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A Publication of the American Printing History Association Stephen O. Saxe, Editor

The Tools of The Trade

Mankind is sometimes defined as a species that makes and uses tools. Tools, conceived in the mind and made by the hand, become an extension of both. Nothing can be more basic to the development of any craft, and I propose to give a brief description here of some of the letterpress printer's tools. I will confine myself to the simplest and most basic.

The best sources of information are early woodcut and engraved pictures of the printing operation. The earliest of these is the famous Dance of Death woodcut published at Lyons in 1499. The illustration is somewhat sketchy in nature, but it shows clearly enough the composing stick, inking balls, and a copy-holder that looks a good deal like the one above my computer.

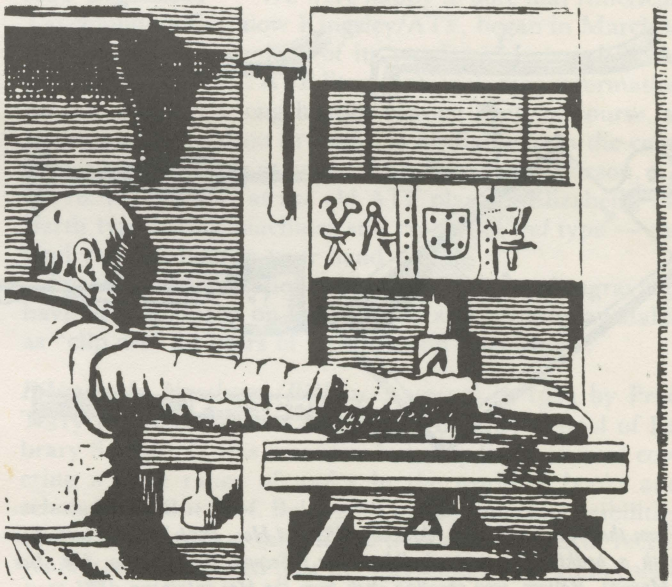
A much more detailed and realistic picture of the press depicts that of Jodocus Badius Ascensius of Paris, in 1520. Next to the name (Prelum Ascensianum) on the head of the press are four hand tools, neatly tucked into leather thongs tacked to the press. Three are unquestionably clear. One is

a pair of scissors to cut the frisket or paper gauges. Next to it is a brush, most likely for pasting down the tympan and other tasks well-known to the modern printer. On the right side of the press is a pair of dividers, later adopted by Plantin for his printer's mark, and used to lay out margins and center type.

Next to these dividers, however, is a Y-shaped tool that appears to have a divided handle and a point. The same tool appears in a cruder woodcut of the same press dated 1522, on the other side of the press. James Moran, in his *Printing Presses*, writes that it is a bodkin. If so, it is an unusual form of one, and I would be interested in hearing from anyone with further information.

Durer's sketch of a press in 1511, although it shows the screw running in the wrong direction, seems to be done from observation. It shows hammer, dividers, and what appears to be the same Y-shaped tool, all attached to the far cheek of the press.

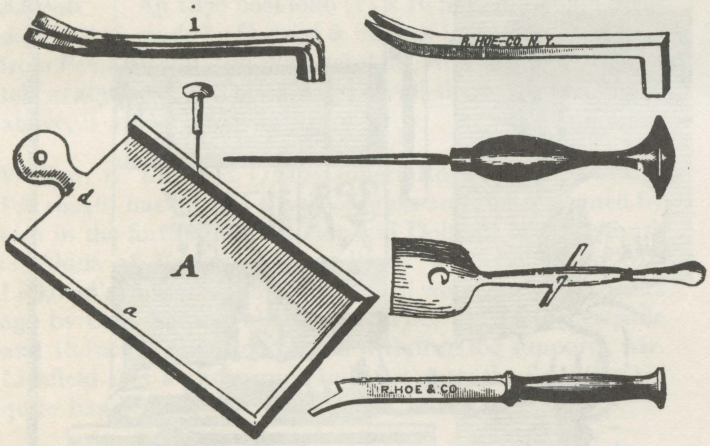
In the well-known 1628 copperplate engraving published in Haarlem by Peter Scriverius, the scissors, dividers and paste-brush are shown again on the head of the press. In this engraving, called "the first accurate representation of a press," the mysterious tool of 1520 is not shown. A hammer



or mallet is shown hanging from the left cheek of the press, used of course for planing the form and setting the quoins and sidesticks.

Abraham von Werdt's representation of a printing office (1639) shows the scissors and hammer on the head, as well as a small pointed implement which may well be a bodkin.

By the time of Joseph Moxon's *Mechanick Exercises on the Whole Art of Printing* (1683) we have for the first time detailed, large-scale depictions of the tools of the printer. One of these is the sheep's foot, a bent piece of iron with a nail-pulling claw at one end and a hammerhead at the other. Moxon states that it is used for nailing and pulling nails from the inking balls. I have found the sheep's foot in my 1881 R. Hoe & Co. printing supply catalogue, and, indeed, it can still be found in hardware shops. In 1841 Savage wrote that "it is customary to have one for each press, which in a wooden press is suspended by the head from two nails driven into the near cheek of the press, just below the cap. It is a very useful article to the pressman; but is often applied instead of the mallet and shooting stick, to tighten up or to loosen quoins...I do not like to see it used for this purpose." Another use for the sheep's foot is to lift up one edge of a form, to check for tightness.



From the top: sheep's foot (Moxon, 1683 and Hoe, 1881.) Galley-and-slice with a bodkin (Moxon); bodkin (Hoe.) Second from bottom, ink slice (Moxon). Bottom, iron shooting stick from the Hoe catalogue, 1881.

The bodkin, mentioned before, is the compositor's tool for inserting and removing a piece of type from a composing stick or form. It has a short wooden handle with a wide mushroom-like cap, and a long point. It is shown in its classic form in Moxon and almost identically in the 1881 Hoe catalogue. About three years ago I found an immaculate classic bodkin at a flea market, so I assume that they have been made until recently. In the last century American manufacturers devised metal tweezers with a folding bodkin point.

Shooting sticks, mentioned above by Savage, were originally a piece of hardwood, such as hickory, with a notch at one end. This notch was engaged against the end of a quoin or side stick, and the shooting stick was tapped with the hammer or mallet. This forced one wedge tighter against another to lock up type inside the chase. In later years shooting sticks were made of iron or steel, and remained in use until the development of mechanical, or screw-tightening quoins in the late 19th century.

The change from wood to metal can be seen in almost every tool and machine of the printer's trade, from presses on down. The greater precision and durability of iron and steel were valued, once the industrial processes involved in fabrication made them accessible. This changeover happened for many tools at the beginning of the 19th century, coincident with the development of the iron hand press.

The composing stick is one tool whose very name indicates its wooden origin. Setting type required precision, and metal composing sticks were all that Moxon showed; yet an 1910 edition of Southward's *Modern Printing* pictures a mahogany stick, with a fixed measure and lined in brass, for use in newspaper work. I suspect that somewhere in England today a compositor is setting type in a wooden composing stick.

Martin Speckter's *Disquisition on the Composing Stick* is the only book ever written on this essential tool, and is well worth reading. It was published by The Typophiles in 1971.

One tool that changed form for the worse was the old wooden galley-and-slice. A wooden galley had inserted above its base a separate sliding base with a protruding handle. When needed, type on the galley could be easily removed by simply grasping the handle and pulling the upper base out of the galley. In the transition to brass and steel galleys, the slice has been lost. (Another form of slice was used for the distribution of ink. Shaped like a miniature shovel, as Moxon says, it had a short bar extending through the handle to prevent the handle from touching the ink when the tool was put down.)

Even this quick glance at some of the compositor's and pressman's tools will give an idea of the conservative nature of the printing craft, during the 500-year reign of letterpress. Gutenberg would no doubt be bewildered in a modern printing plant; but I am sure he would feel very much at home in any amateur's basement letterpress shop.

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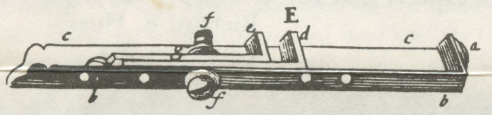
APHA NEWS

Planning for the 1989 APHA Annual Conference is now almost complete. The Conference will take place on Saturday, October 7 at Harvard, with an opening reception at the Houghton Library on Friday afternoon. The subject and location, chosen to commemorate the 350th anniversary of printing in what is now the United States, is "Colonial New England Printing."

The speakers and their subjects:

Hugh Amory on the Bay Psalm Book and the Cambridge press
Sidney Berger on the Green family of printers
Margaret L. Ford on the Franklin family of printers in Newport
Elizabeth Reilly on popular printing in New England
Marcus A. McCorison on Isaiah Thomas.

Following the talks, a second reception will be given at the Houghton rare book library. Houghton and the Harvard Law School Library will mount a joint exhibition on the Cambridge Press and the beginning of printing in this country. The Harvard Law School is co-sponsoring the Conference with APHA.



EDITOR'S NOTES

It is fitting to mention here a man who has made a difference in all our lives: Donald L. Elbert, the inventor of the correctible film ribbon. Mr. Elbert received an award last year for his idea of using an adhesive tape ribbon to lift typing mistakes off paper. Two years ago a large corporation printed 30,000 four-color copies of its annual report on coated paper, only to discover that one caption had a typo that could not be allowed. Reprinting would have cost about $50,000. A desperate executive discovered that the offense could be lifted off the coated paper with sticky tape. The solution: a team of 15 workers armed with erasers expunged the offending line from all 30,000 copies, in a scene redolent of monks toiling in a medieval monastery.

In the last issue we described the forgeries uncovered by APHA member W. Thomas Taylor of Texas. On a slightly less grand scale than these letterpress-printed fakes, however, are a minor genre: fakes produced instantly on color photocopying machines. The new machines are so good that they can reproduce even the minute red and blue silk threads embedded in bills. The Bureau of Printing and Engraving has been forced to redesign the U.S. currency to introduce safeguards. The copiers have been used to produce almost indistinguishable fake dust jackets for rare modern editions. Now we're talking *real* money.

The *APHA Newsletter* is published six times yearly by the American Printing History Association. Subscriptions are through membership in APHA, and include all publications. Personal memberships for the calendar year are $25; $30 for U.S. institutions. All subscriptions matters (other than purely editorial) should be sent to APHA, P.O. Box 4922, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163. Newsletter editorial correspondence only should be addressed directly to the Editor: Stephen O. Saxe, 1100 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10028. Copyright © 1989 by the American Printing History Association. All rights reserved.

BRIEFLY NOTED

"Revolution in Print" An exhibition of printing before and during the French Revolution recently ended at the New York Public Library. It is scheduled to make a tour of 28 American cities.

Part of the exhibition was an 18-minute videotape showing the operation of the common press, demonstrated by Clinton Sisson with the assistance of Roger Frith. The NYPL had on view Isaiah Thomas' common press, made in 1747 and bequeathed by Thomas to the American Antiquarian Society in 1830. In addition there were an 18th century type frame with upper and lower cases, an imposing stone, and other tools of the printing trade. (I do not recall an 18th century composing stick in the exhibit, although the ATF collection at Columbia has several.) Also shown was a clandestine common press about 1/3 the normal size and mounted on a bench for easy concealment.

The Isaiah Thomas hand press mentioned above is the subject of a 24-page pamphlet published by the American Antiquarian Society. Titled *Old "No. 1": The Story of Isaiah Thomas and His Printing Press*, it is available at the NYPL and by mail from the A.A.S., 185 Salisbury Street, Worcester, MA 01609-1634 for $2.50 + .50 postage.

ATF Digitized! We were happy to note that American Typefounders Co., now Kingsley/ATF, began in March to release digitized versions of its typefaces. It is called the ATF Protype series. ATF literature, including information on the company's long history (dating back, of course, to Binny and Ronaldson in 1796), is available from the company's headquarters at 2559-2 East Broadway, Tucson, AZ 85716. Meanwhile, at the old ATF plant in Elizabeth, the Barth typecasting machines still crank out *real* type — the kind you can hold in your hand.

Speaking of digitization: a lot of Bewick's wood engravings have been digitized on floppy disks and are now available as "clip art" for users of Ventura and PageMaker.

Bibliography Newsletter (BiN) was started in 1973 by Prof. Terry Belanger of the Columbia University School of Library Service. It was a serious but very lively journal covering a wide range of topics in the world of books and scholarship. But Prof. Belanger's expanding responsibilities at Columbia took a toll on the publication, and in recent years it was suggested that the way things were going, soon *BiN* would have fewer issue numbers than volume numbers.

Now we have word that one of Terry Belanger's former students, Bryan R. Johnson, has taken up the editing and publishing of *Bibligraphy Newsletter*. It will be published by Johnson's Walrus Press, 102 Preston Forest Drive, Blacksburg, VA 24060. Price for one year (which I presume is a full 12 issues — but I can't find it in writing in the prospectus) is $20, payable to The Walrus Press. It will contain news, essays, exhibition and book reviews, lists of bookdealers' catalogues, and books about books remainders.

TYPE & PRESSES

We are happy to report on the availability of several hand presses, including a replica common press:

Common press A reproduction of a 17th-century English common press, very close to a reproduction at the Smithsonian and based on Elizabeth Harris' and Clinton Sisson's *The Common Press*. Some wood in the press is over 150 years old; construction is entirely without nails. The press building was supervised by David Price, cabinet shop supervisor at the Smithsonian, and his father. The press was first used in 1988 at the Maryland Renaissance Festival; among those who have worked the press is Stan Nelson of the Smithsonian. The press weighs 722 pounds. Contact: Tim Roschy, 9008 Branchview Drive, Fort Washington, MD 20744; tel. 301/839-2811 for further information.

Albion and Reliance An Albion press, made by Hopkinson & Cope of London (successors to Cope, the original manufacturer), with a 24 x 30 platen, is available from Werner Meier, % Pittsburgh Metals, P.O. Box 14, Foot of Jersey Avenue, Jersey City, NJ 07302; tel. 201/435-8274. Also for sale by Mr. Meier is a Reliance hand press, ca.1895-1912, made by Paul Shniedewend & Co. of Chicago. The Reliance also has a 24 x 30 platen.

Albion An 1877 post folio (11 x 16 platen) Albion press dated 1877, made by Harrild & Sons of London, is available from Peter Bishop, 133 West 72nd St., New York, NY 10023; tel. 212/362-7668. This press, like all the others described above, is a floor model.

William E. Lickfield (1212 Gilbert Road, Meadowbrook, PA 19046) has for sale a pair of brass andirons designed by him in the form of the Anchor and Dolphin printing mark of Aldus of Venice. The andirons were cast from Mr. Lickfield's design and his own carved wood pattern 35 years ago by Crowfutt of Philadelphia. They are 12 inches wide and 18 inches high, solid brass with iron log supports. Mr. Lickfield sent a photograph with his note; the andirons are quite handsome..

Note The *APHA Newsletter* is happy to list presses of all sizes and other old printing equipment for sale. Contact Stephen O. Saxe at 1100 Madison Ave., New York, NY 10028. We cannot run wanted items, however.

NOTES & QUERIES

To the Editor:

In reference to the item which appeared in the *APHA Newsletter*, Nov./Dec. 1988, I wish to thank you and to notify you that the entire type collection, including the Kelsey Press, has been sold. I was amazed at the volume of the response from the item . . . With best wishes for continued success, I am

Sincerely,
Mrs. Fridolf Johnson
Woodstock, NY

To the Editor:

Your note on "19th Century American Typographic Periodicals" was quite interesting . . . You say "I am not aware of any good index to this most important printing periodical [*Inland Printer*] — if there is one I hope someone will bring it to my attention."

Back in the late 1970s I started to compile what I called "A Compendium of the *Inland Printer*" which consisted of some 8 or 9 thousand references to the main articles ranging from 1883 to 1960. These references were on "card-file" style of slips . . . My "Compenduim" went to the Rochester Institute of Technology. David Pankow at R.I.T. tells me that a graduate student is working on it, but the work is slow. He expects that R.I.T. will publish it some time . . .

Richard E. Huss
Lancaster, PA

To the Editor:

I read with interest the brief article on "19th Century American Typographic Periodicals" in the recent *APHA Newletter*. . . .I have been working on what amounts to a revision and extension of Ulrich & Kup for several years, and I have detailed information on several thousand periodicals in English from the early 19th century to the present. I would be happy to answer inquiries from any APHA members concerning such periodicals. I would also welcome information concerning periodicals that are more obscure and that I would not likely already know about. The task has been very daunting . . . but I hope to have a publishable manuscript completed one of these days . . .

Timothy Hawley
2114 Douglass Blvd.
Louisville, KY 40205

OBITUARIES

William Edwin Rudge III, son of the noted printer, died March 6 at the age of 80. He apprenticed at his father's printing office, The Printing House of William Edwin Rudge, and continued it after his father's death. In 1940 he founded *Print: a Quarterly Journal of the Graphic Arts*, and was Director of the Yale University Press. He is survived by a son and two daughters.