

## XI

### WILLIAM BULMER (1757–1830) FINE PRINTER

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WITHOUT ANY previous indication in the Minutes of the Council of the Royal Society that anything like this was about to happen, one of the Minutes of the meeting of the Council for the 22 December 1791 reads

Resolved,

That in consideration of the avowed superiority of Mr Bulmer's printing he be for the future employed in printing the transactions of the Society . . .

And so, perhaps for the first time, two of the distinguished Honorary Members of the Newcastle Literary and Philosophical Society came together—Sir Joseph Banks, President of the Royal Society, and the subject of this paper, William Bulmer, the Newcastle-born fine printer. Banks, who, as we shall see, was “into everything”, was elected Honorary Member of the Society in 1794, while Bulmer was elected in 1821, the year of his full retirement from the Shakspeare press.

Bulmer set up the Shakspeare Press on Lady Day 1790, and, as can be seen from this Minute, he seems to have been recognized as a “fine printer” from the outset of his career. How did his background and training equip him for this?

#### *Bulmer's Start in Life*

William was the seventh child of Thomas Bulmer, a member of the House Carpenters' Company, and was born in Newcastle upon Tyne towards the end of 1757, being baptized on 13 November in St. John's Church. It is worth noting parenthetically that the second son was Sir Fenwick Bulmer, some 12 years older, who became successful as a druggist in the Strand, and who must have played a part in introducing his younger brother to the “right people”.

We have contemporary mentions of Bulmer in Thomas Bewick's posthumous memoir and in the near-literate “Biographical sketch of three Newcastle apprentices”, written no later than 1828, by Robert Pollard, the little-known copperplate engraver, who was an apprentice in Newcastle at the same time as Bewick and Bulmer. The sketch was published by the radical editor, William Mitchell, in his *Newcastle Magazine* for October 1830<sup>1</sup>, the issue carrying Bulmer's obituary. Neither is much more than anecdotal, although Bewick tells us that Bulmer helped to take proofs of his early wood-engravings.

The printer seems to have been apprenticed to Isaac Thompson, a Quaker master printer who died on 6 January 1776, just before Bulmer was out of his time. His indentures must have been transferred to Isaac's son, John, since William Bulmer was

admitted to Freedom of Newcastle by patrimony at the Guild in January 1778. The general standard of printing in Newcastle at that time was not high—even in a book which may be carrying our printer's name as editor<sup>2</sup>—so that it seems likely that Bulmer can have learnt no more than the rudiments of his craft. His ambition demanded more.

Although he was admitted to the Freedom of the City in January 1778 he was not sworn until September 1780. This suggests that Bulmer had left Newcastle by the end of 1777. J. B. Nichols, in his unsigned obituary of the printer in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for October 1830,<sup>3</sup> writes that our printer was employed by John Bell, who had strong connexions with France. Further, Robert Pollard, in his sketch, says that Bulmer went to that country to improve his skills, and on returning to England attracted the attention of George Nicol, bookseller to the King. (It is no more than a conjecture, but service to the King may have been the means by which Fenwick Bulmer drew the attention of the Royal Bookseller to his brother's talents. From 1785 the older brother was a member of the Honourable Band of Gentleman Pensioners, who waited on the King on ceremonial occasions, and William was a member from 1790.)

On the face of it there is a gap in our printer's history between his leaving Newcastle in 1777 and his working for George Nicol—to be mentioned in a moment—in 1787. The author's attention has very recently been drawn by Miss Mary Pollard, formerly of the Library of Trinity College, Dublin, to a William Bulmer who was a printer at 2 Church Lane, Dublin, and who printed the *Volunteer Evening Post* in that city from 10 November 1783 to 19 May 1785. The printer is listed in Wilson's *Dublin Directory* for 1785 and 1786, and in Pendred (1785). "The paper was funded by the Administration as part of their propaganda battle with the Dublin newspaper press, and payments to Bulmer, ostensibly for advertisements and proclamations, are recorded in the *Journals of the House of Commons of Ireland*." There are no records of payments to Bulmer after May 1785.<sup>4</sup> While it seems more than likely that such a printer would not be a native of Dublin, search in the published Irish marriage records reveals the marriage of William and Mary Bulmer, both of Belfast, in Belfast Parish Church on 2 September 1791,<sup>5</sup> by which time the "fine printer" was established in St. James's. The published records show no marriage of a William Bulmer in Dublin.

### *The Boydell Shakspeare*

Since Bulmer was launched on the book-loving world of his time by his commission to print the great illustrated Shakspeare of Alderman Sir John Boydell, it is worth a moment to glance at the genesis of this project.

Boydell, who had been Master of the Stationers' Company in 1783, and was Lord Mayor of London in 1790, was one of the leading print-sellers of the late eighteenth century and was a patron of artists. At that time portrait painting, at which British artists excelled, had less prestige than historical painting. Boydell, therefore, wished to stimulate the start of a school of British historical painting. A meeting to discuss this was held at the house of his nephew, Josiah, in Hampstead on 4 November 1786.<sup>6</sup> Amongst the artists present were Benjamin West, George Romney, William Hayley and Paul Sandby. A grandiose scheme was proposed:

1. to commission two series of oil-paintings of Shakspearian scenes;
2. to build a gallery for their permanent exhibition;
3. to publish, without text, a collection of engravings from the larger pictures;
4. to publish a folio edition of Shakspeare's plays, illustrated with engravings from the smaller pictures.

George Nicol, who was also at the meeting, and who seems to have been one of the prime movers in all this, undertook the oversight of the publication of the plays. In an advertisement, dated 4 June 1791, that he prepared for this publication, after mentioning type-founding, paper and ink he wrote<sup>7</sup>

The last object was still the most important—the making proper use of all these materials. For that purpose a printing-press had been erected in my house; but it was soon foreseen, that my numerous and unavoidable avocations would prevent me from paying that unremitting attention to the executive part of the printing, which in a great work is absolutely indispensable. In the meantime a gentleman offered his assistance, whose talents, industry, and skill, left nothing further to be desired; and I will venture to say, that the specimens of typography which will soon appear from the Shakspeare Press, will convince all Europe that Mr. Bulmer is second to no man in his profession.

This strongly suggests not only that Bulmer was working for him, perhaps in his house in Pall Mall, from 1786 or 1787, but also—and very importantly—that our printer was recognized, as early as 1786, as a skilled craftsman and (?) as a “gentleman”.

#### *Sir Joseph Banks and the Royal Society*

Sir Joseph Banks was at the centre of scientific and related public affairs for the whole of Bulmer's working life at the Shakspeare Press, and Bulmer printed for many of his associates. The Banks family, originally from Yorkshire, held Revesby Abbey in Lincolnshire. Joseph was born in London in 1744, and was schooled at Harrow and Eton, where he had shown a keen interest in natural history. As a gentleman-commoner at Christ Church, Oxford, in 1760 he had engaged a lecturer in botany to instruct him in it. In 1763, after his father's death, he inherited the large Revesby estate. Here he continued his scientific studies, and gave much attention to agriculture (reflected later in his contributions to the Board of Agriculture), to the development of his property and to the raising of stock.<sup>8</sup>

Banks became a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1766, being elected President in 1778, after the resignation of Sir John Pringle, physician to the King, and was re-elected annually until his death in 1820.<sup>9</sup> Banks took part in Cook's expedition to the Pacific in 1768–71, at his own expense, and this left him with a lasting interest in the plants and animals of the Pacific and Asia, which resulted in the production of several rare illustrated books, for which Bulmer was responsible. An example is *Plants of the Coast of Coromandel*, three folio volumes published between 1795 and 1819 by William Roxburgh and Sir Joseph Banks. This has 300 splendid plates.

Banks “took no part in the politics of the day, and identified himself with neither of the principal parties, nor would he stand for election as a Member of Parliament, all of which qualities were in his favour”.<sup>10</sup> “A man of so forceful a personality and such exceptional ability would soon make himself familiar with the business of the Society

and would then control to a great extent the activities of the Council".<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, Lyons, writing as an able treasurer and administrator in the Royal Society, is very critical of Banks's unbusinesslike handling of the Society's finances.<sup>12</sup> Having gone over the records of several organizations of which Banks was an officer, it is clear to the author that Sir Henry Lyons had projected back over one and a half centuries the more democratic manner in which learned bodies are now run. It is anachronistic to do so; Sir Joseph Banks saw the Royal Society, like Revesby Abbey, as his fief—to be run efficiently by himself without much explanation to those he may have regarded as subordinates. And this is the purpose of this discursus on the Royal Society—to show how Sir Joseph Banks, by taking firmly into his own hands the affairs of those organizations which he led, was able to patronize those tradesmen and craftsmen, whose work he valued and whom, like Bulmer, he wished to support. Further, his position as President of the Royal Society resulted in his being called on to support, and advise on, the establishment of many new scientific and related activities.

Perhaps the earliest result of Bulmer's being brought to the attention of Banks (presumably through George Nicol) was the resolution of the Council of the Royal Society on 22 December 1791, with which this paper opens.<sup>13</sup> This resolution seems to have come out of the blue, in so far as there is no relevant discussion recorded in earlier minutes. Nichols<sup>14</sup> quotes a letter from Banks (whom he supplied with information about Lincolnshire) explaining that it was only Bulmer's reputation as a fine printer that had caused the Society to change their printer. Nichols adds an illuminating and ironic footnote in extenuation

Mr. Bulmer has the credit of first bringing into extensive use what is technically called *Fine Printing*; which had been previously carried on in Paris by the celebrated Didot; at Birmingham by Baskerville; and still earlier in London (on a small scale) by Dryden Leach . . .—It consists in new Types, excellent Ink, improved Printing Presses, a sufficient time allowed to the Pressman for extraordinary attention, and last, not least, an inclination in the Employer to pay a considerably advanced price.—Mr. Bulmer's example was successfully followed by Mr. Bensley; and *Fine Printing* is now performed by every Printer of respectability in the United Empire.

In fact an analysis of the costs of printing the *Philosophical Transactions* from 1780 to 1822 does not show any sudden increase when Bulmer took over.<sup>15</sup>

Before he died at Heston, Middlesex, on 19 June 1820,<sup>16</sup> in which year Bulmer retired from active control of the Shakspeare Press, Sir Joseph Banks had helped to get commissions from several other societies.

#### *Banks, Bulmer and the Other Organizations*

Another corporate customer, for which Bulmer came to print as a result of Sir Joseph Banks's intervention, was the African Association. The two men who took the lead were Henry Beaufoy and Banks. Beaufoy, the son of a Quaker wine-merchant, was an MP and opposed the slave trade; he became the Secretary, while Banks became the Treasurer, and it is out of the duties of this office that the Association's first printer was changed for Bulmer—once again.<sup>17</sup>

The Association's earliest printer was Colin Macrae of Orange Street, Leicester

Fields. He seems to have been a less than satisfactory businessman, since he was bankrupt in 1795,<sup>18</sup> but he clearly fell out with Banks over his account for the Association's printing.<sup>19</sup> The Banks papers in the Sutro Library naturally show mainly one side of the correspondence, but it is clear that Banks thought that the Association had been overcharged for printing and sewing. There is a sworn deposition, dated 1 July 1790, about the affair.

The early volumes of the Minutes of the African Association are in the Cambridge University Library.<sup>20</sup> There are several references to arranging for papers to be printed, but the printer is in no case mentioned except in relation to accounts being presented for payment. It seems clear, therefore, as suggested above, that Banks, as Treasurer, acted on his own authority to engage (and discharge) the printers.

Bulmer printed the Association's *Proceedings* from no later than 1792, and, although these do not carry his name, it seems that George Nicol acted as the Association's bookseller.<sup>21</sup> In March 1808 Nicol gave an account of the Parts held by him, and at the same meeting Bulmer presented an estimate for reprinting 750 copies of the papers to date in one quarto volume.<sup>22</sup> Bulmer also printed such papers for the Association as James Rennell's *Elucidations of the African Geography* (1793), and such major works as the journeys of Park and Hornemann.

It was not until the Association recruited the young Scottish surgeon, Mungo Park, in 1794 that it can be said to have successfully begun its exploration. Park's *Travels in the Interior of Africa, 1795–7* (1799), in two volumes was a success and had run into six editions by 1810, four years after his death on his second expedition, which was not under the aegis of the Association. The later expedition and the two journeys together were published by John Murray, and the details may be found in that firm's archives.<sup>23</sup> It goes without saying that Bulmer printed all of them.

There are many other ways in which the influence of Sir Joseph Banks helped Bulmer in his career, particularly in developing his market. It is noticeable, for example, that two members of Council of the Royal Society, who attended most meetings of the Council in Bulmer's early days as printer to the Society, were James Rennell and Joseph Planta. Rennell was active in the African Association, already discussed, and Bulmer also printed at least six of his geographical books. Planta had been appointed Assistant Librarian at the British Museum in 1773, becoming Principal Librarian in 1799. His own *History of the Helvetic Confederacy* (2 vols. 1800) was printed by Bulmer, and no doubt he had a hand in guiding in our printer's direction the Museum's splendid illustrated descriptions of its marbles and terracottas.

Of the Societies for which Bulmer printed the last to be founded with a Banks connexion was the Horticultural Society of London, the lead being taken by John Wedgwood, of the pottery family. In this case Bulmer did not work for the Society from its very earliest days.

The inaugural meeting of the Society was held on Wednesday 7 March 1804—in the house of the bookseller, John Hatchard, in Piccadilly, London. Seven attended this meeting: Wedgwood, who took the chair, William Forsyth (gardener to the King), Banks, the Rt. Hon. Charles Greville, R. A. Salisbury, W. T. Aiton and James Dickson.<sup>24</sup>

Periodical meetings were held, at which papers on horticultural subjects were read. From about 1807 these papers were printed and issued in periodical parts, five or six making up the first volume. These first five or six parts were printed by William Savage, of Bedford Bury, London,<sup>25</sup> but Bulmer seems to have become the printer by 1812, when the first volume of collected parts was published. From then onwards he printed the *Transactions* and such other publications of the Society as lists of members etc.<sup>26</sup> The manuscript minutes of the early meetings of the Council of the Society mention accounts for printing from William Savage on 5 May 1807, 3 May 1808, 2 January 1810, 9 February 1810, 5 June 1810 and 15 May 1811. The first mention of an account for printing from Bulmer was 7 April 1812. It looks, therefore, as if the Society's printing was transferred to him in 1811.

The Society's second President, T. A. Knight, younger brother of another of "Bulmer's authors", Richard Payne Knight, issued his *Pomona Herefordiensis*, in ten bi-monthly parts (each containing three coloured plates), beginning in October 1808,<sup>27</sup> and the letterpress was printed by Bulmer. The work was published by the Agricultural Society of Herefordshire. Nevertheless there was, once again a close connexion with Sir Joseph Banks: the engraver of the splendid plates was William Hooker, often employed by Banks.<sup>28</sup>

### *Bulmer and Bewick*

A Newcastle paper on Bulmer must take account of the working relationship between him and that other of the Northeast's famous sons, the wood-engraver Thomas Bewick—a relationship that was not always easy.

One of Bulmer's early productions, and the first in which he ventured as his own publisher, was the *Poems of Goldsmith and Parnell* (1795), with splendid wood-engravings by the brothers Thomas and John Bewick. This is, perhaps, the most successful contemporary showing of Bewick's wood-engravings. It was very profitable for the printer, but caused some friction between him and the Bewick family, who thought that the engraver had been inadequately rewarded for his work.

That Bulmer gave detailed oversight to all aspects of this work is shown by instructions in his hand accompanying proof pulls of three engravings: The Traveller (p. 3), The Departure (p. 29) and The Hermit, Angel, and Guide (p. 72) now in the Pease Collection in Newcastle Central Library.<sup>29</sup>

In April 1794 Bulmer issued a prospectus<sup>30</sup> about the *Poems*, which starts in the same vein as his much-quoted Advertisement to the first edition. The fourth paragraph is very germane to the Bewick thesis

The Price of the Work in boards, to Subscribers, will be One Guinea. And as this Publication is undertaken with the laudable ambition of exhibiting the abilities of the different Artists, without the most distant regard to emolument on the part of the Printer, two hundred and fifty copies only will be taken off.

It seems highly unlikely that the run was as small as 250, and Jane Bewick notes that "Bulmer told us he soon sold 1000 copies at one guinea each he wd. not tell us where the cuts now are." Timperley<sup>31</sup> also records "This volume was highly appreciated by

the public; two editions of it, in 4to. were sold, and they produced a profit to the ingenious printer, after payment of all expenses, of £1,500.”<sup>32</sup>

The next, and last, paragraph in the prospectus shows how important the engravings were to the enterprise

Gentlemen wishing to be possessed of this Specimen of the Art, are requested to leave their names, as early a possible, at the Shakspeare Printing Office, Cleveland Row, St. James’s, where the Engravings on Wood, and the Letter-Press, may be seen.

A letter from Bulmer to Bewick, dated 20 January 1794, gives his answer to the engraver’s accusations<sup>33</sup>

Why you should obliquely hint a doubt of my honor, or the expressions of friendship which I had frequently professed for your fame, & for your welfare, I know not—neither will I trouble myself with the enquiry—& retrospect of my conduct to you, since our earliest acquaintance, will, I presume, be the strongest confutation on that head. We are now at issue concerning a business in which I employed you near 2 years ago, & the sooner that is settled, the more agreeable it will be to my feelings; for you may rest assured it is contrary to my inclination to enter a correspondence of disputation with any person, but more particularly with a man for whom I have invariably held the highest respect & esteem.

The printer then goes on to list the engravings involved, and the prices that the two of them had agreed, drawing up a final account showing that he owed Bewick £37.7.0.

In spite of such strains in their relationship, the two Novocastrians remained on reasonably friendly terms, helped, no doubt, by the distance between them. The extensive series of letters from Robert Pollard to Thomas Bewick, now in the Library of the Victoria and Albert Museum, includes friendly mentions of the printer. For example, in a letter of 1 June 1821, Pollard mentions a recent invitation from Bulmer to Bewick to come to London, presumably to stay with him in Clapham.<sup>34</sup> We also know that, on his last visit to London in August 1828, the year of his death, Bewick dined with Bulmer.<sup>35</sup>

After his death subscriptions were raised for a marble bust of Bewick, which now stands in the rooms of the Newcastle Literary and Philosophical Society. Bulmer was one of the subscribers.<sup>36</sup>

It seems that the acrimony between Bewick and several of those for whom he worked was overemphasized by his daughters after his death. He was a notable success in his own lifetime, as was Bulmer. Both were good businessmen; perhaps Bewick’s provincial milieu allowed him to be somewhat sharper than would have been possible for Bulmer. One must conclude that the printer was not unfair, but believed in striking a good bargain.

### *Bulmer’s Publishers*

The launch given to Bulmer by George Nicol and the Boydells, together with the support of Sir Joseph Banks, gave him a flying start. His clientele slowly increased and his annual production grew steadily from the six books in 1792, to eleven in 1793, to 21 in 1794, reaching a peak of 35 in 1802. This was exceeded only in 1812 with 36 and in 1814 with 47 (ten of which were editions of Byron’s topical *Ode to Napoleon*

*Buonaparte*, a small pamphlet printed, every few weeks, for John Murray in “batches”, initially of 1000, reducing to 750 and, by the fifth edition to 500).

Robert Faulder, bookseller in New Bond Street, was the publisher of one of the books printed by Bulmer in each of the years 1792–7. Maxted<sup>37</sup> shows that, in 1799, he was bookseller to the King. He may, therefore, have had some association with George Nicol; at the least, he must have been well known to him.

While his principal publishers, in the early years, were Nicol and the Boydells, others were beginning to use Bulmer’s services. In 1793 the Society of Antiquaries commissioned him to print Major-General William Roy’s *Military Antiquities of the Romans*, a large folio. Roy was a pioneer of the Ordnance Survey, a project with which Banks was closely concerned.<sup>38</sup> In that same year Bulmer printed *The Peerage of Great Britain and Ireland* for Robert Pollard, a copperplate engraver and life-long friend of the printer from the time that they were apprentices in Newcastle upon Tyne. There were also two books for James Rennell.

In 1794 Bulmer printed Kindersley’s *Specimens of Hindoo Literature*, which was dedicated to the Directors of the East India Company, and is the printer’s first contact with that Company. This association afterwards produced many books for authors employed by the Company, some using various exotic typefaces. In the same year he also printed Major Dirom’s *Narrative of the Campaign in India in 1792*.

Also in 1794 Bulmer printed eight of ten *General Views* of county agriculture. The ninth (Walker’s *Hereford*) came out in 1795, and the tenth (Young’s *Lincoln*) in 1799.

For the first few years that Bulmer printed the *Philosophical Transactions* of the Royal Society, the name of Peter Elmsly, the Strand bookseller, appears in the imprint. In 1795 Bulmer printed Sir William Drummond’s *Philosophical Sketches* and Skrine’s *Three Successive Tours in the North of England* for Elmsly. There were also at least three other reports for the old Board of Agriculture. In that year Bulmer felt sufficiently confident to publish, on his own account, the *Poems of Goldsmith and Parnell*, that I have already mentioned as a source of friction between the two eminent Novocastrians.

By 1796 we find the names of Cadell and Davies, and of James Edwards on the imprints. In 1797 Bulmer started printing the *Communications to the Board of Agriculture*, and the first of his publications for the Society of Dilettanti (*The Antiquities of Ionia*, part ii)—this Society was another of Banks’s activities.<sup>39</sup>

Although the range of his publisher clients had grown considerably by the end of the eighteenth century, it was not until 1805 that we find the name of Longman in a Bulmer imprint. In that year was issued the four-volume edition in octavo of the *Plays* of Massinger, edited by William Gifford. The Longman Impression Books, now in the Library of Reading University, show that the total cost of the edition of 750 was £897.18.0, of which printing cost £372.0.0 and paper £296.16.0. Eight other booksellers were associated with Longmans in this publication.<sup>40</sup> Bulmer did not, in fact, print very much for Longmans.

It was not until he moved from Fleet Street to 50 Albemarle Street, in 1812, that John Murray employed Bulmer. At this time John Murray seems to have changed his emphasis, as is shown by a bound set of his catalogues, ranging from 1774 to 1824.<sup>41</sup> While in Fleet Street he seems to have concentrated mainly on bookselling, and the

books had a medical and similar emphasis. After his move to Albemarle Street he made a substantial entry to publishing, with works of literary and general interest. He was, for example, as is well known, Byron's publisher, and issued the later editions of Mungo Park's two expeditions.

It was not until 1808 that that most irritating of bibliographic writers, the Rev. T. F. Dibdin, first commissioned Bulmer, and by that time it is arguable that the printer's most attractive typeface was already in the past. In that year Bulmer printed for Dibdin More's *Utopia* and the bibliophile's own *Lincoln Nosegay*. There followed another half-dozen works, several of which were very substantial and printed in more than one colour.

### *Bulmer's Achievement*

In the prefatory "Advertisement" to the *Poems of Goldsmith and Parnell* Bulmer says that the work is "particularly meant to combine the various beauties of PRINTING, TYPE-FOUNDING, ENGRAVING, and PAPER-MAKING". He then goes on to extol William Martin for the type, the Bewicks for the wood-engravings, and Whatman for the paper; what he does not mention is ink.

Hansard<sup>42</sup> devotes a whole chapter to printing ink, and says "Few printers, of any eminence, in this country attempt to be the entire makers of their own ink . . . with the exception of Mr. Bulmer".<sup>43</sup> Several paragraphs later he asserts that Baskerville was the first printer to turn his attention to "this most essential article", and goes on

It was reserved for to him to discover . . . a superior kind of black for the purpose required, and to this success may be attributed, in a great measure, the superiority of his printing.

Hansard attributes the "discovery" to 1760, and suggests that, from the time of Baskerville's death in 1775 to 1790, the technique lay dormant. In that year, through Robert Martin,

A considerable quantity of this fine black, which had been collecting, for a length of time, from the glass-pinchers' and solderers' lamps, was bought by him, at an almost unlimited price, and was supplied to Mr. Bulmer for his experiments in fine printing. But the difficulty of obtaining any regular supply by these means, and the adulterations practised by the workmen when they found a demand for the article, induced Mr. Bulmer to erect an apparatus for the purpose of making it, for his own use; and he succeeded in producing a very superior black.<sup>44</sup>

The work was slow and unpleasant and, in consequence, Bulmer did not produce the ink commercially, but used it to good effect in some of his finest books.

Hansard especially commends the quality of the ink in Bulmer's printing of the *Anacreontis Odaria* (1802), with fine engravings by a Miss Bacon (afterwards wife of the editor, the Rev. Edward Forster) and printed in William Martin's splendid Greek face, and also of a number of wood-engravings in volume 2 of Dibdin's *Bibliographical Decameron*. These had a very dense black background and were printed on the same page as footnotes that can have been in type no larger than brevier (say, 8 point); the black ink admirably fulfils the two different functions.<sup>45</sup> (It is just possible, however, that the text and wood-engraving were printed at separate pulls; red was used on other pages, and this must have called for a second pull.)

This has been gone into at some length to illustrate how Bulmer's achievement, immediately recognized, resulted from the kind of attention to detail that George Nicol, in his advance notice for the Shakspeare, says is "absolutely indispensable".

### *Bulmer's Typography*

If, in fact, Bulmer worked for John Bell, after he left Newcastle in late 1777, he was in the right shop to acquire the skills of, and a feeling for, "fine printing". As the late Oliver Simon pointed out Bell "did much to popularize 'Fine Printing', as many of his prospectuses and books bear witness. His work and influence as a typographer were important".<sup>46</sup> Indeed, Bulmer used his types very widely, especially in his earlier books, when they probably predominate over those of William Martin. Nevertheless, it may be said that our printer not only practised what he had learnt, but also carried the craft to a high point in the very early years of the nineteenth century. Marrot,<sup>47</sup> who was writing at a time of inter-war renaissance of typography, is enthusiastic about the achievement of Bulmer and Bensley; he writes that "they were, indeed, not far from being model printers". Marrot was, no doubt, overstating the case, but when one considers what went before and what followed in the Victorian crepuscule, it will be recognized that their achievement was noteworthy.

Since the early 1930s, when Marrot was writing, and even since the late 1940s, when Oliver Simon wrote his splendidly stimulating article, our knowledge of Bulmer's output has increased so much beyond the fine books, so flatulently mentioned by Dibdin in his *Bibliographical Decameron*, that we can make a more informed judgement.

When we compare, say, *Poems of Goldsmith and Parnell* and a piece of jobbing printing such as Dimsdale's *Extract from an Account of Cases of Typhus Fever*, a small pamphlet printed for the Society for Bettering the Condition of the Poor about 1803, and intended to sell for 1s. for a dozen copies, we can see that Bulmer quite properly devoted less attention to more everyday bread-and-butter work. Bulmer was a commercial printer—and a very successful one at that, as his will shows<sup>48</sup>—not a private press. He had to provide what his customers wanted and were prepared to pay for. Marrot<sup>49</sup> puts it in this way

It is clearly unreasonable to expect of the commercial printer that his work should be as consistently good as that of the private presses, but what one may, and should, ask is, that he show equal enterprise and intelligence *within the limits of his narrower orbit*.

An examination of William Bulmer's output over his thirty years at the Shakspeare Press shows that he satisfied Marrot's criterion.

### *A Man of Substance*

Dr. Johnson, on being taken to dinner in Kensington in Mr. Strahan's coach, remarked that this showed that the printer was a man of substance and mentioned Hamilton<sup>50</sup> "who had arrived at grandeur before Strahan".<sup>51</sup> This comment suggests that prosperity and status were not common for printers in the eighteenth century. Bulmer was clearly a man of substance. His carriage is mentioned by Robert Pollard in a letter to Bewick,<sup>52</sup> his will demonstrates that he was prosperous,<sup>53</sup> and he was a

member of the Honourable Band of Gentlemen Pensioners from very early in his printing career.

It would be otiose to go into Bulmer's will here, since it has been published elsewhere, but we may usefully glance at the property, aside from money, because this may help to show where he lived in London at various times.

He leaves, to his brother Ralph, houses and other premises near Parsons Green, Fulham, and also at 12 Park Street, Islington. He also mentions at length his share in Fulham Bridge, which he bequeaths, after a life interest to his wife, to the illegitimate children of his brother Fenwick and to their children.

The poor-rate books for the Parish of Fulham<sup>54</sup> show that Bulmer paid a poor rate from the first half of the year 1805–6 (having taken over the house of the "late Cording") until the second half of the year 1809–10. It seems likely, therefore, that he lived in Broomhouse Lane in Parsons Green from the later months of 1805 until the early months of 1810.<sup>55</sup>

We know that Bulmer was living in Clapham Rise when he died. The printer's house was actually in the Parish of St. Mary, Lambeth, and the poor-rate books for that parish demonstrate that he took over the house of a Julius Schroeder from the third quarterly collection in 1816.<sup>56</sup> A glance at a map of London does not suggest that Park Street, Islington, was a likely residential stage between Parsons Green and Clapham. He may have lived "over the shop" from 1790, or soon afterwards, but Islington does not seem to be conveniently located either for Cleveland Row—or for the Strand, if Bulmer did, in fact, work for John Bell.

John Nichols quotes several *jeux d'esprit* from William Gifford, editor of *The Anti-Jacobin*, to Bulmer and these show that both were members of the Honourable Band of Gentlemen Pensioners. Indeed Gifford was Paymaster and Bulmer printed some of the payslips for the Band.<sup>57</sup> What was this Band? And what does membership of it tell us about Bulmer?

A complete run of the *Royal Kalendar*, in the Institute of Historical Research of the University of London, shows that, rather astonishingly, William Bulmer was a member of the Gentlemen Pensioners from 1790 until his death in 1830; he must have been commissioned within a few months of setting up in Cleveland Row, St. James's. His elder brother, Fenwick, was a member of the Band from 1785 until he died in 1824.

The English Sovereign had for long had a close personal guard in peace and war, but it was Henry VIII who, on his accession in 1509, formed the Honourable Band of Gentlemen Pensioners, on the pattern of the French Pensionnaires established by Louis XI in 1474. Henry VIII required his Pensioners to be of noble blood, and the horses, arms and servants that they were required to provide meant that they also had to be wealthy.

The commission in the Band was paid, and soon came to be sold—at some times by the Captain, and at some times by the member himself. In early years the Band was a crack fighting body, but by the reign of George III its duties were entirely ceremonial, and Brackenbury remarks that when George IV came to the throne "the Corps was composed, almost if not quite without exception, of civilians untrained in the use of arms."

It seems that the reputation of the Band had dropped by the end of the eighteenth century, and as early as 1782 Burke had tried to suppress the practice of selling places, but without success. At that time the place of a private Gentleman in the Band cost on average 1000 guineas, while the annual income, after deducting land tax and other outgoings, amounted to only £76 per year.<sup>58</sup> (It was not, in fact, until 1862 that the Corps was reconstructed on its present lines as a Corps of senior retired Service officers with distinguished careers.) The Captain, whose appointment by Bulmer's time was political, received £1000 per year, the Paymaster £300 and the ordinary members £100.

Reading the names of the Gentlemen Pensioners in the *Royal Kalendars* from 1784 to 1831 does not immediately suggest aristocratic family names, but they were all treated as gentlemen, being graced with "esquire" in the lists. It almost looks as though William Bulmer had achieved—or bought—that status by 1790.

However that may be, there are a few conclusions that we may tentatively draw from this. Clearly his elder brother, Fenwick, must have been a helpful connexion. William's location, so close to St. James's Palace where the Prince of Wales lived, is much to the point, especially since the Band became attached to the Prince, rather than the King, after the latter became mad. It has been remarked that Bulmer became as nearly the King's personal printer as anyone ever has, and some colour is given to this by Dibdin's circumstantial story of the "Bodoni Hum".<sup>59</sup> As suggested earlier, William Bulmer's connexion with the Crown, through the Gentlemen Pensioners, must have been assisted by his older brother, Fenwick, and may have led to his being introduced to George Nicol. Further, if it was indeed our William Bulmer who was working for the Dublin Administration, he may well have been in favour with the Government all those years before.

Even if Bulmer was no scion of a noble family, he must have been wealthy enough by 1790 to buy a place in the Gentlemen Pensioners, and have been an acceptable companion to gentlemen and wealthy tradesmen like his elder brother. His joining such a group so early in his career as a master-printer says much for his ambition and for his opinion of himself.

Bulmer always retained a kindly feeling for his native town—certainly he remembered his family in Newcastle in his will—and, no doubt, his native town enjoyed his fame. A similar kind of bookish interest that enabled him to find customers for his fine printing led, three years after his establishment in Cleveland Row, St. James's, to the foundation of the Literary and Philosophical Society, which early invited Sir Joseph Banks to accept Honorary Membership in the Society's first year, and our printer likewise almost thirty years later. The Society possesses two letters from Bulmer to the Rev. Anthony Hedley, Secretary from 1821 to 1825. In these he presents a number of his books to the Library and acknowledges the honour of his election. (The correspondence is clearly incomplete, and he seems to have presented two lots of books.)

### *Conclusion*

Even Homer nodded or—to use a more appropriate metaphor, since Bulmer was printing for profit, not for pleasure—because our printer did not feel obliged to supply

a Rolls-Royce when he had been paid only for a Mini, not all his work was of the standard of the Milton. It is appropriate to echo the words of Marrot in his summing up of the achievement of Bulmer and Bensley.<sup>60</sup>

In their choice of the best types, paper, and ink that circumstances would permit, in their active researches after every kind of improvement in material as in method, they were worlds removed from that ordinary docile beast of burden, the “commercial” printer . . . It is, of course, not implied that they were infallible, nor that their books were all faultless . . . The two men are specially remarkable for the way in which they understood their types—performed, that is, exactly the primary and most essential duty of the printer.

In his early days especially, Bulmer had the better of it in William Martin’s transitional typeface, which he generally handled in masterly fashion in prose text, while Bensley was more successful in his title-pages. “Fine printing” was being striven for by the very few cognoscenti before Bulmer, but he gave it consistent form and impetus.

Updike says of the best printing of Bulmer’s time

Whatever may be the opinion of the light, open types and widely spaced and leaded pages of volumes by the best printers in these last years of the eighteenth century, they seem to me to be very sincere and workmanlike solutions of problems which the printer worked out in the manner of that time. Such books were part of the life about them. They accorded admirably with the cool, sedate interiors in which they were housed. It was printing faithful to the best standards of its day, and because of this I think it will live.<sup>61</sup>

To this development the Newcastle apprentice who became a prosperous “gentleman” made a major contribution, and the author hopes that he has shown that William Bulmer was indeed a Fine Printer—and a worthy son of Newcastle upon Tyne.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Pp. 464–6, and there signed R.P.H.

<sup>2</sup> Bulmer, William [Ed.] *Wit’s Repository*, Thomas Robson, Newcastle upon Tyne, 1777.

<sup>3</sup> The file copies of the *Gentleman’s Magazine*, made by the Nichols family are in the Folger Library, Washington, and this obituary carries an annotation that it was written by J. B. Nichols.

<sup>4</sup> Personal correspondence, August 1987. Miss Poilard points out to me that she knows no other imprint of his in Dublin.

<sup>5</sup> *Journal of the Irish Memorials Association*, vol. xii, p. 332\*. The marriage was carried out by S. Smythe by Licence.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, the accounts given in Balston, Thomas, “John Boydell, publisher, the commercial Maecenas”. *Signature*, NS 8, pp. 3–32, and Friedman, Winifred H. *Boydell’s Shakespeare Gallery*, New York, 1976, Part I.

<sup>7</sup> A copy is in the St. Bride’s Printing Library.

<sup>8</sup> Lyons, Sir Henry (1944). *The Royal Society: a History of its Administration under its Charters*, Cambridge University Press, p. 187.

<sup>9</sup> Lyons, *Royal Society*, pp. 193–4 and 197–8.

<sup>10</sup> Lyons, *Royal Society*, p. 197.

<sup>11</sup> Lyons, p. 198.

<sup>12</sup> Lyons, p. 202.

<sup>13</sup> This transcription has been made from an early manuscript copy of the Council Minutes in the Archives of the Royal Society, with the permission of the Librarian.

<sup>14</sup> Nichols, John and J. B. (1817–58). *Illustrations of the Literary History of the Eighteenth Century*, vol. 4, p. 697n. It must be remembered that this was published in 1822, with the judgement of hindsight.

<sup>15</sup> See Isaac, P. C. G. (1984). *William Bulmer, 1757–1830, “Fine Printer”*, Sandars Lectures, University of Cambridge, p. 17.

<sup>16</sup> Carter, H. B. (1981). Sir Joseph Banks—the cryptic georgian. *Lincolnshire History and Archaeology*, 16, 53–62.

<sup>17</sup> Lupton, Kenneth (1979). *Mungo Park the African Traveler*, Oxford University Press, p. 20.

<sup>18</sup> Maxted, Ian (1977). *The London Book Trades, 1775–1800*, Folkstone, Dawson, p. 145.

<sup>19</sup> The episode may be followed in the photocopies, in the Library of the Royal Geographical Society, of the Banks papers in the Sutro Library of the California State Library, San Francisco—see sheets numbers 111–128.

<sup>20</sup> CUL Add. MSS 7085, 7086 and 7087.

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, CUL Add. MSS 7085 fos. 116–17.

<sup>22</sup> CUL Add. MSS 7085 fo. 117v.

<sup>23</sup> John Murray ledger B, fos. 1 and 2, and daybook (1811–17), fo. 133.

<sup>24</sup> Fletcher, H. R. (1969). *The Story of the Royal Horticultural Society, 1804–1968*, London, p. 22.

<sup>25</sup> The bound copy of Vol. 1 of the *Transactions* (shelfmark 25.1.A) in the RHS Library carries the imprint of William Savage, in various forms, on pp. 70, 111 and 169. There is no imprint at the supposed ends of Parts 4–6. The end of the Appendix carries Bulmer's imprint, as does the title-page. See also *Flora Malesiana Bulletin*, 1 ser., no. 4, March 1954 for a discussion of the dates and pagination of the Parts. Three editions of the early volumes of the *Transactions* seem to have been published.

<sup>26</sup> A lengthy list of members for 1820 is in the John Johnson Collection in the Bodleian Library.

<sup>27</sup> According to a pencil note in a modern hand in one copy (shelfmark 86bis.E.2b) in the RHS Library, which also shows the price of each part as 8/- and indicates that the information came from an original wrapper. Another copy (shelfmark 86bis.E.3) has uncoloured plates, printed in green in both copies. The latter copy has on the top board a small printed label in a border of flower ornaments, showing that the price was £4 4s plain and £6 6s coloured.

<sup>28</sup> Personal communication from Mr. H. B. Carter, the biographer of Banks.

<sup>29</sup> Item no. 61 in the Pease Collection of Bewick material in the Newcastle Central Library. It is interesting to note how Bewick was acting as a trade engraver, working from another artist's painting—and that Bulmer seems to have wished to suppress that fact.

<sup>30</sup> In the collection of the late John Hack.

<sup>31</sup> Timperley, C. H. (1842). *Encyclopaedia of*

*Literary and Typographical Anecdote*, London.

<sup>32</sup> P. 912. In fact the second edition (1804) is in octavo.

<sup>33</sup> This letter was published as Plate 8 by Iain Bain (1970), *Checklist of the Manuscripts of Thomas Bewick*, Pinner, reprinted from *The Private Library*.

<sup>34</sup> Shelfmark 86.JJ.18B; letter no. 89.

<sup>35</sup> See, for example, Montague Weekley (1953), *Thomas Bewick*, pp. 187–8. At the time Bewick was already failing, for when “Bulmer took him for a drive to the new splendours of Nash's Regent's Park, he did not even bestir himself to get out of the carriage in order to look at the Zoo, which had been established there in that year.”

<sup>36</sup> There is a list of the subscribers and an engraving of the bust in item 184 in the Pease Collection in the Newcastle Central Library. The bust is illustrated in Iain Bain's edition of Bewick's *Memoir*, facing p. 211.

<sup>37</sup> Maxted (1977).

<sup>38</sup> Roy was also FRS.

<sup>39</sup> The records of the Society of Dilettanti are deposited in the Library of the Society of Antiquaries of London.

<sup>40</sup> Impression Book 3, folio 130r.

<sup>41</sup> In the archives of the present firm at 50 Albemarle Street. In working on these archives I was greatly assisted by Mrs. Virginia Murray, Archivist to the firm.

<sup>42</sup> Hansard, T. C., *Typographia*, London, 1825, pp. 715–33.

<sup>43</sup> p. 716.

<sup>44</sup> Hansard, op. cit., p. 718.

<sup>45</sup> Idem., pp. 718–19.

<sup>46</sup> Simon, Oliver, *English typography and the industrial age. Signature*, NS 7, p. 22, note 1.

<sup>47</sup> Marrot, H. V. *William Bulmer, Thomas Bensley: a study in transition*, London, 1930, p. 13.

<sup>48</sup> Dreyfus, John and Isaac, P. C. G. *William Bulmer's will. Studies in the Book Trade in Honour of Graham Pollard*. Oxford Bibliographical Society, 1975, pp. 341–9.

<sup>49</sup> Marrot, op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>50</sup> Presumably Archibald Hamilton (c. 1719–93) who, on moving to London from Edinburgh, became associated with Strahan (Plomer, Bushnell and Dix (1968) *A Dictionary of Printers and Booksellers who were at work in England, Scotland and Ireland from 1726 to 1775*).

<sup>51</sup> Knight, Charles (1865). *Shadows of the Old Booksellers*, London, p. 231.

<sup>52</sup> Letter no. 90 in the Pollard-Bewick correspondence, Victoria and Albert Museum Library shelfmark 86.JJ.18B.

<sup>53</sup> Dreyfus and Isaac (1975).

<sup>54</sup> The Fulham Parish records are in the Shepherds Bush Library shelfmarks PAF/1/36–37. These rate books also mention the Bridge, which was also rated. The first reference to WB is on folio 12 of PAF/1/36 and the last on folio 8 of PAF/1/37. The Library also has a number of deeds, deposited by a firm of London solicitors, which include several dealing with Bridge transactions, in which WB was concerned.

<sup>55</sup> The will gives the address as Broom House Lane. An eighteenth-century map of London shows Broom House Lane running down to the

Thames through market gardens just to the east of Fulham Bridge.

<sup>56</sup> Minet Library, Lambeth, shelfmark P2/133, pp. 339 and 461. The printer's name is, in fact, spelt "Bulmore".

<sup>57</sup> Nichols (1817–58), vol. 6, pp. 1–36.

<sup>58</sup> Brackenbury, Henry (1905) *The Nearest Guard: the history of the Honourable Corps of Gentlemen-at-Arms*, London, pp. 170–9.

<sup>59</sup> Dibdin, T. F. (1817). *The Bibliographical Decameron*, London, vol. 2, p. 396 and vol. 3, pp. 483–4.

<sup>60</sup> Marrot, op. cit., pp. 12–14.

<sup>61</sup> Updike, D. B. *Printing Types: their history, forms and use*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1951, vol. 2, pp. 147–8.

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