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John Jackson and William Andrew Chatto

Frontmatter

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### **Treatise on Wood Engraving, Historical and Practical**

A *Treatise on Wood Engraving, Historical and Practical* (1839), combines the practical knowledge of an engraver with the critical inquiry of an historian. Compiled and edited by William Andrew Chatto, an established author with an interest in woodcuts, the book was originally conceived by the wood-engraver John Jackson, who provided the book's more than three hundred engravings. Roughly three quarters of the *Treatise* is concerned with the historical evolution of engraving, from the Egyptian hieroglyph stamps held at the British Museum through the masterful works of Albrecht Dürer to the decline and reinvigoration of the art in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Practical analysis permeates the text as a whole, with the final section explaining more fully how a block is chosen, cut, and even repaired. The book is therefore of interest to art historians, historians of the book, and even artist practitioners interested in nineteenth-century methods.

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

# Treatise on Wood Engraving, Historical and Practical

*With Upwards of Three Hundred Illustrations,  
Engraved on Wood*

JOHN JACKSON  
WILLIAM ANDREW CHATTO



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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

A T R E A T I S E

ON

W O O D E N G R A V I N G,

HISTORICAL AND PRACTICAL.

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WITH UPWARDS OF THREE HUNDRED ILLUSTRATIONS,  
ENGRAVED ON WOOD,  
BY JOHN JACKSON.

LONDON:  
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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## P R E F A C E.

I FEEL it my duty to submit to the public a few remarks, introductory to the Preface, which bears the signature of Mr. Chatto.

As my attention has been more readily directed to matters connected with my own profession than any other, it is not surprising that I should find almost a total absence of practical knowledge in all English authors who have written the early history of wood engraving. From the first occasion on which my attention was directed to the subject, to the present time, I have had frequent occasion to regret, that the early history and practice of the art were not to be found in any book in the English language. In the most expensive works of this description the process itself is not even correctly described, so that the reader—supposing him to be unacquainted with the subject—is obliged to follow the author in comparative darkness. It has not been without reason I have come to the conclusion, that, if the *practice*, as well as the *history* of wood engraving, were *better understood*, we should not have so many speculative opinions put forth by almost all writers on the subject, taking on trust what has been previously written, without giving themselves the trouble to examine and form an opinion of their own. Both with a view to amuse and improve myself as a wood engraver, I had long been in the habit of studying such productions of the old masters as came within my reach, and could not help noting the simple mistakes that many authors made in consequence of their knowing nothing of the practice. The farther I prosecuted the inquiry, the more interesting it became; every additional piece of information strengthening my first opinion, that, “if the *practice*, as

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00915-7 - Treatise on Wood Engraving, Historical and Practical  
John Jackson and William Andrew Chatto

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

iv

## PREFACE.

well as the *history* of wood engraving, were *better understood*," we should not have so many erroneous statements respecting both the history and capabilities of the art. At length, I determined upon engraving at my leisure hours a fac-simile of anything I thought worth preserving. For some time I continued to pursue this course, reading such English authors as have written on the origin and early history of wood engraving, and making memoranda, without proposing to myself any particular plan. It was not until I had proceeded thus far that I stopped to consider whether the information I had gleaned could not be applied to some specific purpose. My plan, at this time, was to give a short introductory history to precede the practice of the art, which I proposed should form the principal feature in the Work. At this period, I was fortunate in procuring the able assistance of Mr. W. A. Chatto, with whom I have examined every work that called for the exercise of practical knowledge. This naturally anticipated much that had been reserved for the practice, and has, in some degree, extended the historical portion beyond what I had originally contemplated; although, I trust, the reader will have no occasion to regret such a deviation from the original plan, or that it has not been *written* by myself. The number and variety of the subjects it has been found necessary to introduce, rendered it a task of some difficulty to preserve the characteristics of each individual master, varying as they do in the style of execution. It only remains for me to add, that, although I had the hardihood to venture upon such an undertaking, it was not without a hope that the history of the art, with an account of the practice, illustrated with numerous wood engravings, would be looked upon with indulgence from one who only professed to give a fac-simile of whatever appeared worthy of notice, with opinions founded on a practical knowledge of the art.

JOHN JACKSON.

London, 15th December 1838.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00915-7 - Treatise on Wood Engraving, Historical and Practical

John Jackson and William Andrew Chatto

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## PREFACE.

v

---

THOUGH several English authors have, in modern times, written on the origin and early history of wood engraving, yet no one has hitherto given, in a distinct work, a connected account of its progress from the earliest period to the present time; and no one, however confidently he may have expressed his opinion on the subject, appears to have thought it necessary to make himself acquainted with the practice of the art. The antiquity and early history of wood engraving appear to have been considered as themes which allowed of great scope for speculation, and required no practical knowledge of the art. It is from this cause that we find so many erroneous statements in almost every modern dissertation on wood engraving. Had the writers ever thought of appealing to a person practically acquainted with the art, whose early productions they professed to give some account of, their conjectures might, in many instances, have been spared; and had they, in matters requiring research, taken the pains to examine and judge for themselves, instead of adopting the opinions of others, they would have discovered that a considerable portion of what they thus took on trust, was not in accordance with facts.

As the antiquity and early history of wood engraving form a considerable portion of two expensive works which profess to give some account of the art, it has been thought that such a work as the present, combining the history with the practice of the art, and with numerous cuts illustrative of its progress, decline, and revival, might not be unfavourably received.

In the first chapter an attempt is made to trace the principle of wood engraving from the earliest authentic period; and to prove, by a continuous series of facts, that the art, when first applied to the impression of pictorial subjects on paper, about the beginning of the fifteenth century, was not so much an original



Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00915-7 - Treatise on Wood Engraving, Historical and Practical  
John Jackson and William Andrew Chatto

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

invention, as the extension of a principle which had long been known and practically applied.

The second chapter contains an account of the progress of the art as exemplified in the earliest known single cuts, and in the block-books which preceded the invention of typography. In this chapter there is also an account of the *Speculum Salvationis*, which has been ascribed to Laurence Coster by Hadrian Junius, Scriverius, Meerman, and others, and which has frequently been described as an early block-book executed previous to 1440. A close examination of two Latin editions of the book has, however, convinced me, that in the earliest the text is entirely printed from moveable types, and that in the other—supposed by Meerman to be the earliest, and to afford proofs of the progress of Coster's invention,—those portions of the text which are printed from wood-blocks have been copied from the corresponding portions of the earlier edition with the text printed entirely from moveable types. Fournier was the first who discovered that one of the Latin editions was printed partly from types and partly from wood-blocks; and the credit of showing, from certain imperfections in the cuts, that this edition was subsequent to the other with the text printed entirely from types, is due to the late Mr. Ottley.

As typography, or printing from moveable types, was unquestionably suggested by the earliest block-books with the text engraved on wood, the third chapter is devoted to an examination of the claims of Gutemberg and Coster to the honour of this invention. In the investigation of the evidence which has been produced in the behalf of each, the writer has endeavoured to divest his mind of all bias, and to decide according to facts, without reference to the opinions of either party. He has had no theory to support; and has neither a partiality for Mentz, nor a dislike to Harlem.—It perhaps may not be unnecessary to mention here, that the cuts of arms from the *History of the Virgin*, given at pages 96 and 97, were engraved before the writer had seen Koning's work on the *Invention of Printing*,

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00915-7 - Treatise on Wood Engraving, Historical and Practical

John Jackson and William Andrew Chatto

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## PREFACE.

vii

Harlem, 1816, where they are also copied, and several of them assigned to Hannau, Burgundy, Brabant, Utrecht, and Leyden, and to certain Flemish noblemen, whose names are not mentioned. It is not improbable that, like the two rash Knights in the fable, we may have seen the shields on opposite sides; — the bearings may be common to states and families, both of Germany and the Netherlands.

The fourth chapter contains an account of wood engraving in connexion with the press, from the establishment of typography to the latter end of the fifteenth century. The fifth chapter comprehends the period in which Albert Durer flourished, — that is, from about 1498 to 1528. The sixth contains a notice of the principal wood-cuts designed by Holbein, with an account of the extension and improvement of the art in the sixteenth century, and of its subsequent decline. In the seventh chapter the history of the art is brought down from the commencement of the eighteenth century to the present time.

The eighth chapter contains an account of the practice of the art, with remarks on metallic relief engraving, and the best mode of printing wood-cuts. As no detailed account of the practice of wood engraving has hitherto been published in England, it is presumed that the information afforded by this part of the Work will not only be interesting to amateurs of the art, but useful to those who are professionally connected with it.

It is but justice to Mr. Jackson to add, that the Work was commenced by him at his sole risk; that most of the subjects are of his selection; and that nearly all of them were engraved, and that a great part of the Work was written, before he thought of applying to a publisher. The credit of commencing the Work, and of illustrating it so profusely, regardless of expense, is unquestionably due to him.

W. A. CHATTO.

London, 5th December 1838.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00915-7 - Treatise on Wood Engraving, Historical and Practical  
John Jackson and William Andrew Chatto

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

## CHAPTER I.

## ANTIQUITY OF ENGRAVING, 1—51.

	PAGE
Initial letter A,—an ancient Greek <i>scriving</i> on a tablet of wood, drawn by W. Harvey . . . . .	1
View of a rolling-press, on wood and on copper, showing the difference between a wood-cut and a copper-plate engraving when both are printed in the same manner . . . . .	5
Back and front view of an ancient Egyptian brick-stamp . . . . .	7
Copy of an impression on a Babylonian brick . . . . .	9
Roman stamp, in relief . . . . .	10
Roman stamps, in intaglio . . . . .	12
Monogram of Theodoric, king of the Ostrogoths . . . . .	16
Monogram of Charlemagne . . . . .	17
Gothic marks and monograms . . . . .	19
Characters on Gothic coins . . . . .	20
Mark of an Italian notary, 1236 . . . . .	20
Marks of German notaries, 1345—1521 . . . . .	21
English Merchants'-marks of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries . . . . .	22
Tail-piece, illustrative of the antiquity of engraving,—Babylonian brick, Roman earthen-ware, Roman stamp, and a roll with the mark of the German Emperor Otho in the corner . . . . .	51

## CHAPTER II.

## PROGRESS OF WOOD ENGRAVING, 52—144.

Initial letter F, from an old book containing an alphabet of similar letters, engraved on wood, formerly belonging to Sir George Beaumont . . . . .	52
St. Christopher, with the date 1423, from a cut in the possession of Earl Spencer . . . . .	60
The Annunciation, from a cut probably of the same period, in the possession of Earl Spencer . . . . .	64
St. Bridget, from an old cut in the possession of Earl Spencer . . . . .	66
Shields from the Apocalypse, or History of St. John, an old block-book . . . . .	82
St. John preaching to the infidels, and baptising Drusiana, from the same book . . . . .	83
The death of the Two Witnesses, and the miracles of Antichrist, from the same book . . . . .	85

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00915-7 - Treatise on Wood Engraving, Historical and Practical  
John Jackson and William Andrew Chatto

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

X

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

	PAGE
Group from the History of the Virgin, an old block-book . . . . .	89
Copy of a page of the same book . . . . .	90
Figures and a shield of arms, from the same book . . . . .	94
Shields of arms, from the same book . . . . .	96, 97
Copy of the first page of the Poor Preachers' Bible, an old block-book	107
Heads from the same book . . . . .	109
Christ tempted, a fac-simile of one of the compartments in the first page of the same book . . . . .	110
Adam and Eve eating of the forbidden fruit, from the same book . . . . .	112
Esau selling his birth-right, ditto . . . . .	113
Heads, ditto . . . . .	114
First cut in the <i>Speculum Salvationis</i> , which has generally, but erroneously, been described as a block-book, as the text in the first edition is printed with types . . . . .	119
Fall of Lucifer, a fac-simile of one of the compartments of the preceding	120
The Creation of Eve, a fac-simile of the second compartment of the same	121
Paper-mark in the Alphabet of large letters composed of figures, formerly belonging to Sir George Beaumont . . . . .	132
Letter K, from the same book . . . . .	135
Letter L, ditto . . . . .	136
Letter Z, ditto . . . . .	137
Flowered ornament, ditto . . . . .	138
Cut from the <i>Ars Memorandi</i> , an old block-book . . . . .	141
Tail-piece, illustrative of the progress of wood engraving,—old blocks of religious subjects, cards, graver, dauber, roller, used in taking impressions by means of friction, brushes and pot of colour used in colouring old cuts by means of a stencil . . . . .	144

## CHAPTER III.

## THE INVENTION OF TYPOGRAPHY, 145—200.

Initial letter B, from a manuscript life of St. Birinus, of the twelfth century,	145
Tail-piece,—portraits of Gutemberg, Faust, and Scheffer . . . . .	200

## CHAPTER IV.

## WOOD ENGRAVING IN CONNECTION WITH THE PRESS, 201—278.

Initial letter C, from Faust and Scheffer's Psalter . . . . .	201
Apes, from a book of Fables printed at Bamberg by Albert Pfister, 1461	209
Heads, from an edition of the Poor Preachers' Bible, printed by Pfister	216
Christ and his Disciples, from the same . . . . .	217
Joseph making himself known to his Brethren, from the same . . . . .	217
The Prodigal Son's return, from the same . . . . .	218
The Creation of Animals, from <i>Meditationes Joannis de Turre-cremata</i> , printed at Rome, 1467 . . . . .	226
A bomb-shell and a man shooting from a kind of hand-gun, from <i>Valturius</i> <i>de Re Militari</i> , printed at Verona, 1472 . . . . .	229
A man shooting from a cross-bow, from the same . . . . .	230

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00915-7 - Treatise on Wood Engraving, Historical and Practical  
John Jackson and William Andrew Chatto

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

xi

	PAGE
The Knight, from Caxton's Book of Chess, about 1476 . . . . .	235
The Bishop's pawn, from the same . . . . .	236
Two figures—Music, from Caxton's <i>Mirroure of the World</i> , 1480 . . . . .	238
Frontispiece to Breydenbach's Travels, printed at Mentz, 1486 . . . . .	252
Syrian Christians, from the same . . . . .	254
Old Woman with a basket of eggs on her head, from the <i>Hortus Sanitatis</i> , printed at Mentz, 1491 . . . . .	256
Head of Paris, from the book usually called the <i>Nuremberg Chronicle</i> , printed at Nuremberg, 1493 . . . . .	258
Creation of Eve, from the same . . . . .	262
The same subject from the <i>Poor Preachers' Bible</i> . . . . .	263
The difficult Labour of Alcmena, from an Italian translation of Ovid's <i>Metamorphoses</i> , 1497 . . . . .	264
Mars, Venus, and Mercury, from <i>Poliphili Hypnerotomachia</i> , printed at Venice, 1499 . . . . .	269
Cupid brought by Mercury before Jove, from the same . . . . .	269
Cupid and his Victims, from the same . . . . .	270
Bacchus, from the same . . . . .	271
Cupid, from the same . . . . .	271
A Vase, from the same . . . . .	272
Cat and Mouse, from a supposed old wood-cut printed in Derschau's Collection, 1808—1816 . . . . .	275
Man in armour on horseback, from a wood-cut, formerly used by Mr. George Angus of Newcastle . . . . .	277
Tail-piece — the press of Jodocus Badius Ascensianus, from the title-page of a book printed by him about 1498 . . . . .	278

## CHAPTER V.

## WOOD ENGRAVING IN THE TIME OF ALBERT DURER, 279—388.

Initial letter M, from an edition of Ovid's <i>Tristia</i> , printed at Venice by J. de Cireto, 1499 . . . . .	279
Peasants dancing and regaling, from <i>Heures a l'Usaige de Chartres</i> , printed at Paris by Simon Vostre about 1502. The first of these cuts occurs in a similar work — <i>Heures a l'Usaige de Rome</i> — printed by Simon Vostre in 1497 . . . . .	282
The woman clothed with the sun, from Albert Durer's illustrations of the <i>Apocalypse</i> , 1498 . . . . .	291
The Virgin and Infant Christ, from Albert Durer's illustrations of the <i>History of the Virgin</i> , 1511 . . . . .	295
The Birth of the Virgin, from the same work . . . . .	296
St. Joseph at work as a carpenter, with the Virgin rocking the Infant Christ in a cradle, from the same . . . . .	298
Christ mocked, from Durer's illustrations of Christ's Passion, about 1511 . . . . .	299
The Last Supper, from the same . . . . .	300
Christ bearing his Cross, from the same . . . . .	301
The Descent to Hades, from the same . . . . .	302
Caricature, probably of Luther . . . . .	324

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00915-7 - Treatise on Wood Engraving, Historical and Practical

John Jackson and William Andrew Chatto

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xii

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

	PAGE
Albert Durer's Coat-of-arms . . . . .	328
His portrait, from a cut drawn by himself, 1527, the year preceding that of his death . . . . .	329
Holy Family, from a cut designed by Lucas Cranach . . . . .	335
Samson and Delilah, from a cut designed by Hans Burgmair . . . . .	337
Aristotle and his wife, from a cut designed by Hans Burgmair . . . . .	338
Sir Theurdank killing a bear, from the Adventures of Sir Theurdank, 1517 . . . . .	343
The punishment of Sir Theurdank's enemies, from the same work . . . . .	344
A figure on horseback from the Triumphs of Maximilian . . . . .	356
Another, from the same work . . . . .	357
Ditto, ditto . . . . .	358
Ditto, ditto . . . . .	359
Ditto, ditto . . . . .	360
Ditto, ditto . . . . .	361
Three knights with banners, from the same work . . . . .	363
Elephant and Indians, from the same . . . . .	364
Camp followers, probably designed by Albert Durer, from the same . . . . .	365
Horses and Car, from the same . . . . .	367
Jael and Sisera, from a cut designed by Lucas van Leyden . . . . .	372
Cut printed at Antwerp by Willem de Figuersnider, probably copied from a cut designed by Urse Graff . . . . .	377
Three small cuts from Sigismund Fanti's <i>Triumpho di Fortuna</i> , printed at Venice, 1527 . . . . .	380
Fortuna di Africo, an emblem of the South wind, from the same work . . . . .	381
Michael Angelo at work on a piece of sculpture, from the same . . . . .	382
Head of Nero, from a work on Medals, printed at Strasburg, 1525 . . . . .	385
Tail-piece,—a full-length of Maximilian I. Emperor of Germany, from his Triumphs . . . . .	388

## CHAPTER VI.

## FURTHER PROGRESS AND DECLINE OF WOOD ENGRAVING, 389—528.

Initial letter T, from a book printed at Paris by Robert Stephens, 1537 . . . . .	389
Adam and Eve eating the forbidden fruit, from a cut designed by Hans Holbein in the Dance of Death, first printed at Lyons in 1538 . . . . .	408
The Old Man, from the same work . . . . .	410
The Duchess, from the same . . . . .	411
The Child, from the same . . . . .	412
The Waggoner, from the same . . . . .	413
Child with a shield and dart, from the same . . . . .	414
Children with the emblems of a triumph, from the same . . . . .	415
Abraham about to sacrifice Isaac, from a cut designed by Holbein in his Bible-prints, Lyons, 1539 . . . . .	441
The Fool, from the same work . . . . .	442
Portrait of Sir Thomas Wyatt, from a cut designed by Holbein in Leland's <i>Næniæ</i> , 1542 . . . . .	454
Prayer, from a cut designed by Holbein in Archbishop Cranmer's <i>Catechism</i> , 1548 . . . . .	455

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00915-7 - Treatise on Wood Engraving, Historical and Practical  
John Jackson and William Andrew Chatto

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

xiii

	PAGE
Christ casting out Devils, from another cut by Holbein, in the same work	456
The Creation, from the same work	457
The Crucifixion, from the same	457
Christ's Agony, from the same	457
Genealogical Tree, from an edition of the New Testament, printed at Zurich by Froschover, 1554	458
St. Luke, from Tindale's Translation of the New Testament, 1534	459
St. James, from the same	459
Death on the Pale Horse, from the same	459
Cain killing Abel, from Coverdale's Translation of the Old and New Testament, 1535	462
Abraham about to sacrifice Isaac from the same	462
The Two Spies, from the same	463
St. Matthew, from the same	464
St. John the Baptist, from the same	464
St. Paul writing, from the same	464
Frontispiece to Marcolini's Sorti, Venice, 1540, by Joseph Porta Garfagninus, after a Study by Raffaele for the School of Athens	466
Punitione, from the same work	468
Matrimony, and cards, from the same	469
Truth saved by Time, from the same	470
The Labour of Alcmena, from Dolce's Transformationi, Venice, 1553	471
Monogram from Palatino's Treatise on Writing, Rome, 1561	473
Hieroglyphic Sonnet, from the same work	473
Portraits of Petrarch and Laura, from Petrarch's Sonetti, Lyons, 1547	478
Adam and Eve driven out of Paradise, from Quadrins Historiques de la Bible, Lyons, 1550—1560	479
Christ tempted by Satan, from Figures du Nouveau Testament, Lyons, 1553—1570	480
Briefmaler, from a book of Trades and Professions, Frankfort, 1564—1574	489
Formschneider, from the same	490
The Goose Tree, from Sebastian Munster's Cosmography, Basle, 1550—1554	494
William Tell about to shoot at the apple on his son's head, from the same	497
Portrait of Dr. William Cuninghame, from his Cosmographical Glass, London, 1559	506
Four initial letters, from the same work	507, 508, 509
Large initial letter, from Fox's Acts and Monuments, 1576	510
Initial letter from a work printed by Giolito at Venice, about 1550	511
Two Cats from an edition of Dante, printed at Venice, 1578	512, 513
Emblem of Water, from a chiaro-scuro by Henry Goltzius, about 1590	514
Caricature of the Laocoon, after a cut designed by Titian	517
The Good Householder, from a cut printed at London, 1607	518
Virgin and Christ, from a cut designed by Rubens, and engraved by Christopher Jegher	520
The Infant Christ and John the Baptist, from a cut designed by Rubens, and engraved by Christopher Jegher	521

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00915-7 - Treatise on Wood Engraving, Historical and Practical  
John Jackson and William Andrew Chatto

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xiv

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

	PAGE
Jael and Sisera, from a cut designed by Henry Goltzius, and engraved by C. Van Sichem . . . . .	522
Tail-piece, from an old cut on the title-page of the first known edition of Robin Hood's Garland, 1670 . . . . .	528

## CHAPTER VII.

## REVIVAL OF WOOD ENGRAVING, 529—634.

Initial letter A, from a French book, 1698 . . . . .	529
Fox and Goat, from a copper-plate by S. Le Clerc, about 1694 . . . . .	534
The same subject from Croxall's <i>Æsop's Fables</i> , 1722 . . . . .	534
The same subject from Bewick's <i>Fables</i> , 1818—1823 . . . . .	535
English wood-cut with the mark F. H., London, 1724 . . . . .	537
Adam naming the animals, copy of a cut by Papillon, 1734 . . . . .	545
The Poet's Fall, from <i>Two Odes in ridicule of Gray and Mason</i> , London, 1760 . . . . .	557
Initial letters, T. and B., composed by J. Jackson from tail-pieces in <i>Bewick's History of British Birds</i> . . . . .	559
The house in which Bewick was born, drawn by J. Jackson . . . . .	559
The Parsonage at Ovingham, drawn by George Balmer . . . . .	560
Fac-simile of a diagram engraved by Bewick in <i>Hutton's Mensuration</i> , 1768—1770 . . . . .	563
The Old Hound, a fac-simile of a cut by Bewick, 1775 . . . . .	564
Cuts copied by Bewick from <i>Der Weiss Kunig</i> , and illustrations of <i>Ovid's Metamorphoses</i> by Virgil Solis . . . . .	572
Boys and Ass, after Bewick . . . . .	574
Old Man and Horse, ditto . . . . .	576
Child and young Horse, ditto . . . . .	576
Ewe and Lamb, ditto . . . . .	577
Old Man and young Wife, ditto . . . . .	577
Partridge, ditto . . . . .	585
Woodcock, ditto . . . . .	586
The drunken Miller, ditto . . . . .	590
The Snow Man, ditto . . . . .	590
Old Man and Cat, ditto . . . . .	591
The World turned upside down, ditto . . . . .	596
Cuts commemorative of the decease of Bewick's father and mother, from his <i>Fables</i> , 1818—1823 . . . . .	598
Bewick's Workshop, drawn by George Balmer . . . . .	601
Portrait of Bewick . . . . .	602
View of Bewick's Burial-place . . . . .	603
Funeral, View of Ovingham Church, drawn by J. Jackson . . . . .	604
The Sad Historian, from a cut by John Bewick, in <i>Poems</i> by Goldsmith and Parnell, 1795 . . . . .	608
Fac-simile of a cut by John Bewick, from <i>Blossoms of Morality</i> . . . . .	609
Copy of a cut engraved by C. Nesbit, from a drawing by R. Johnson . . . . .	611
View of a monument erected to the memory of R. Johnson, against the south wall of Ovingham Church . . . . .	612



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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

XV

	PAGE
Copy of a view of St. Nicholas Church, engraved by C. Nesbit, from a drawing by R. Johnson . . . . .	613
Copy of the cut for the Diploma of the Highland Society, engraved by L. Clennell, from a drawing by Benjamin West, P. R. A. . . . .	618
Bird and Flowers, engraved by L. Clennell, when insane . . . . .	621
Cut from the Children in the Wood, drawn by W. Harvey, and engraved by J. Thompson . . . . .	626
Cut from the Blind Beggar of Bethnal Green, drawn by W. Harvey, and engraved by C. Nesbit . . . . .	627
Copy of a part of the Cave of Despair engraved by R. Branston, from a drawing by J. Thurston . . . . .	629
Bird, engraved by R. Branston . . . . .	630
Three cuts intended for an edition of Select Fables, engraved by R. Branston . . . . .	631
Copy of one of the plates of Hogarth's Rake's Progress, engraved by J. Thompson . . . . .	633
Tail-piece,—Traveller in the Snow, engraved by Thomas Bewick . . . . .	634

## CHAPTER VIII.

## THE PRACTICE OF WOOD ENGRAVING, 635—736.

Initial letter P, showing a wood engraver at work, with his lamp and globe, drawn by R. W. Buss . . . . .	635
Diagram, showing a block warped . . . . .	642
Cut showing the appearance of a plug-hole in the engraving, drawn by J. Jackson . . . . .	646
Diagrams illustrative of the mode of repairing a block by plugging . . . . .	647
Cut showing a plug re-engraved . . . . .	648
Diagram showing the mode of pulling the string over the corner of the block . . . . .	649
The shade for the eyes, and screen for the mouth and nose . . . . .	651
Engraver's lamp, glass, globe, and sand-bag . . . . .	652
Graver . . . . .	653
Diagram of gravers . . . . .	654
Diagrams of tint-tools, &c. . . . .	655
Diagrams of gouges, chisels, &c. . . . .	656
Gravers . . . . .	657
Cuts showing the manner of holding the graver . . . . .	658
Examples of tints . . . . .	659, 660, 661, 662, 663
Examples of curved lines and tints . . . . .	664, 665
Cuts illustrative of the mode of cutting a white outline . . . . .	667, 668
Outline engraving previous to its being blocked out—the monument to the memory of two children in Lichfield Cathedral by Sir F. Chantrey . . . . .	669
The same subject finished . . . . .	670
Outline engraving, after a design by Flaxman for a snuff-box for George IV. . . . .	670
Cut after a pen-and-ink sketch by Sir David Wilkie for his picture of the Rabbit on the Wall . . . . .	671
Figures from a sketch by George Morland . . . . .	672

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978-1-108-00915-7 - Treatise on Wood Engraving, Historical and Practical

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

	PAGE
Group from Sir David Wilkie's Rent Day . . . . .	674
Figure of a boy from Hogarth's Noon, one of the engravings of his Four	
Parts of the Day . . . . .	675
A Hog, after an etching by Rembrandt . . . . .	676
Dray-horse, drawn by James Ward, R.A. . . . .	677
Jacob blessing the Children of Joseph, after Rembrandt . . . . .	678
Two cuts—View of a Road-side Inn—showing the advantage of cutting	
the tint before the other parts of a subject are engraved . . . . .	679
Head, from an etching by Rembrandt . . . . .	680
Impression from a cast of part of the Death of Dentatus, engraved by W.	
Harvey . . . . .	682
Christ and the Woman at the Well, from an etching by Rembrandt . . . . .	684
The Flight into Egypt, from an etching by Rembrandt . . . . .	687
Sea-piece, drawn by George Balmer . . . . .	688
Sea-piece, moonlight, drawn by George Balmer . . . . .	689
Landscape, evening, drawn by George Balmer . . . . .	690
Impression from a cast of part of the Death of Dentatus, engraved by W.	
Harvey . . . . .	692
View of Rouen Cathedral, drawn by William Prior . . . . .	693
Map of England and Wales, with the part of the names engraved on wood,	
and part inserted in type . . . . .	695
Group from Sir David Wilkie's Village Festival . . . . .	697
Natural <i>Vignette</i> , and an old ornamented capital from a manuscript of the	
thirteenth century . . . . .	699
Impressions from a surface with the figures in relief,—subject, the Crown-	
piece of George IV. . . . .	700
Impressions from a surface with the figures in intaglio—same subject . . . . .	701
Shepherd's Dog, drawn by W. Harvey . . . . .	703
Egret, drawn by W. Harvey . . . . .	704
Winter-piece, with an ass and her foal, drawn by J. Jackson . . . . .	705
Salmon-Trout, with a view of Bywell-Lock, drawn by J. Jackson . . . . .	706
Boy and Pony, drawn by J. Jackson . . . . .	707
Heifer, drawn by W. Harvey . . . . .	708
Descent from the Cross, after an etching by Rembrandt,—impression when	
the block is merely lowered previous to engraving the subject . . . . .	709
Descent from the Cross,—impression from the finished cut . . . . .	710
Parsonage at Ovingham, engraved in chiaro-scuro, and printed in oil-	
colours, by George Baxter, after a drawing by Edward Swinburne, Esq. . . . .	713
A Café in Constantinople, and a Design for a Pattern, two of "Mr. Knight's	
Patent Illuminated Prints" . . . . .	715
Copies of an ancient bust in the British Museum,—No. 1 printed from a	
wood-cut, and No. 2 from a cast . . . . .	723
Horse and Ass, drawn by J. Jackson,—improperly printed . . . . .	725
Same subject, properly printed . . . . .	726
Landscape, drawn by George Balmer,—improperly printed . . . . .	728
Same subject, properly printed . . . . .	729
Tail-piece, drawn by C. Jacques . . . . .	738