

Old English at New: Early Printed Books in Anglo-Saxon Type, 1570-1705

and bookseller John Day (1521/2–1584),⁹ who then used it for a number of publications in the years to follow. In the often-quoted preface to one of his later editions of an Old English text, *Asser's Life of King Alfred*, Parker (or potentially Joscelyn),¹⁰ gives credit to and stresses the pioneering nature of Day's work:

Iam verò cum Dayus Typographus primus (& omnium certè quod scian solus) has formas æri inciderit : facilè quæ Saxonice literis perscripta sunt, iisdem typis diuulgabuntur. (A4^r)¹¹

(And inasmuch as Day the printer, is the first (and indeed as far as I know the only one) who has cut these letters in metal: whatever has been written in Saxon characters will be easily published in the same type.)

Between 1566, the (disputed) date of the first ever edition of an Old English text, printed by Day, and the first years of the 18th century, nearly 100 publications containing Anglo-Saxon type were produced in England using both English-made fonts, and sets of types imported from or commissioned on the continent.¹² As designing, cutting, and casting these types was expensive, they were re-used heavily, loaned out extensively, and at the death or retirement of the owner passed on or sold to other printers. In themselves, particularly the special sorts are distinctive enough that they allow easy identification of a particular set and thus enable us to trace them from the possession of one printer to the next. More than that, this also means we have a pretty clear picture of the evolution of Anglo-Saxon type from its beginnings to its eventual demise in the 18th century, when convention changed and Old English texts were habitually printed entirely in Roman font with only a few special characters such as Ash (Æ/æ), Thorn (Þ/þ) and Eth (Ð/ð) remaining, a practice which of course persists to this day.¹³

New College Library holds a number of these early and influential publications containing Anglo-Saxon type from the 16th to the early 18th century, and its collections thus allow a rare opportunity to view the different types and uses side-by-side. Taking advantage of this opportunity

⁹ Andrew Pettegree, 'Day [D aye], John (1521/2–1584)', *ODNB* (3 January 2008)

I would like to use this article as an occasion for a relatively brief discussion and overview of this rather intriguing practice in publications from 1570 to 1703–1705 as reflected in the holdings of the Library of New College, Oxford.

EARLY 'DAYS': FOXE'S

Figure 1: Typographical table and the beginning of Ælfric's

Neustriae vel Normanniae, the history of the Dukes of Normandy,²⁰ the latter also printed by John Day, and the former by Henry Bynneman (*b.* in or before 1542, *d.* 1583),²¹ one of Parker's protégés.

Figure 2: Parker's *Ælfredi Regis res gestae*, frontispiece, New College Library, Oxford, BT1.4.3(2)

²⁰ Thomas Walsingham, *Historia brevis Thomae Walsingham, ab Edwardo primo, ad Henricum quintum* (Londini: Excusum apud Henricum Binneman typographum. [sic] sub insigno Syrenis, 1574), New College Library, Oxford, BT1.4.3(3), and Thomas Walsingham, *Ypodigma Neustriæ vel Normanniae* (Londini: In ædibus Iohannis Daij, 1574), New College Library, Oxford, BT1.4.3(4). In the New College copy these are furthermore bound together with an earlier, continental print of the works of Thomas More, *Thomæ Mori Angli, viri eruditionis pariter ac virtutis nomine clarissimi, Angliaeque olim cancellarii, Omnia, quae hucusque ad manus nostras peruenerunt, Latina opera: : quorum aliqua nunc primum in lucem*

For another, there is the elaborate frontispiece of the work, which despite the lack of any other title page does not mention either place, printer, or date—though in our copy a previous owner has helpfully scribbled ‘A uthore A sserio Menevensi’ and ‘E didit archiepiscopi Parker’ into the white spaces surrounding the portrait which must be meant to represent King Alfred. The very odd depiction of King Alfred is only one strange element of a frontispiece in which ‘anachronism jostles anachronism’, as Suzanne Hagedorn puts it, from the verses by Henry of Huntingdon to the female personifications of Geometry and Astronomy and male figures including Ptolemy and Strabo: ‘We see an Anglo-Saxon king who is dressed as a Tudor king and is described in a 12th-century poem looking out over a border of classical figures’.²²

But even having set aside the strangeness of this frontispiece and progressed beyond the preface to the actual text, the peculiarities do not end. Asser wrote his *Vita* in c. 893 naturally in Latin, which is how Parker prints it—but in Day’s Anglo-Saxon type. The choice of an Anglo-Saxon font previously exclusively reserved for the printing of Old English language for a Latin text strikes as rather odd. Just as with the creation of an Anglo-Saxon type in the first place, Clement again finds the motivation in the visual impact of the font, giving the appearance of authority and authenticity: ‘its use, though ahistorical, gave the book a far greater impact than it would have had otherwise [and] imbued the text with a visual authority that was impossible to obtain by use of normal roman or black-letter type’.²³

What the Anglo-Saxon type does not do, however, is distinguish the Latin of Asser’s *Vita* from the three and a half pages of Old English that follow it in Parker’s edition: King Alfred’s *Preface* to his translation²⁴ of St Gregory’s *Cura Pastoralis* (‘This the Preface how S. Gregorie this booke made, which men the Pastoral doe call’, F1^r). The *Preface* this is printed in the same large, Great Primer (or 18pt) version of Day’s Anglo-Saxon type, though here with an interlinear modern English translation in a tiny Italic (F1^r–F2^v), and followed by the Latin text in a Great Primer Roman type (F3^r–F4^v).

Figure 3: Parker’s Old English text and interlinear translation of Alfred’s *Preface* to St Gregory
New College Library, Oxford, BT1.4.3(2), F1^r

Like Foxe, and as he did in the *Testimonie* earlier, Parker supplies for the reader a typographical table of the Anglo-Saxon characters used, ‘so that from there the method to most easily and most rapidly read it perfectly may be at hand for whoever is eager for the language. (. . . vt facillima citissimaq(ue) inde ad eam perfectè legendam ratio cuius eius lingu cupido paresiat’, ¶12^v).

²² Suzanne C. Hagedorn, ‘Matthew Parker and Asser’s *Ælfredi Regis Res Gestæ*,

Figure 4: The typographical table in Parker's *Alfred*, New College Library, Oxford, BT1.4.3(2), ¶12^v

The uncial E, M and Æ, as well as the strange z, are easily recognisable from Foxe's abbreviated table and printed text (see Figures 1 and 2 above). Reed calls the typography in this volume '

and one of the 1610 English translation by Philemon Holland (1552–1637)³² in the 1695 **revision** by Edmund Gibson (1669–1748),³³ of whom more later.³⁴ In our earliest 1590 copy, a handwritten note under the edition statement on the title page points the reader to the existence of the 1600 edition and its additional maps.

Figure 5: Title page of Camden's 1590 *Britannia*, New College Library, Oxford, BT1.131.1

Curiously, Adams's list of early Anglo-Saxon prints omits all of the many and popular editions of the *Britannia*, presumably because none of them actually contain any longer passages of text printed in Anglo-Saxon type, though its use is far from insubstantial. As Camden assures his 'benevolent readers', he diligently consue~ i † æ

Figure 7:

Figure 8: Camden'

Britannia,⁴⁰ and a second, 1614 edition of his *Remaines, concerning Britaine*,⁴¹ a somewhat looser collection of thematic essays. But although both make frequent reference to and print texts or at least words from the 'Saxon tongue' Old English, they make only very limited use of Anglo-Saxon type.

In the *Anglica*, Camden prints a collection of early chronicles and histories of Britain including *Chronicon Angliae temporibus Edwardi II et Edwardi III* by Geoffrey the Baker (falsely attributed to Thomas de la More); the same *Historia Anglicana* or *Historia Brevis* and *Ypodigma Neustria*

. . . q(uod) ut sedaret, rex ille inuictissimus Ælfredus, de dissidio eo nuntio & querimonia Grymboldi certior factus, Oxoniam se contulit, vt finem modumq(ue) huic controuersiæ imponeret, qui & ipse summos labores hausit, causas & querelas vtrinq(ue) illatas audiendo: . . . (B2^v).

(. . . so in order to settle this, that most invincible

Unlike Foxe's *Acts*, Parker's *Alfred*, and Camden's *Britannia*, the *Anglica* was printed not in Britain, but on the continent, in Frankfurt, and the Anglo-Saxon types used in this table differ

type)—without, however, offering a typographical table to help his readers decipher the Anglo-Saxon characters.

Figure 14: The Anglo-Saxon laws of King Edgar in Selden's

Only a year before Selden's publication of the *Historie*, the lexicographer John Minsheu (1559/60–1627)⁵⁴ made a different decision regarding the probable familiarity of his readers with Anglo-Saxon type. His 1617 etymological dictionary with the very appropriately polyglot title < [Ÿa b'YghUj]` ~~g~~ž→X'gh *Ductor in Linguas, The Guide into Tongues*,⁵⁵ was not the first etymological or general dictionary, but the first to include Old English etymologies. Indicative of the novelty of this is once again the inclusion of a table of Anglo-Saxon typography at the beginning of the work—notably Minsheu does not bother to present his readers with a like help for reading the plentiful Greek or Hebrew words included, but in his list of abbreviations (*Notas quibus vtimur sic intelligito*, 'The marks which we use are thus understood') he includes 'The Saxon Letter or Character here vnder set downe, for the *Readers vse*, to reade the *Saxon wordes*, oftentimes in this *Dictionarie vsed*' (A6').

Figure 16: Typographical table with Anglo-Saxon types in Minsheu's *Hegemon*
New College, Oxford, BT3.102.2, A6r

This is clearly again Day's Anglo-Saxon type (in the smaller pica size) with some variants from Lambarde's type, such as the ð with the shorter upper stroke we encountered earlier in the *Britannia*.⁵⁶

Figure 18: Wheelock's curlicued capitals in close proximity, New College Library, Oxford, BT3.16.4; G1^v

OXFORD AND JUNIUS

Just as with Wheelock's type in Cambridge, another entirely new Anglo-Saxon type was created some time later for publications in Oxford at the Sheldonian Theatre, the forerunner of today's Oxford University Press. The press had been in the possession of Anglo-Saxon type since at least the late 1650s, when the London type-founder Nicholas Nicholls is recorded as having been paid £23 for a set of Anglo-Saxon type.⁶¹ These were first used in 1659 in a new Anglo-Saxon to Latin dictionary compiled by William Somner.⁶² Rather than include a full typographical table, among the things he judges the reader should be warned at the outset ('. . . quæ Lectorem hic in limine monendum esse judicavi') Somner only presents a short list of the instances in which Anglo-Saxon characters differ from Latin ('Elementa *Saxonica* quæ à *Latinis* differunt'), such as the Anglo-Saxon d, f, g, r, s, t, w, Ð, ð, þ and the abbreviation for *paet* and the Tironian *et* (b2^r).

The name connected with this Anglo-Saxon type is somewhat better known than that of Abraham Wheelock of Cambridge: it is that of the great Germanic philologist Franciscus Junius (1591–1677),⁶⁵ the former owner of the codex of Old English biblical poetry which still resides at the Bodleian Library as MS Junius 11. Junius's involvement in the creation of a new set of Anglo-Saxon type is documented in an often-quoted letter to John Selden, the author of the *Historie of Tithes*, written by Junius from Amsterdam on 8 May 1654, and printed in the preface to Hickes's *Thesaurus*.

In the meane while have I here Anglo-Saxonick types (I know not whether you call them Punchons) a cutting, and hope they will be matriculated, and cast within the space of seven or eight weeks at the furthest. As soon as they come to my hands, I wil send you some little specimen of them, to the end I might know how they will be liked in England . . . (Hickes, *Thesaurus*, p. xliii)

Figure 21: Typographic tables of Anglo-Saxon and runic type used in Hickes's *Thesaurus*
New College Library, Oxford, NB.187.17, p. 1 and p. 136.

Junius presented the type and matrices to Oxford University Press in 1677 together with a number of other types including Gothic, Runic, Danish and Icelandic, some of which the Press apparently retained for several centuries.⁶⁶ Both Gibson and Hickes include typographical specimens and tables in their work, both of course with the identical Junius type. Junius adds a capital square C to the square G also found in Wheelock, but keeps the font otherwise plain,

⁶⁵ Sophie van Romburgh, 'Junius [Du Jon], Franciscus [Francis] (1591–1677)', *ODNB* (22 September 2011) <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/15167>> (Accessed: 28 July 2023).

⁶⁶ Cf. Reed, *History*, pp. 73–4 and pp. 150–156. On p. 150, note 3, he reports their presence there towards the end of the 19th century: 'The Gothic and Runic punches, and the punches and matrices of the Saxon, formed part of the interesting exhibit of the Oxford University Press at the Caxton Exhibition in 1877.' I have so far been unable to ascertain whether these are still in the possession of Oxford University Press or one of the University's museums or archives, and, if so, accessible to the public, but am determined to find out.

without the aesthetically pleasing but not necessarily very authentic (i.e. found in Anglo-Saxon MSS) embellishments added in the Cambridge type. The ascender of the lower case Eth ð, however, seems to have grown again past the shortness of the Lambard type and to a length last seen in Day's type; and just as it did over a century ago in Foxe's 1570 *Acts* (cf. Figure 10 above), the combination of ascender's angle and the length of both ascender and cross stroke cause a noticeable gap before the letter every time it is used in a medial or final position. Curiously, however, both the Eth used underneath the Thorn in the Runic table, and the Eth used in the above the runes which spells out their names in Anglo-Saxon type are different in shape, with a slightly larger bowl and a higher cross stroke which sits above the median, so that in this Runic table the words containing ð are actually rather more closed up, and aesthetically more pleasing, than in the samples of Old English poetry printed further on.

The history of the Anglo-Saxon font also seems to come full circle here (or rather hark back to its beginnings) in another curious editorial decision. With Junius' gift of the various sets of type and matrices, Hicke should have had access to Junius's Norse/Icelandic type as well as his Anglo-Saxon one. The Anglo-Saxon types are duly used in Hicke's samples of Old English poetry, among them the famous *Finnsburgh Fragment*, the text of which, due to a loss of the original manuscript, is only preserved here. On the very next page, however, Hicke prints a poem from the Old Norse/Icelandic *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, the *Hervararkviða*

