

THE CAMBRIDGE
History of the Book in Britain

*
VOLUME III
1400–1557

This volume of *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain* is an overview of the century and a half between the death of Chaucer in 1400 and the printing of the *English Works* of Thomas More in 1557 – a year that also saw the incorporation of the Stationers' Company. The profound changes during that time in British social, political and religious conditions are paralleled and reflected in changing modes of the dissemination and reception of the written word. By the end of the period the comparatively restricted manuscript culture of Chaucer's day had been replaced by an ambience in which printed books were becoming the norm, resorted to much more widely and in ways much more familiar to the modern reader.

The emphasis in this collection of essays by 27 specialists is less on the materials of book production than on demand and use by readers in schools, universities and monasteries, by the secular clergy and by other professionals such as lawyers and doctors, by scholars, gentlemen and gentlewomen, by royalty, statesmen and politicians, for purposes public and private, regulatory, instructive, devotional, or simply pleasurable. Patterns of ownership are identified. Questions of supply are also addressed and patterns established of where, why and how books were written, printed, bound, acquired and passed from hand to hand. The book-trade receives special attention, with emphasis on the large part played by imports of manuscripts but especially of printed books from continental centres of culture and learning, and on links with printers in other countries, which were decisive for the development of printing and publishing in Britain.

LOTTE HELINGA retired in 1995 as Deputy Keeper in the British Library, London, and is currently Secretary of the Consortium of European Research Libraries

J. B. TRAPP was Professor of the History of the Classical Tradition and Director of the Warburg Institute, University of London

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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.

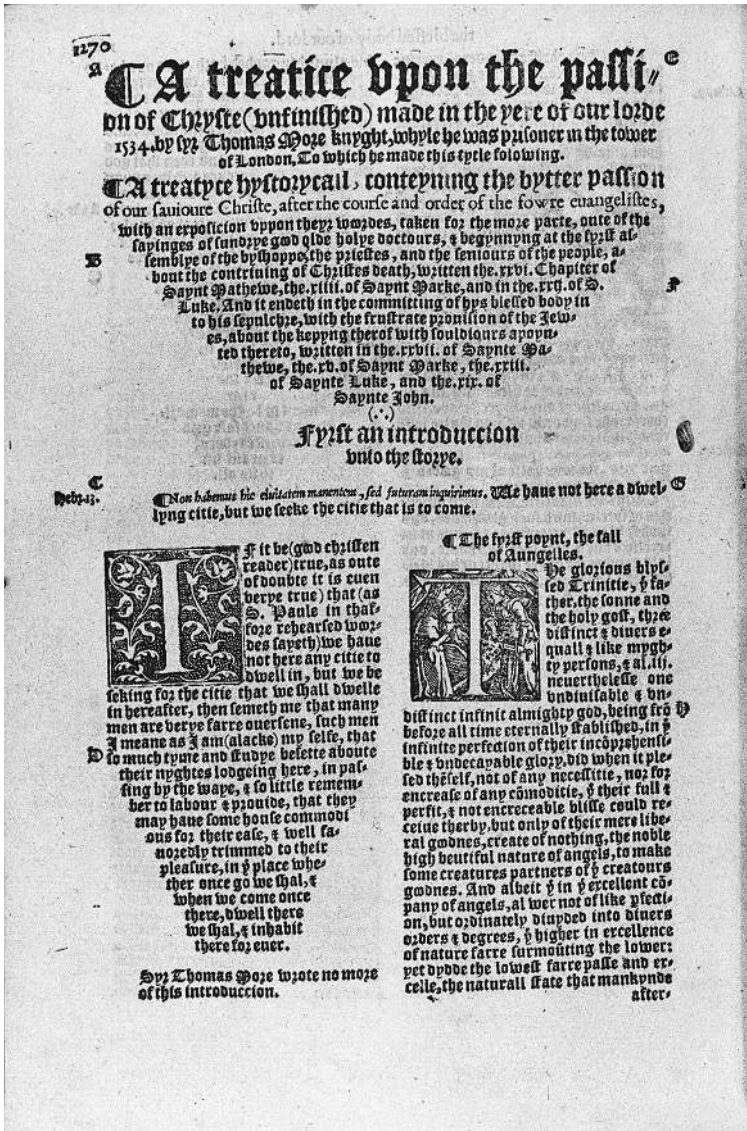
In principle, any history of the book should help to explain how these particular texts were created, why they took the forms they did, their relations with other media, especially in the twentieth century, and what influence they had on the minds and actions of those who heard, read or viewed them. 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.

D. F. MCKENZIE · D. J. MCKITTERICK · I. R. WILLISON

General Editors

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The opening of *A treatise vpon the passion* in *The Workes of Sir Thomas More*, London 1557, showing the use of black-letter, roman and italic typefaces, decorated and historiated woodcut initials and other variations in the aspect of the page.

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Preface

Thanne was there a wighte, with two brode eyen,
 Boke highte that beupere, a bold man of speche,
 ‘By Godes body’, quad this boke, ‘I wil bere witesse’.
 [Then appeared a fellow with two wide eyes, a man of
 authority, bold of speech, whose name was Book.
 ‘By God’s body’, quoth Book, ‘I will bear witness’.]

LANGLAND, *Piers Plowman*, B. XVIII, 228–30

A firm basis for a history of the book in Britain during the 150 years which saw the transition from manuscript to print is provided by a long-established and still flourishing British tradition of cataloguing and descriptive bibliography. Both manuscripts and earlier printed books have been thoroughly recorded within this tradition.

For manuscripts, a great debt is owed to M. R. James, Sir Roger Mynors, R. W. Hunt, N. R. Ker and their colleagues in previous generations and, in the present, A. I. Doyle, A. G. Watson and the editorial team of the *Corpus of British Medieval Library Catalogues*, with A. C. de la Mare – to mention no others and without forgetting the expert cataloguers in the great libraries of Britain, whose labours remain largely anonymous.

During our entire period, handwritten books were produced, imported, owned or used – often all four – by the members of every literate social category within the British Isles.¹ The context of the preservation of manuscripts, at that time in particular, was sometimes private and personal and sometimes institutional. Until the 1530s, at least, institutional preservation was chiefly monastic. What is not always clear from contemporary monastic lists, however, is which of the books in them were or had been in individual ownership.²

The record of manuscript production and dissemination in Britain

1. See especially the chapters below by Alexander, Backhouse, Baker, Bell, Boffey, Carley, Christianson, Edwards, Erler, Jones, Meale, Milsom, Stratford and Trapp.

2. Bell, below, pp. 229–54, esp. 233, 248; Doyle 1988.

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during the late Middle Ages is fuller than for the reigns of Henry VII, Henry VIII, Edward VI and Mary. The varieties of script in which English vernacular books and documents were written have been thoroughly surveyed, as have Latin documentary hands; Latin book hands rather less fully, particularly for the sixteenth century.³ Manuscripts illuminated in the British Isles during the Middle Ages have been described in a remarkable and comprehensive series of volumes.⁴ The most recently published, Kathleen L. Scott's account of later Gothic manuscripts from 1390 to 1490, is the most important for us.⁵ No similar survey yet exists for the sixteenth century.⁶

The means and processes by which the manuscripts were made get much attention in these catalogues and elsewhere, and will receive more in earlier volumes of this *History*. They have, moreover, recently been the subject of an invaluable collective volume, to which some of our collaborators contributed: *Book production and publishing in Britain 1375–1475*, edited by the late Jeremy Griffiths and D. A. Pearsall in 1989, which takes the story from late in the manuscript era to the advent of printing.⁷ This is one reason why comparatively little space is given in our volume to the actual making of manuscripts in Britain. Another is that we attempt throughout to respond to the question 'In what respect is Britain in the period different from what prevailed elsewhere or in other times?' Manuscripts were not put together in our period in ways radically different from those in use either outside the British Isles or in the period before 1400, except for a much increased use of paper rather than parchment during the fifteenth century, and still more in the sixteenth. Our concern is chiefly with the dissemination – transmission, acquisition, circulation, reception, retention and use – of what had been transcribed. This is addressed in Griffiths and Pearsall with an emphasis on native British aspects.⁸ We seek also to take into account practices in the rest of Europe, so as to give due weight to the role of production abroad for consumption at home (the reverse is so rare in our period as to call for incidental mention only).⁹ The coverage by Griffiths and Pearsall ceases with

3. Denholm-Young 1952; C. E. Wright, 1960; Hector 1966; Parkes 1969, 1991. For punctuation, see Parkes 1992b.
4. J. J. G. Alexander (ed.), *A survey of manuscripts illuminated in the British Isles*, 6 vols., London 1975–96.
5. Scott 1996; see also, e. g., the relevant sections in Pächt and Alexander 1966–73; Alexander and Temple 1985. 6. Auerbach 1954 contains some material.
7. It is referred to below as *BPPB*.
8. See in *BPPB* the section on 'Patrons, buyers and owners', by Kate Harris, Carol Meale and R. J. Lyall. 9. Alexander, Needham, Ford, Trapp below.

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the importation of printing into Britain. We have aimed throughout to bring manuscript and print closely together.¹⁰

For printed books also we have emphasized dissemination and use, bearing in mind that, if the distribution in the British Isles of such new-fangled productions to some extent took over the mechanisms existing for manuscript publication, printing itself was an import from abroad. Its early practitioners in Britain were predominantly not natives of the British Isles; indeed, soon after the first books were printed here, foreign book artificers of all kinds were encouraged by statute to take up residence; legislation favouring Englishmen was not passed until the sixteenth century was well advanced. Only a small portion of the books printed in Britain was in Latin, British books in that language being intended largely for particular occasions or purposes. Almost all were imported, whence the booksellers' and stationers' term 'Latin trade' for books from abroad.¹¹ Books printed in English left these shores comparatively seldom, and usually in special circumstances.

Of books printed in the British Isles there has existed since 1926, with a notable gain in fullness and accuracy in 1976–91, a full bibliographical record for the period from the beginning of printing to almost the mid seventeenth century. As in the case of manuscripts, all who study the period are indebted to generations of largely anonymous cataloguers in our great libraries. Particularly, however, they are indebted to the vision and the pioneering labours of A. W. Pollard and G. R. Redgrave, expanded and consolidated by their successors William A. Jackson, F. S. Ferguson and Katharine F. Pantzer.¹² For no other country is the coverage of our entire period so full.¹³

10. Cf. Bühler 1960; Härtel and Hellinga 1981; Trapp 1983; Nielsen, Borch and Sorensen 1986; *Bibliography and Civilization* 1987; Hindman 1991; Barker 1993.

11. Below, Ford, Hellinga, Trapp.

12. *A short-title catalogue of books printed in England, Scotland and Ireland, and of English books printed abroad, 1475–1640*, first compiled by A. W. Pollard and G. R. Redgrave [1926]. *Second Edition, revised and enlarged, begun by Wm. A. Jackson and F. S. Ferguson, completed by Katharine F. Pantzer*, 2 vols., London 1976–86; Vol. 111: *A printers' and publishers' index, other indexes and appendices, cumulative addenda and corrigenda*, by Katharine F. Pantzer; with a *chronological index* by Philip R. Rider, London 1991. We refer to it as *STC*.

13. A few examples will highlight both the degree of coverage enjoyed by the British Isles and the length of time it has been available. European production of books printed before 1501 has long been well recorded; see Hellinga below, pp. 65–6. For the sixteenth century, Wouter Nijhoff and M. E. Kronenberg (NK) document Netherlandish printing from 1500 to 1540 and their work is continued for later years by the automated *Short-title catalogue of books printed in the Netherlands* (STCN; in progress); printing in Denmark to 1600 is recorded by Nielsen 1919 and 1931–3; sixteenth-century printing in the German-speaking lands in *VD16* (1983–95). The British (Museum) Library's short-title catalogues (1921–90), though limited to that institution's holdings, are indispensable. They are the model for a

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Given that printed books have survived in vastly greater numbers than books written by hand, it is not surprising that we know proportionately less about ownership of them during our period. The record is nevertheless substantial, if biased towards identifiable names and towards men. Sears Jayne's impressive pioneer survey of library catalogues from the English Renaissance recorded almost 600 collections comprising 15 books or more.¹⁴ From 1521, moreover, English law required that the property of any deceased person be recorded for probate. The inventories taken for this purpose in Cambridge, edited by Elisabeth Leedham-Green, are highly instructive.¹⁵ So are the parallel Oxford inventories, in course of publication by Dr Leedham-Green, R. J. Fehrenbach and their collaborators.¹⁶ Some 30 per cent of Jayne's and the Oxford lists and almost half the Cambridge lists relate to persons who died within our period. Two-thirds of Jayne's lists are from the university sector. Women figure infrequently in Jayne and not at all in Oxford and Cambridge.¹⁷ Recently there have been valuable reconstructions of individual learned libraries, such as Andrew Perne's in Cambridge,¹⁸ or Archbishop Cranmer's.¹⁹ Recently, too, royal libraries have come under renewed scrutiny.²⁰ The data-base established by Margaret Lane Ford in connection with this volume is the first attempt to complement such archival evidence with the record of extant books for which a British provenance in our period is known or can be established.²¹

One earlier contribution to the history of the book in Britain is as relevant to us for the era of printing as was the volume of Griffiths and Pearsall for the manuscript age. H. S. Bennett's *English books and their readers 1475–1557* of 1952, taking up the story after the scribal period, deals with it primarily from the point of view of the circulation, reception and use in England of books printed in England. Bennett devotes only limited space to ownership and retention in libraries and does not consider the evidence of annotation by readers.²²

Footnote 13 (*cont.*)

similar catalogue of books in the National Library of Scotland (1970), as well as for H. M. Adams's catalogue of Cambridge holdings (1967). For printing in Paris in the early decades of the sixteenth century, the work of the late Brigitte Moreau is basic, as is that of Baudrier for Lyons. The Hand Press Book Database of the Consortium of European Research Libraries will provide an overview of books printed before 1830 in European libraries.

14. Jayne 1956–83. 15. Leedham-Green 1986. 16. *PLRE*.

17. See below, especially Bell, Erlor, Ford, Meale and Boffey.

18. Collinson, McKitterick and Leedham-Green 1991. 19. Selwyn 1996.

20. See below, Backhouse, Carley and Stratford; Birrell 1987a.

21. Ford, below, pp. 179–201; see also Alston 1994, which covers a greater chronological span in less detail. 22. Cf. below, pp. 41–2; and Rosenthal 1997.

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The book-trade's importance as mediator between author and owner or reader and so as an important indicator in intellectual history has long been recognized. Though the system of patronage survived long beyond our period, in the course of the fifteenth century production came to be comparatively less affected by it, and more speculative, anticipating and even creating demand. This was shown in a seminal study by A. I. Doyle and M. B. Parkes.²³ It indicates an increase in the reading public before the introduction of printing made books more readily available. The successive forms of organization and regulation of the trade reveal pressures and conflicts of interest between protectionism and professional control and the need for expansion in response to rising demand, and between censorship by Church or state on the one hand and the flow of communication on the other. A decisive change took place when, in 1403, a fraternity of London artisans was first granted ordinances of incorporation. From then on, the trade created an identity for itself among the many companies and other organizations in London. London was to dominate other centres in Britain for centuries to come. Early studies by E. Gordon Duff and Graham Pollard and more recent investigations by C. Paul Christianson charted these developments.²⁴ Pollard's work covered the entire period from 1400 to the incorporation of the Stationers' Company in 1557. Duff concentrated rather on the stationers and printers, and the foreign agents, from 1475. In more recent years their conception of the pivotal function of the trade has been somewhat obscured by concentration on book production. The business records of printers, stationers and booksellers from 1510 or thereabouts in London,²⁵ 1520 in Oxford,²⁶ and the 1520s, 1530s and early 1540s in Cambridge,²⁷ give much information about what could be and what was bought during that time. Correlation between the evidence of booksellers' lists and that of inventories, however, is less close than might be wished.²⁸

It will be obvious that our approach owes much to the work of Lucien Febvre, Henri-Jean Martin and Roger Chartier.²⁹ Implicit in it is an insistence on the bibliographical record of book production, in manuscript

23. Doyle and Parkes 1978.

24. For example Duff 1905; G. Pollard, 1937; Christianson 1990 and below; and cf. G. J. Gray, 1904.

25. Plomer 1909; Duff 1907.

26. Madan and Bradshaw 1885–90.

27. Leedham-Green, Rhodes and Stubbings 1992; Leedham-Green 1986, no. 25 (Pilgrim).

28. For the book-trade, see especially the section on 'Technique and trade' below, pp. 47–201,

but also Baker, Leedham-Green and Trapp.

29. Febvre and Martin 1958–76; H. J. Martin, Chartier and Vivet 1982; H. J. Martin 1987;

Aquilon and Martin 1988; Bödeker 1995; Darnton 1980, 1986. Chaytor 1945 may still be

read with profit.

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and in print, particularly in the British Isles, as our most tangible evidence. In spite of its comprehensiveness as a record of what is extant, however, this can only be fragmentary in terms of what was actually produced. The rarity of many items implies that evidence for the existence of many manuscripts and printed editions has vanished. Printed materials, and especially printed materials as unspectacular as most English books of the period, seem not to have been highly valued in their day, but only when they became collectors' objects in the eighteenth century. They were particularly vulnerable to loss or defacement, whether from having been relegated to a remote corner of a library or, in an ordinary household, subject to the scribbles of children.

It is worth looking further at the nature of the record. Full though it is, it leaves a great many questions unconsidered, unanswered, or at least not answered with the scope, the fullness of detail or the definitiveness that one might wish. Book-trade archives, for example, revealing the mechanisms by which books came into the country, seldom specifically identify particular texts or editions. Inventories, giving a more or less complete and coherent account of books owned by an individual or an institution, usually specify both author and text, but seldom the precise edition, which would give a clue to place of writing, printing or acquisition. Individual copies in early British ownership give certainty as to the edition, though more often than not the copy itself has been separated from copies of other books once the property of an individual or even institutional owner. All these details must be painstakingly established before an analysis of the interaction of authorship, manufacture, trading, possession and use can produce patterns significant for intellectual and cultural history.

If we should therefore be cautious in coming to absolute conclusions from the record of production as it stands, the positive information to be derived from it remains valid: a text was chosen for reproduction, at a particular time, by a particular scribe or printer, and then became the property of an individual, a family or an institution, to be read or merely retained. To elaborate our knowledge of what happened to books, and as a result of them, after they left the scriptorium or printing house, we must turn to less direct and more elusive sources.

In spite of what has been said above, evidence for the traffic in books is relatively sparse. Its records provide less than the full picture for England. For Scotland, Wales and Ireland in our period it hardly exists, book ownership being there much more a matter of individual initiative.

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Records for the trade in books actually printed in the British Isles are few and far between, but the surviving documents reflect the great numbers of books printed on the Continent and imported.³⁰ These records are invaluable, nevertheless, since they reveal the processes of the trade's operation: the relations of printers with wholesalers or retailers, wholesale imports, stationers' shops, even advertisements.

For ownership, we have the inventories, individual and institutional. Discrepancy between them and what exists at the present day will again alert us to the fragmentary nature of survival, large as the heritage in book form may seem when compared to other artefacts. The inventories' evidence needs always to be supplemented from examination of what is still accessible, in early or in later collections. Only surviving copies give precise proof of identity. That is why a special effort has been made in connection with this volume to establish where individual books were located during the period we cover, as far as this may be inferred from the identification of owners.³¹ For this a variety of evidence has been brought to bear: the names of identifiable or unidentifiable but unmistakably English or Scots owners, annotations, handwriting, styles of illumination (most spectacularly, if rather infrequently, for copies of the Gutenberg Bible and other early Mainz printings).³² Bindings, often to be connected with stationers in known locations, provide a convincing body of evidence for the presence of books in the British Isles, and may also indicate the kind of use to which they were put.³³

We are aware that our attempt to treat the book in the British Isles as it reflects the intellectual and cultural life of England and, to a much lesser extent, of Scotland falls short of completeness. We hope, however, that the series of probes made by our contributors gives an indication of the state of the question on the most important matters, and that they will set other enquiries in train. Each contributor has made use of the wealth of information available to subject specialists of the period, whatever the particular area of their specialism. We owe them a great debt for having put their knowledge at the disposal of our readers and ourselves. We thank them for co-operation and for a patience in which they have been matched by our general editors, by the Leverhulme Trust as sponsors of the collaborative seven-volume *History of the Book in Britain*, and by the Cambridge University Press as publishers. Without the initiative of

30. Christianson, Needham, Ford below. 31. See especially Ford below, pp. 180–3.
 32. E.g. König 1983; Alexander below, pp. 47–64; Hellinga below, p. 100.
 33. Foot below.

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the late Professor McKenzie, Dr McKitterick and Mr Willison, this project would never have been conceived; without the Leverhulme Trust's generous financial support, and that of the Pilgrim Trust, it could not have been begun, much less brought to its present state; and without the good will of the Cambridge University Press, it could not have been advanced to the point of publication.

More specifically, we thank our respective former institutions, the British Library and the Warburg Institute of the University of London, not least for allowing us to maintain, after retirement, a formal connection with them which ensured continued privileged access to their collections. We are also indebted to both our institutions for bearing, with the help of a conference grant from the British Academy, and the Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica of Amsterdam, and others from the Foundation for Intellectual History and the Wellcome Trust, the expense of the planning colloquium for our volume. To our colleagues we are grateful for assistance as needed and for forbearance. If we name only a very few, it is not from want of appreciation. We offer similar general but heartfelt thanks to librarians, colleagues and friends in other libraries and institutions on both sides of the Atlantic. It would be wrong, however, not to express thanks for particular help to M. J. Jannetta and Elizabeth McGrath.

This determined restraint in naming must not be allowed to apply to five persons, to whom we are especially indebted: Nicolas Barker read, and commented trenchantly and valuably on, the whole volume, as well as earlier acting as encourager and advocate; Kristian Jensen read and commented on a number of chapters; Kimberley Hart unflinchingly bore the labour of transferring the text, in many drafts, to floppy disk; and Caroline Bundy was our editor and Leigh Mueller our copy-editor at Cambridge University Press. We should have been lost without them.