, has been a reminder for caution, while her constant encouragement has been inspiration far beyond any ordinary support.

ABBREVIATIONS

In the following list of abbreviations and in the notes all books are published in London unless otherwise stated.

- Acts P.C.* *Acts of the Privy Council of England*, ed. J. R. Dasent *et al.* (1890–)
- Arber *A transcript of the registers of the Company of Stationers of London; 1554–1640 A.D.*, ed. Edward Arber, 5 vols., 1875–94
- Baillie, ‘Privileged books’ William M. Baillie, ‘The printing of privileged books at Cambridge, 1631–1634’, *TCBS*, 5 (1971), pp. 155–66
- Baker–Mayor Thomas Baker, *History of the College of St. John the Evangelist, Cambridge*, ed. J. E. B. Mayor, 2 vols. (Cambridge 1869)
- Bennet and Clements, *Notebooks* Norma Hodgson and Cyprian Blagden, eds., *The notebooks of Thomas Bennet and Henry Clements (1686–1719); with some aspects of book trade practice* (Oxford Bibliographical Society 1956)
- Black, *Cambridge University Press* M. H. Black, *Cambridge University Press, 1584–1984* (Cambridge 1984)
- Blagden, *Stationers’ Company* Cyprian Blagden, *The Stationers’ Company; a history, 1403–1959* (1960)
- Blayney, *Nicholas Okes* P. W. M. Blayney, *The texts of King Lear and their origins*. 1. *Nicholas Okes and the first quarto* (Cambridge 1982)
- BNYPL *Bulletin of New York Public Library*
- Bowes, *Catalogue* Robert Bowes, *A catalogue of books printed at or relating to the University and town of Cambridge from 1521 to 1893* (Cambridge 1894)
- Calendar of Patent Rolls *Calendar of Patent Rolls preserved in the Public Record Office* (1901–)
- Carter, *Oxford University Press* Harry Carter, *A history of the Oxford University Press*. 1. *To the year 1780* (Oxford 1975)
- Clark, *Endowments* J. W. Clark, ed., *Endowments of the University of Cambridge* (Cambridge 1904)
- CLRO Corporation of London Records Office
- Cooper, *Annals* C. H. Cooper, *Annals of Cambridge*, 5 vols. (Cambridge 1842–1908)
- CSPD *Calendar of state papers domestic*, ed. R. Lemon *et al.* (1856–)
- Darlow and Moule T. H. Darlow and H. F. Moule, *Historical catalogue of the printed editions of holy scripture in the library of the British and Foreign Bible Society*, 2 vols. (1903–11)
- DNB *Dictionary of national biography*

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- DSB* C. G. Gillispie, ed., *Dictionary of scientific biography*, 16 vols. (New York 1970–80)
- Duff E. Gordon Duff, *Fifteenth-century English books: a bibliography* (Bibliographical Society 1917)
- Duff, *Century* E. Gordon Duff, *A century of the English book trade* (Bibliographical Society 1905)
- Dyer, *Privileges* George Dyer, *The privileges of the University of Cambridge*, 2 vols. (1824)
- EHR* *English Historical Review*
- Emden, *BRUC* A. B. Emden, *A biographical register of the University of Cambridge to 1500* (Cambridge 1963)
- Emden, *BRUO 1500* A. B. Emden, *A biographical register of the University of Oxford to A.D. 1500*, 3 vols. (Oxford 1957–9)
- Emden, *BRUO 1501–1540* A. B. Emden, *A biographical register of the University of Oxford A.D. 1501–1540* (Oxford 1974)
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- GJ* *Gutenberg Jahrbuch*
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- Grace Book B*, pt i, pt ii *Grace Book B*, 1488–1544, ed. M. Bateson, 2 vols. (Cambridge 1903–5)
- Grace Book Γ* *Grace Book Γ*, 1501–42, ed. W. G. Searle and J. W. Clark (Cambridge 1908)
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- Historical MSS Commn Historical Manuscripts Commission
- Historical register* J. R. Tanner, *The historical register of the University of Cambridge... to the year 1910* (Cambridge 1917)
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- McKenzie, *Cambridge University Press* D. F. McKenzie, *The Cambridge University Press, 1696–1712; a bibliographical study*, 2 vols. (Cambridge 1966)
- McKerrow, *Devices* Ronald B. McKerrow, *Printers' & publishers' devices in England & Scotland, 1485–1640* (Bibliographical Society 1913)
- McKerrow, *Dictionary* Ronald B. McKerrow, ed., *A dictionary of printers and booksellers in England, Scotland and Ireland, and of foreign printers of English books, 1557–1640* (Bibliographical Society 1910)
- McKitterick, *Cambridge University Library* David McKitterick, *Cambridge University Library; a history. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries* (Cambridge 1986)
- Madan, *Early Oxford press* F. Madan, *The early Oxford press* (Oxford 1895)
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- Oates, ‘Congratulatory verses’ J. C. T. Oates, ‘Cambridge books of congratulatory verses, 1603–1640, and their binders’, *TCBS*, 1 (1953), pp. 395–421
- PBSA* *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*
- PCC, Wills Public Record Office, wills proved in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury
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- PRO Public Record Office
- Roberts, *History* S. C. Roberts, *A history of the Cambridge University Press, 1521–1921* (Cambridge 1921)
- SB* *Studies in Bibliography*
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- STC* A. W. Pollard and G. R. Redgrave, *A short-title catalogue of books printed in England, Scotland & Ireland, and of English books printed abroad, 1475–1640*, 2nd edn, revised and enlarged by K. F. Pantzer *et al.* 3 vols. (Bibliographical Society 1976–91)
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- TCBS* *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society*
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- Tudor royal proclamations* Paul L. Hughes and James F. Larkin, eds., *Tudor royal proclamations*, 3 vols. (New Haven 1964–9)
 University Archives Cambridge University Archives, Cambridge University Library
 VCH *Victoria history of the counties of England*
 Venn J. and J. A. Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses*. Part 1. *From the earliest times to 1751*, 4 vols. (Cambridge 1922–7)
 Venn, *Gonville and Caius* J. Venn et al., *Biographical history of Gonville and Caius College*, 1– (Cambridge 1897–)
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 Wing Donald Wing, *Short-title catalogue of books printed in England, Scotland, Ireland... and of English books printed in other countries, 1641–1700*, 2nd edn, 3 vols. (New York 1972–88)
 Worman, *Alien members* E. J. Worman *Alien members of the book-trade during the Tudor period* (Bibliographical Society 1906)

NOTE ON CURRENCY

The following may be useful to those unfamiliar with English currency before the Decimal Currency Act, 1971, when the pound was newly divided into 100 pence.

4 farthings = 1 penny (1d.)
2 halfpence = 1 penny (1d.)
12 pence = 1 shilling (1s.)
20 shillings = 1 pound (£1)
1 guinea = £1.1s.0d.

Sums of money are conventionally written, for example, as £5.13s.4d.