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978-1-108-00106-9 - Specimens of Printing Types and Ornaments: At the University Press, Cambridge

John Willis Clark

Frontmatter

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Specimens of Printing Types and Ornaments

First published in 1901, this is a rich repository of typefaces (including English, Greek, Latin, Sanskrit, Arabic, Hebrew and Cyrillic), ornaments, borders and various decorative devices used in books printed at the University Press, Cambridge, until 1900. Highlights of the compilation include a wide range of historical typefaces (including Caslon, Marr, Figgins, Blake, and Miller & Richards), stylish borders, corners and head and tail pieces, university and college shields, and a detailed catalogue of Egyptian hieroglyphs. It also contains sections on accented letters and signs, 'poster founts' and ornately styled initial letters. Prefaced with a brief 'Historical Sketch' by J. W. Clark, a noted Cambridge academic and antiquarian, Specimens is a valuable archive of the craft of lettering and design before the advent of the digital age that will delight bibliophiles, typographers and collectors.

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John Willis Clark

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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Cambridge University Press

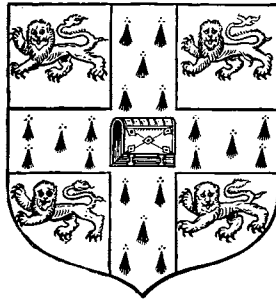
978-1-108-00106-9 - Specimens of Printing Types and Ornaments: At the University Press, Cambridge

John Willis Clark

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

SPECIMENS OF
PRINTING TYPES
AND
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1901

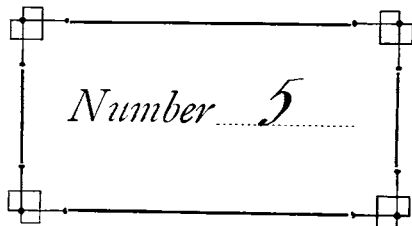
Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00106-9 - Specimens of Printing Types and Ornaments: At the University Press, Cambridge

John Willis Clark

Frontmatter

[More information](#)



Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00106-9 - Specimens of Printing Types and Ornaments: At the University Press, Cambridge

John Willis Clark

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

HISTORICAL SKETCH OF THE CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS



O a centre of National Education, such as the University of Cambridge has always been, a Printing-press is as indispensable as a Library; and recent researches have shewn that printers, more or less closely connected with the University, have been established in Cambridge from very ancient times. The earliest of these, so far as we know, is JOHN SIBERCH, the friend of ERASMUS, who printed books at Cambridge in 1521 and 1522. Eight volumes only are recorded as the products of his press; but one of these claims to be the first book printed in England in which Greek characters occur.

We do not know why SIBERCH ceased to print, or whether his business was taken up by a successor. One thing, however, is certain. The ruling party in the University were determined to keep the production and sale of books so far as possible in their own hands; for in 1529 we find them petitioning Cardinal WOLSEY that “for the suppression of error” there should be three booksellers only allowed in Cambridge, who should be sworn not to bring in or sell any book which had not first been approved by the censors of books in the University. This petition, evidently actuated more by a desire to exclude heresy than to promote learning, did not take effect till 1534, when KING HENRY THE EIGHTH empowered the University to appoint “three stationers or printers or sellers of books” who might print all manner of books approved by the Chancellor, or his vicegerent, or three doctors.

This royal grant no doubt marks the addition of a Printing-press to the educational appliances of the University. But it became, in practice, no more than a historical fact, without consequences. The stationers were regularly appointed, but they had no place to work in; while the strictness of the censorship paralyzed the efforts of the authors who might have supplied them with material. Books were sold at Cambridge, but none were produced there for more than half a century.

Nor did matters improve when the University, in 1583, appointed THOMAS THOMAS, a learned man, and Fellow of King's College, to be University Printer. He set up a press, and began to print a theological treatise by an author of unquestionable orthodoxy, but suddenly the agents of the Stationers' Company, then newly incorporated, appeared upon the scene, seized the press, the plant, and all the printed sheets on which they could lay hands. A bitter controversy ensued, which lasted, with varying success, till the middle of the Commonwealth. Then the University, emboldened by the turn which public affairs had taken, determined to make another effort to obtain the free use of their Press. A new departure was made in 1655, by the appointment of JOHN FIELD, "printer to the parliament." He had a press in London, which he continued to direct even after his appointment in Cambridge. FIELD'S merits as a printer may not have been great, but the selection of such a man is important as shewing a determination on the part of the University to put their affairs into the hands of a professional, rather than into those of an amateur. Every chance of success was given to FIELD. A lease of a suitable site opposite Queens' College was obtained, on which he built a Printing-house. It is worth noting that this building, with additions, remained in use as the Printing-office of the University until 1827.

These efforts, though well-intentioned, had but little stability; for in less than half a century afterwards we find a thorough renovation of the Press in full progress, stimulated and directed by the energy of Dr RICHARD BENTLEY. An addition was made to the buildings, new presses were procured, and new types were imported from Holland. The cost of these improvements was defrayed by a subscription, promoted, if not originated, by the

Historical Sketch

v

or soon afterwards, the University undertook to manage the Press for itself, by the appointment of a body of Curators, selected from the Heads of Colleges and Members of the Senate. Henceforward every book printed was sanctioned directly by them; they determined the price per sheet, and among other details appointed a competent person to correct the printed proofs of each work undertaken. The scheme thus inaugurated was no doubt successful, up to a certain point; the works issued, either by the University itself, or by the booksellers allowed to use the Press, were of permanent value; and the credit of the University, as a patron of literature, was greatly advanced. But the institution was badly managed from a pecuniary point of view, and a heavy deficit ensued. Various expedients were resorted to from time to time; but no real improvement resulted until the present permanent Syndicate of the Press was appointed in 1782.

The University Press of to-day, with its system of self-government, and consequent prosperity, may date its existence from 1782. The present buildings were begun soon afterwards, but twenty years before part of the site had been secured on which a warehouse was built in 1786. A large section of the present buildings dates from 1827; but the first stone of the building next Trumpington Street was not laid until 1831. The funds were, to a considerable extent, provided by the Committee appointed to erect a statue in London to the memory of Mr PITT. When it was found that the receipts would largely exceed the expenses, it was agreed to offer the surplus to the University which had already honoured Mr PITT by a statue in the Senate House and a Scholarship bearing his name, for the enlargement of the Press. The name of PITT, originally restricted to the building then erected, is now commonly applied to the whole Press.

J. W. CLARK.

June, 1901

Cambridge University Press

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John Willis Clark

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CONTENTS

OLD FACE SERIES	1-7
OLD STYLE SERIES	8-14
MODERN FACE SERIES	15-34
ACCENTED LETTERS, SIGNS, &c.	35-43
DISPLAY FOUNTS, &c.	44-65
SPECIAL FIGURE FOUNTS	66-68
SAXONS AND DOMESDAYS	69
FOREIGN FOUNTS	70-85
TYPE WRITER	86
MUSIC	87
POSTER FOUNTS	88-95
HEAD & TAIL PIECES, ARMS, SHIELDS, MISCELLANEOUS ORNAMENTS, &c.	97-140
BORDERS AND CORNERS	141-144
INITIAL LETTERS	145-159
EGYPTIAN HIEROGLYPHICS	(at end) i., 1-23
APPENDIX	(at end) 1-4

A ccented Letters, Signs, &c.	35-43	Beza Latin	78
Aldine Italic	52	Black	63-65
Anglo Saxon	64	„ Augustan	64
Antique	44-48	„ Tudor	65
„ Condensed	47	„ (with German Combi- nations)	65
„ Old Style	53	Bold Latin Condensed	55
„ Skeleton	48	Borders and Corners	141-144
„ Special Figures and Superior Figures	67-68	Braces	140
Arabic	82-84	C ambridge Borough Arms	133
Armenian	85	Cambridge University Arms	121-122
Arms	120-133	Caxton	64
„ Borough of Cambridge	133	Centre Face Figures (Special) Modern Face	67
„ Miscellaneous	133	Centre Face Figures (Special) Old Style	66
„ Regius Professors'	123-125	Checks	139
„ Royal	120	Classic	56
„ University of Cambridge	121-122	College & University Shields, &c.	125-132
Athenian	56	Combination Borders	141
Augustan Black	64	Commercial Italic	52
B engali	85		
Beza Greek	78		

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00106-9 - Specimens of Printing Types and Ornaments: At the University Press, Cambridge

John Willis Clark

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Contents

vii

Compressed Latin	58	Greek Inscription	76-77
Condensed Antique	47	„ Slanting Capitals	71
„ „ Special Figures	68	„ Superior Capitals	76
„ De Vinne (<i>Appendix</i>) 2-3		„ Two Line Capitals	70
„ Latin (Bold)	55	„ Uncial	77
„ Old English	64	Grotesque	49-51
„ Sans Serif	51	„ Old Style	53
„ „ Italic	52	„ Special Figures	68
„ Two Line Modern Face 62-63		H air Line	63
„ „ Old Style	58	Hair Spaced Greek	75
Coptic	80	Head Pieces	97-111
Corners and Borders	141-144	Hebrew	81-82
Crosses	138	„ Rabbinic	82
D e Vinne	54	Hieroglyphics, Egyptian (<i>See</i> <i>Catalogue at end</i>) i. & 1-2,3	
„ Condensed (<i>Appendix</i>) 2-3		I nitial Letters	145-159
„ Italic	3	Inscription Greek	76-77
Domesday	69	Ionic Special Figures	68
E gyptian	46	Italic Aldine	52
„ Hieroglyphics (<i>See</i> <i>Catalogue at end</i>) i. & 1-2,3		„ Commercial	52
„ Special Figures	68	„ De Vinne (<i>Appendix</i>) 3	
Elongated Latin	55	„ Sans Serif Condensed	52
„ Sans Serif	51	„ Two Line Old Style	59
Estrangelo Syriac	84	J acobite Syriac	84
Ethiopic	80	L atin	56, 58
Expanded Latin	56	„ Beza	78
„ Skeleton	56	„ Compressed	58
F at Face Greek	76	„ Condensed (Bold)	55
Figures (Special)	66-68	„ Elongated	55
„ „ Antique	67	„ Expanded	56
„ „ Grotesque	68	„ Two Line	58
„ „ Ionic	68	Legal Seals	139
„ „ Modern Centre Face	67	M altese Crosses	138
„ „ Old	66	Miscellaneous Arms	133
„ „ Old Style	66	„ Ornaments	134-138
„ „ Old Style Antique	67	„ Shields	129-132
„ „ Old Style Antique Superiors	67	Missal	64
„ „ Old Style Centre Face	66	Modern Centre Face Figures	67
„ „ Old Style Superiors	67	Modern Face Series	15-34
Flemish Old Style	57	Modern Face Two Line	59-63
French Dashes	140	Music	87
G erman	79	N estorian Syriac	84
Gothic (<i>Appendix</i>) 1		O ld English Condensed	64
Greek	70-78	Old Face Series	1-7
„ Beza	78	Old Special Figures	66
„ Fat Face	76	Old Style Series	8-14
„ Hair Spaced	75		

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00106-9 - Specimens of Printing Types and Ornaments: At the University Press, Cambridge

John Willis Clark

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

viii

Contents

Old Style Antique	53	Sans Serif Condensed Italic	52
„ „ Special Figures	67	„ „ Elongated	51
„ „ Superior Figures	67	Sanskrit	85
„ Centre Face Figures	66	Saxons	69
„ Condensed Two Line	58	Seals, Legal	139
„ Flemish	57	Shields, College & Miscellaneous	127-132
„ Grotesque	53	„ University	125-126
„ Special Figures	66	Signs, Accented Letters, &c.	35-43
„ St Bride	57	Skeleton Antique	48
„ Superior Figures	67	„ Expanded	56
„ Two Line	58-59	Slanting Greek Capitals	71
„ „ Condensed	58	Special Figures	66-68
„ „ Italic	59	St Bride Old Style	57
Ornamental Dashes	140	Superior Figures, Old Style	67
Ornaments, Miscellaneous	134-138	„ Greek Capitals	76
P oster Founts	88-95	Syriac, Estrangelo	84
Antique	89, 91	„ Jacobite	84
„ Condensed	88-90	„ Nestorian	84
Bold Latin Condensed	92	T ail Pieces	112-119
Condensed Sans Serif	93	Tudor Black	65
Elongated	94	Two Line Greek Capitals	70
Figures	95	„ Latin	58
Grotesque	93	„ Modern	59-63
Roman Condensed	94	„ Modern Condensed	62-63
Sans Serif Italic	92	„ Old Style	58-59
R abbinic Hebrew	82	„ Old Style Italic	59
Regius Professors' Arms	123-125	Type Writer	86
Royal Arms	120	U ncial Greek	77
Russian	80	University Arms	121-122
S amaritan	80-81	„ and College Shields	125-132
Sans Serif Condensed	51	V enetian Text	(Appendix) 4

