

A bibliophile's letter from Great Britain

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A BIBLIOPHILE'S LETTER FROM GREAT BRITAIN

Since the 1961 letter I have made several references to the manuals of writing-masters of the sixteenth century. I talked about a proof of my own booklet in this field in 1964 and since then *Lines of the Alphabet* has been corrected and was issued on October 6 by Nattali & Maurice Ltd.

Nattali & Maurice were antiquarian booksellers in Covent Garden in the 1930s with roots going back at least as far as Ackermann. When The Bodley Head took over Putnams in 1962, they found Nattali & Maurice a dormant company on their books, and their sole asset a series of aquatint plates measuring 229 × 305 mm all of coastal scenes round Britain (illustration 1). They were issued in eight folio volumes between 1813 and 1825. The plates themselves (308 in all) have been in the care of the plate printers Thomas Ross & Son, London, for many years.

Thomas Ross, under licence from Putnams, have been making prints and hand-colouring them for sale largely in America. But the fastest possible rate of production in this way would never make it possible for Nattali & Maurice to issue even a selection of the prints in sheet or book form for general sale. At this point Mr. Hummerstone of The Stellar Press and I set to work on a series of experiments by which we might eventually make satisfactory copies. Technical and financial considerations had to be matched, and the rate of reproduction had to be higher than Thomas Ross's rolling presses and hand colourists could ever achieve.

Starting with as near perfect a proof as could be made from an original plate using black ink and white paper, we made a photolitho aluminium plate using a screen negative for the aquatint and line negative for the titling and border and printed this in various shades of sepia and black inks on

various textures and tints of paper. We then consulted an experienced lithographic artist (Alex Packham of Greenwich, London) about making autolithographic zinc plates following as closely as possible the work of the early-nineteenth-century colourists. A hand-coloured complete copy of the original work, which we purchased in 1964 for £ 400, was used as a guide for the new plates. After printing four or five flat tint autolithographic plates in a range of transparent colours, the screen of the one photolithographic plate is much softened.

The result is as you see in the accompanying colour plate, a detail from 'View near Aberystwith, Cardiganshire', engraved by William Daniell, 1814. The colours on this plate are all printed as flat tints. Our experiments with a second aquatint use some flat tints and some washes. Also the colours of the first trial plate are transparent, whereas subsequent experiments have used some opaque printings.

Another aspect of Nattali & Maurice's re-awakening will be the distribution of some privately printed bibliographical researches. I have already mentioned my own book, *Lines of the Alphabet*, which may be followed by Iain Bain's account of Albert Schloss's *English Bijou Almanac*. This was a hand-engraved almanac of miniature proportions, 25 × 15 mm, issued in London between 1836 and 1843. It was sold for one shilling or so depending on the style of binding and presentation. Copies now fetch from £ 10 to £ 50. Some copies were issued in very pretty bindings and slipcases and even with miniature reading glasses cased in tortoiseshell.

Mr. Bain is secretary of The Printing Historical Society and he has recently shown a searching interest in the printing house of Thomas Ross who hold intact and in fair condition the steel plates for Schloss's alma-

nacs for the years 1839 to 1843 inclusive. Iain Bain has written an account of Schloss's activities and his projected publication will include proofs (flat sheets, unbacked) from the five surviving plates. Since these will need some cleaning and skilful printing, the edition of Mr. Bain's book may be no more than 100 copies. The house of Thomas Ross & Son (illustration 2) is so full of printing history and of surviving plates that Mr. Bain is now writing an historical note on the firm, its equipment, methods and materials. His account of this surprisingly neglected branch of the trade will be published next year in the *Journal* of the Printing Historical Society.

Another act of distribution by Nattali & Maurice, and one which its directors are proud to announce, may be the marketing of two new books from the Officina Bodoni, Verona. Dr. Giovanni Mardersteig is at present working on facsimiles of two writing books, one by Francesco Tornielo and one by Tagliente—his first book of 1524. The completion and issue of these facsimiles depends on certain factors of research, but all preliminary work has been done and it is hoped that publication may be within the next year or so.

In June this year the eighth Antiquarian Book Fair took place in London. There were forty-two exhibitors including one Dutch and one Italian bookseller. On the opening night I spent my time wandering between stalls and talking to visitors and exhibitors rather than looking at books. Nevertheless, my eye caught several displays of books on ballooning from which I turned with distaste, not on account of the books themselves, but because at Oxford, on May 12, nine balloons took part in the first international balloon race since 1914—and I missed it.

However, I was also impressed by an item at the Fair offered by Menno Hertzberger of Amsterdam, a copy of Giovanni Francesco Cresci's *Essempiare di più sorti lettere, etc.*, of 1578 (illustration 3). It had once been bound but was now offered as a set of loose quires in very fine condition. It seems likely

that this copy has been taken apart to clean and unfox the paper, and since the text is complete and with good margins, it was surely worth the trouble and worth the price of £ 110. Perhaps the market value of this book is difficult to judge since, in London, no copy appears to have been auctioned during the last sixteen years. I hope that, because none of Cresci's works has been adequately reproduced, someone will think it worth while to make a facsimile of it.

The first number of the *Journal* of the Printing Historical Society has just been issued under the editorship of James Mosley. It runs to over 100 pages and is illustrated. Articles include 'The Bibliographical Press Movement' by Philip Gaskell who established and carried on such a press at King's College, Cambridge, from 1953 to 1958. Mr. Gaskell lists and describes twenty-four other bibliographical presses as a census which was made in 1963-4. The bibliographical press is defined as 'a workshop or laboratory which is carried on chiefly for the purpose of demonstrating and investigating the printing techniques of the past by means of setting types by hand and of printing from it on a simple press'. Dr. Vervliet contributes on 'The Garamond Types of Christopher Plantin', a short article containing precise new information based on recently examined material in the Plantin-Moretus Museum, Antwerp. The wealth of material in this museum is unique and contemporary researches may draw upon: 4500 punches, 20000 matrices, 60 moulds, 12 tons of lead

CAPTIONS TO THE FOLLOWING ILLUSTRATIONS

1 Photograph of William Daniell's aquatint plate, in its present well-preserved state, depicting Seacombe ferry, Liverpool, in 1815.

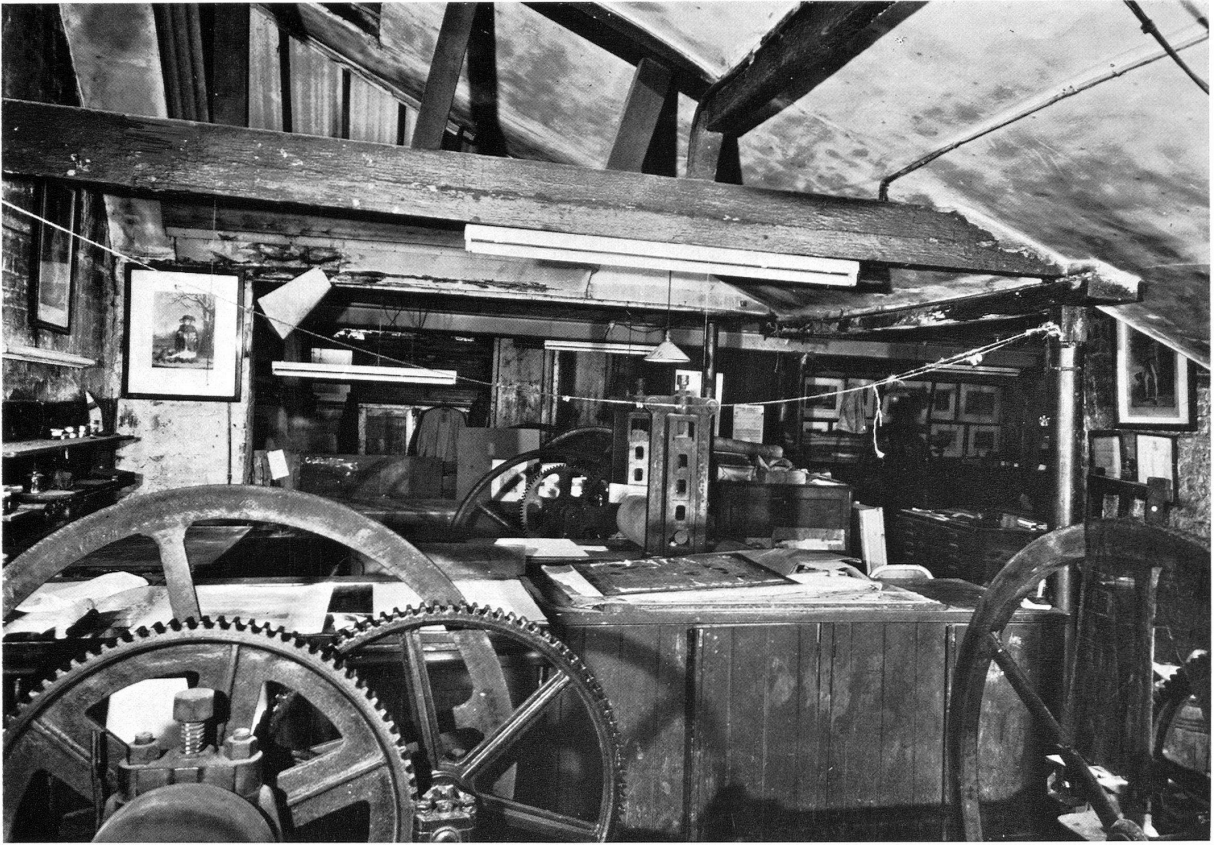
2 The workshop of Thomas Ross & Son, London, plate printers.

3 Three openings from Cresci's first writing-book. The first edition was published in 1560 at Rome.

4 Some of the leaflets from the Alfred Knopf Keepsake.

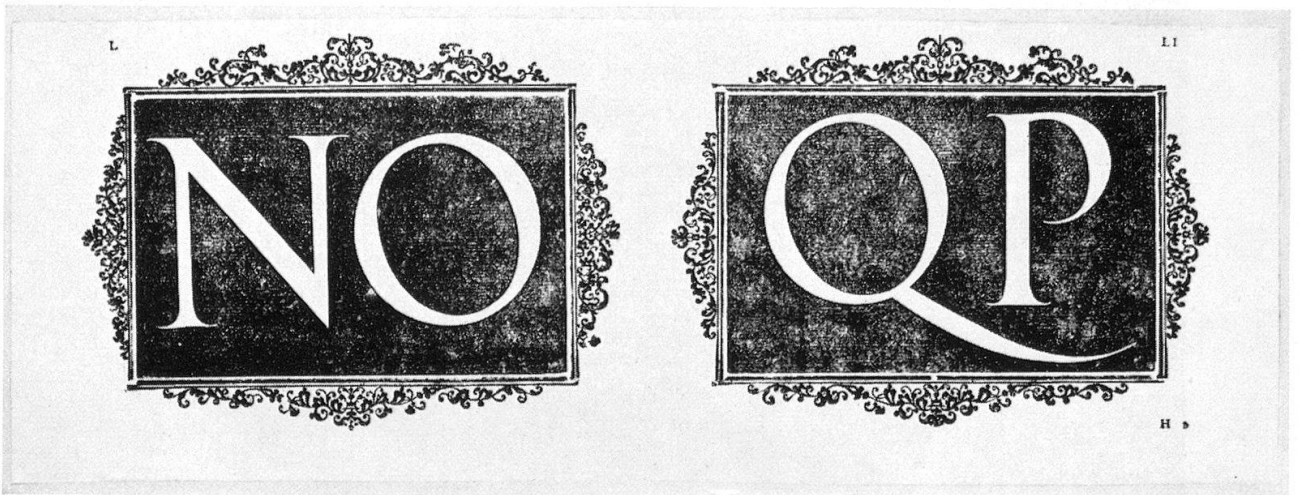


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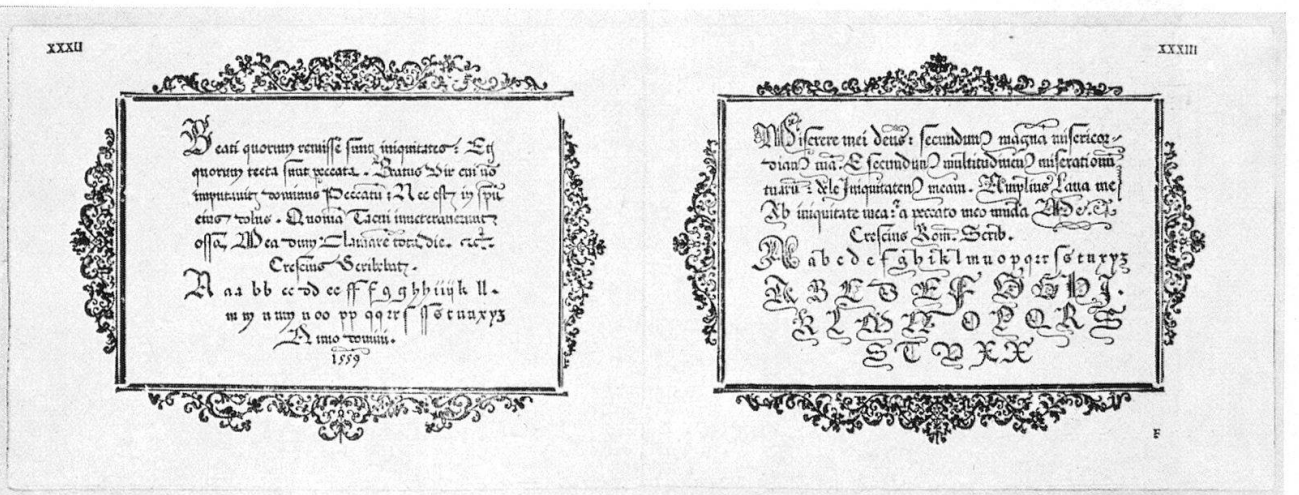




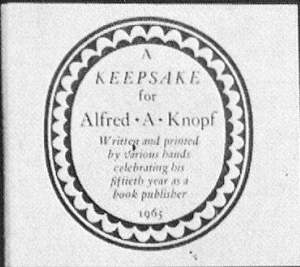
3 a



3 b

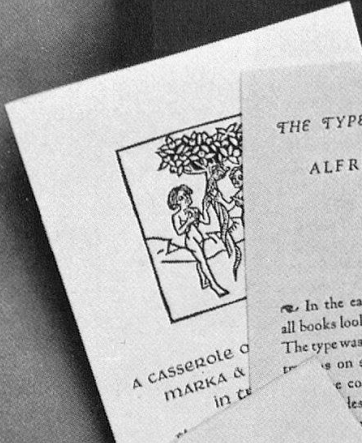


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THE TYPEMAN'S PUBLISHER
ALFRED A. KNOPF




In the early part of our half century all books looked alike, particularly novels. The type was printed on eggshell, the illustrations on slick paper, tipped in. The covers were pictorial but the design, just a standard design, was a new young publisher's design as well as the design he knew about.



A SPECIAL
KEEPSAKE
TO PRAISE
ALFRED A.
KNOPF
FIFTY
YEARS
PUBLISHING

STELLAR
TO
KNOPF

THE SHOP RULES
OF CHRISTOPHER PLANTIN AT
THE GOLDEN COMPASS
ANTWERP: ca. 1563
Printed for Alfred A. Knopf, to mark
his 50th year in book publishing



types in varying condition, 1200 volumes of archives and the ledgers of Plantin's business which are all but complete. The first part of Edmund Poole's much longer article on 'New Music Types' is concerned with the development in the eighteenth century and tells the story of intensive developments in the short period of about six years. Rosart, Breitkopf, Fournier le Jeune, Fleischman and Henry Fougat of London were the chief participants—and acrimony, discord, plagiarism were also much in evidence. Michael Twyman writes on 'The Tinted Lithograph' and André Jammes on 'Académisme et Typographie'. M. Jammes's long article on the making of the Romain du Roi types contains a sixteen-page inset of illustrations. Fresh light is thrown on Grandjean the punch-cutter and the Académiciens who planned their capital letters on a network of 2304 squares by the chance discovery of contemporary documents including notes by Billettes and Truchet, inventors of the project. (Copies of the *Journal* are available from the Society at St. Bride Library, Fleet Street, London, E. C. 4, by becoming a member and paying a fee of £ 1.1 s.)

A few months ago the British Museum published an illustrated booklet by A. Hyatt King entitled *Four Hundred Years of Music Printing*. With illustrations including colour plates and a select list of books and articles, it provides an excellent introduction to the subject for five shillings, but perhaps it should be read together with Harry Carter's review of this booklet in *The Library* dated June 1965.

At Sotheby's on June 29 a number of MSS that had belonged to Sir Thomas Philipps were sold. The sale included *Robert Herrick's Poetical Commonplace Book*, quarto, 352 pages, c. 1612–24, containing twelve pages of verse in Herrick's hand. For this item L. D. Feldman bid up to £ 34,000. The previous record price for a literary MS was £ 15,000, achieved at the sale of *Alice in Wonderland*.

This year Alfred Knopf celebrates his fif-

tieth year in publishing. Charles Antin, at the Random House office in New York, organized the making of a keepsake for Mr. Knopf consisting of a collection of privately printed congratulations which was distributed in an edition of 150 copies. There were two contributions from England and both are shown in illustration 4. The Stellar Press printed an extract from George Gissing's *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*. Will Carter's personal message from his Rampant Lions Press is shown on the left of Stellar's. The most important item in this Keepsake came from The Plantin Press, Los Angeles, of Saul Marks and Muir Dawson (shown at tail of illustration 4). This twelve-page booklet consists of 'The Shop Rules of Christopher Plantin at the Golden Compass, Antwerp: ca. 1563' in a translation by Peter van der Pas. Copies of the original, a broadside printed in Civilité types, are preserved at the Plantin-Moretus Museum. It may be the earliest example of regulations ever devised for a printing house. With each rule is printed the fine to be levied on any man, and this included the master of the shop, who fails to comply. The twenty-one rules set out on Plantin's broadside are of exceptional value to the bibliographer of sixteenth-century printing.

Published in 1964, but not recorded in my last letter, was a facsimile of Plantin's dialogue *Calligraphy and Printing in the Sixteenth Century*. The Plantin-Moretus Museum published this book through the Steinhour Press, Lunenburg, Vermont. Ray Nash has translated the text and added fully illustrated notes. There is also a foreword by Stanley Morison.

During the summer Anthony Rota and I discussed the work of the Eugrammia Press with Dr. Paul Katona its proprietor and we had with us on the table at La Terrazza in Soho an early copy of *Lines of the Alphabet*. Dr. Katona is perhaps the foremost maker of facsimiles in England and I like to think that for him to see notes on so many rare books all of which are visually attractive and

most of which have never been reproduced must have been interesting and even provocative. The latest issue from the Eugrammia Press is Fournier's *Modèles des caractères* and this gives me hope that some sixteenth-century writing-books facsimiles will be made under this imprint.

The Fourth International Congress of Bibliophiles took place in London this year from September 27 to October 2 (see page 214 ff.).

Exhibited in the King's Library of the British Museum were bookbindings from the library of Jean Grolier (born in Lyons, 1479), all now coming from libraries in Britain and Ireland. The exhibition commemorates the fourth centenary of Grolier's death. It was arranged and catalogued by Howard Nixon who, together with Desmond Flower, organized the National Book League exhibition 'Treasures from Private Libraries in England'. In Mr. Nixon's excellent catalogue to the Grolier exhibition we learn that the binder recently known as *entrelac binder* was Claude de Picques, royal binder to Henry II (84 of the 138 bindings in this exhibition are by de Picques).

Among the twelve collections represented in the exhibition from private libraries is that of the Royal Library at Windsor. H. M. the Queen loaned a Psalter in Latin printed by Johann Fust and Peter Schoeffer, Mainz, 1457. Cyril Connolly brought the scene up to date with his 'Homage to the Twenties', a collection including *Poems* by T. S. Eliot, handset by Leonard and Virginia Woolf in 1919, *Ulysses* by James Joyce, the first 1922 issue from Paris signed by the author, and *Poems* by W. H. Auden, 1928, printed by Stephen Spender. From the library of Henry Davis was shown a copy of Albert Schloss's *English Bijou Almanac* for 1840, not in the one-shilling binding but here seen in citron morocco gilt with inlaid panels of red morocco on sides, gilt edges and matching slip-case. A fly leaf of this 19 × 14 mm book bears the signature of Sir Thomas Phillipps' daughter Henrietta.

Alongside the Grolier exhibition at the British Museum were shown some fine examples of English book illustration. Four colour plates from Daniell's *A Voyage Round Great Britain* provided an excellent example of early-nineteenth-century aquatints. These pictures were taken from one of the fifty so-called "cardboard copies" in which the plates were printed on thin boards and many of them re-touched by William Daniell.

In March 1965 Dr. Giovanni Mardersteig issued as one of his *Editiones Officinae Bodoni* an octavo entitled *Francisci Petrarcae Ascensus Montis Ventosi & Jean-Henri Fabre: une Ascension au Mont Ventoux*. Printed on the hand-press from Dante type in an edition of 175 copies of which 70 were for presentation (with the name of each recipient printed in the preliminary pages), 101 copies numbered and 4 special copies on vellum. There are notes by Giuseppe Billanovich on Petrarch and by Giovanni Mardersteig on Jean-Henri Fabre. At the end of the Fabre text is a drawing of the Alpine butterfly, *Parnassius Apollo*, printed in colour.

If I am still with you in these columns next year I should like to give a detailed account of my interest in sixteenth-century writing-books and their facsimiles from the points of view of bibliographical research and also of book collecting. With any luck it may be possible to make some mention of new facsimiles brought about by the publication of *Lines of the Alphabet*. Failing that, or perhaps in addition to that, I should like to give a critical account of the work of a New York private press belonging to John Fass and known as the Hammer Creek Press.

CAPTION TO THE FOLLOWING
PICTURE

Detail from William Daniell's aquatint 'View near Aberystwith, Cardiganshire, 1814' here reproduced by The Stellar Press from photolitho and autolitho plates.

