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978-1-107-03593-5 - Old Books, New Technologies: The Representation, Conservation and Transformation of Books since 1700

David McKitterick

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## Old Books, New Technologies

As we rely increasingly on digital resources, and libraries discard large parts of their older collections, what is our responsibility to preserve old books for the future? David McKitterick's lively and wide-ranging study explores how old books have been represented and interpreted from the eighteenth century to the present day. Conservation of these texts has taken many forms, from early methods of counterfeiting, imitation and rebinding to modern practices of microfilming, digitisation and photography. Using a comprehensive range of examples, McKitterick reveals these practices and their effects to address wider questions surrounding the value of printed books, in terms of both their content and their status as historical objects. Creating a link between historical approaches and the emerging technologies of the future, this book furthers our understanding of old books and their significance in a world of digital technology.

DAVID MCKITTERICK is Fellow and Librarian of Trinity College, Cambridge. His books include *A History of Cambridge University Press*, 3 vols. (1992–2004) and *Print, Manuscript and the Search for Order, 1450–1830* (2003). He is also a general editor of *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*.

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## Preface

Any new technology, just like any new idea, requires some understanding not just of what is new, but also of what it replaces. The current revolution in printing and publishing is no different. It offers new ways of doing things, and new ways of thinking. It offers opportunities for creativity and imagination on a scale and by routes of which we are so far scarcely aware. During the past few years there has emerged a considerable literature about the effect on conventional publishing of what is sometimes called the digital age. While we have moved on from early simplistic announcements that the book is either dead, or dying, to more considered – and better informed – assessments of an increasingly complex world, on the other hand it is perhaps not surprising that less thought has been given to the structures and details of relationships between past, present and future.

The following pages are about attitudes, and about practices. They are about those whose professions or other interests have made them responsible for the care and preservation of older printed books, about those who have sought to explain and understand their manufacture and their alteration at the hands of subsequent generations. They are about both private and public knowledge of objects which are simultaneously so familiar, as books, and yet, by their increasing age or by their monetary or other values, so apparently alien. They are about the dissemination and enhancement of public understanding. By addressing these kinds of evidence over a long period, the revolution in our reading of older books, and the ease with which we can now download – and often manipulate – texts and images, can be better comprehended.

In turn, this raises questions about how books should be valued and preserved so that future generations can understand features of the world of print that are – at present – well within living memory of most people.

In writing this book, I have been encouraged and helped by a wider than usual range of friends, colleagues and audiences in four continents. I am grateful to publishers as well as librarians, printers as well as authors,

booksellers as well as book collectors, lawyers as well as historians, journalists as well as archivists, and people from several different backgrounds well beyond academia who have shared with me some of the topics addressed in the following pages. But, as always, I have been helped most by my wife Rosamond who watched and nurtured the project as the book gradually took shape.

David McKitterick