

THE CAMBRIDGE
History of the Book in Britain
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VOLUME VI
1830–1914

The years 1830–1914 witnessed a revolution in the manufacture and use of books as great as that in the fifteenth century. Using new technology in printing, paper-making and binding, publishers worked with authors and illustrators to meet ever-growing and more varied demands from a population seeking books at all price levels. The essays by leading book historians in this volume show how books became cheap, how publishers used the magazine and newspaper markets to extend their influence, and how book ownership became universal for the first time. The fullest account ever published of the nineteenth-century revolution in printing, publishing and book-selling, this volume brings the *Cambridge History of the Book* up to a point when the world of books took on a recognisably modern form.

DAVID MCKITTERICK, FBA is Fellow and Librarian of Trinity College, Cambridge, and Honorary Professor of Historical Bibliography in the University of Cambridge. His many publications include *A History of Cambridge University Press* (three volumes, Cambridge, 1992–2004) and *Print, Manuscript and the Search for Order 1450–1830* (Cambridge, 2003). He is a past President of the Bibliographical Society and recipient of its Gold Medal.

THE CAMBRIDGE

History of the Book in Britain

The history of the book offers a distinctive form of access to the ways in which human beings have sought to give meaning to their own and others' lives. Our knowledge of the past derives mainly from texts. Landscape, architecture, sculpture, painting and the decorative arts have their stories to tell and may themselves be construed as texts; but oral tradition, manuscripts, printed books, and those other forms of inscription and incision such as maps, music and graphic images, have a power to report even more directly on human experience and the events and thoughts which shaped it.

In principle, any history of the book should help to explain how these particular texts were created, why they took the form they did, their relations with other media, especially in the twentieth century, and what influence they had on the minds and actions of those who heard, read or viewed them. Its range, too – in time, place and the great diversity of the conditions of text production, including reception – challenges any attempt to define its limits and give an account adequate to its complexity. It addresses, whether by period, country, genre or technology, widely disparate fields of enquiry, each of which demands and attracts its own forms of scholarship.

The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain, planned in seven volumes, seeks to represent much of that variety, and to encourage new work, based on knowledge of the creation, material production, dissemination and reception of texts. Inevitably its emphases will differ from volume to volume, partly because the definitions of Britain vary significantly over the centuries, partly because of the varieties of evidence extant for each period, and partly because of the present uneven state of knowledge. Tentative in so many ways as the project necessarily is, it offers the first comprehensive account of the book in Britain over one and a half millennia.

JOHN BARNARD · DAVID MCKITTERICK · I. R. WILLISON
General Editors

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Preface

This volume of the *Cambridge history of the book in Britain* both complements and is complemented by other projects, most notably those dealing with Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Of these, only the last has been published in its entirety, as a collection of essays *A nation and its books: a history of the book in Wales*.¹ The first volume of the *Oxford history of the Irish book*, dealing with the Irish book in English, 1550–1800, appeared in 2006.² The third and fourth volumes (and first to appear) of the *Edinburgh history of the book in Scotland*, covering the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, were published in 2007, shortly before these words went to the publisher.³ The existence of these projects has influenced the structure and approach of the present volume, and they should be read alongside it. Nonetheless, though all these enterprises are loosely connected both by their subject matter and by personal ties, they are emphatically independent. They share common methodologies only incidentally; they share common viewpoints still less. More importantly, they do not seek, as a group, to be comprehensive. To do so would be impractical, even overweening. In each of them, and not least in the present volume, not only have large areas of activity been ignored; it will also be plain how much is still tentative, and how much more work needs to be done even at quite fundamental levels. Given the size of the book trade in the nineteenth century, and the immense volume of evidence in the shape of printed material and manuscript documentation that has survived, readers may perhaps find occasion for some relief. Besides these other national projects, the more general *Cambridge history of libraries in Britain and Ireland*⁴ is an essential companion to the following pages.

1 Ed. Philip Henry Jones and Eiluned Rees (Aberystwyth, 1998).

2 Ed. Raymond Gillespie and Andrew Hadfield (Oxford, 2006). A further four volumes are planned.

3 Bill Bell (ed.), *Ambition and industry, 1800–1880*; David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery (eds.), *Professionalism and diversity, 1880–2000* (Edinburgh, 2007). A further two volumes are planned for previous periods.

4 Giles Mandelbrote and K. A. Manley (eds.), *The Cambridge history of libraries in Britain and Ireland*. 2. 1640–1850 (Cambridge, 2006); Alistair Black and Peter Hoare (eds.), *The Cambridge history of libraries in Britain and Ireland*. 3. 1850–2000 (Cambridge, 2006).

Preface

This volume is tentative in other respects as well. As an activity, the history of the book is still finding its feet: that is plain from the debates and position papers that appear in abundance each year.⁵ Under its generous umbrella shelter dozens of claims and approaches, some based more than others on the evidential, artefactual and archival value of books themselves. Contributors to this volume have been encouraged to found their work on the physical archival record, whether books, periodicals and newspapers, or other written, printed and visual related documentation. The wealth of surviving evidence, on a scale many times greater than for any previous period and perhaps greater than for any other country at this time, is both a strength and a difficulty. It is impossible to attain the relative coverage of earlier volumes in the *Cambridge history of the book in Britain*.

Where so much has survived, conclusions must frequently imply further questions even more than usual. Some are raised explicitly in the following pages; others by implication or even by their absence. In important and quite fundamental respects, this volume is tentative. At the most basic level, there is still no adequate bibliographical record of the output of the press in the British Isles after 1800, the closing date of the *English short title catalogue*. The *Nineteenth century short title catalogue*, which in any case covers only part of the period with which this volume is concerned, is avowedly selective, based on a small and, in important respects, unrepresentative selection of libraries. We still have no idea of the real scale of the pamphlet literature that was such a feature of nineteenth-century publishing. Excellent though it is, the *Waterloo directory* of Victorian periodicals is by no means complete. Moreover, while retrospective bibliographies are adept at describing titles and editions, they are not designed to provide details of how many copies of an edition were printed, or (often) how frequently reprints were called for, or over how long a period. For this, we rely on the business archives of printers and publishers. Not only have these survived very incompletely. Even for those that have survived, there has thus far been no concerted and systematic attempt to recover from them the quantities of books or periodicals that were manufactured. Understandably, all forays that have been made into archives for statistical purposes have been selective and unrepresentative in various ways. As a result of these two shortcomings, one concerning print and one mostly concerning manuscript, not only are we still very far off from knowing how far and in what ways society was saturated with

⁵ See among recent examples, with copious reference to previous literature, Michael Suarez, 'Historiographical problems and possibilities in book history and national histories of the book', *Studies in Bibliography* 56 (2003–4; published 2007), pp. 147–70; David L. Vander Meulen, 'How to read book history', *ibid.*, pp. 171–93.

Preface

print even of a permanent or semi-permanent kind, let alone more ephemeral materials. There is, at present, not even an agenda that elaborates the limitations and potential benefits of such archives as have survived, or how they relate to wider contexts of authorship, use and reading.

The chapter by William St Clair, that serves as an endpiece, is deliberately personal in its approach and tentative in its theme. In part, it continues discussions about his book *The reading nation in the romantic period* (2004), which has refashioned questions on periods far beyond that suggested in his title. It also calls for the collecting of a broader statistical basis, and analysis of better figures than are currently available. It implies the need for a fuller understanding of contexts and their relationships – bibliographical, topical, geographical, financial and human – than has so far been developed. It is to be hoped that this volume as a whole will contribute to that debate, and to others.

In preparing this volume, I am firstly grateful for their support, advice, encouragement and criticism to the other general editors of the *Cambridge history of the book in Britain*, John Barnard and Ian Willison. Simon Eliot brought crucial advice in shaping the volume and in the early stages of recruiting authors, and was to have been joint editor until other demands on his time made that impossible. Bill Bell generously shared with me the nineteenth-century volume of the *Edinburgh history of the book in Scotland*, while it was still in proof. This volume was given its preliminary form at a seminar held at Trinity College, Cambridge. The Leverhulme Trust provided a grant to support Alexis Weedon in a project on statistics, and some of the fruit of that work can be seen in her guides to archives and in her *Victorian publishing* (2003), referred to at many points in this volume. I have unashamedly drawn on the experiences and lessons not just of editors and contributors in other volumes in this series, but also of those involved in similar projects in other parts of the world, especially Australia, Canada, France, Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand and the United States. At the University Press, Linda Bree, Maartje Scheltens and their colleagues have brought to this volume, as they have to others in the series, a degree of friendly patience as well as skilled interest for which every contributor is grateful and for which I am profoundly so. As always, however, my wife Rosamond is the person who has lived with this volume as long as anyone. For her willingness to listen, offer suggestions and read drafts with a judicious eye, and for her continuing support of all kinds, I am more thankful by the year.

David McKitterick