

MORE PRENTICES OF LONDON

D. F. McKenzie, ed., *Stationers' Company Apprentices, 1641 - 1700*. Oxford: The Oxford Bibliographical Society, 1974. (Printed and bound by the Scolar Press Ltd.) U.K. price £7.50.

With the publication of this further inventory of Stationers' Company Apprentices, Professor McKenzie brings his accounts to 1700. The first part originally appeared in *Studies in Bibliography*, XIII (1960), and was subsequently published in expanded form by the Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia as *Stationers' Company Apprentices, 1605 - 1640*. The Oxford Bibliographical Society has now taken over this most welcome enterprise, and has stated its intention of issuing (at some future date) a final list of masters and the apprentices bound to them for the period 1701 - 1800.

This new list once again provides us with the dry bones of the circumstances of apprenticeship codified in the following manner: apprentice's name, transcribed from the registers; his father's name and trade and place of origin where this is known; dates of term of binding and of freedom, if any. There is an index of apprentices and an index of place-names, but the apprentices are grouped under masters who are listed alphabetically in the main body of the text. This invaluable range of information has been drawn and meticulously pieced together from the Registers of Apprentices and the Registers of Freemen, together with other indexes held by the Stationers' Company.

For most of us, it is a long way to Paternoster Row, and these lists will not only meet a long-felt bibliographical need but will also provide a stimulus to further research into the intriguing mazes of the licensed book trade. The procedure adopted by the present editor may best be indicated by a few citations from entries that are significantly related. Thus, in the List of Printers' Apprentices, 1605 - 1640, one finds the following, and not untypical entry:

BURBY, Cuthbert

129. Nicholas Bourne. Fd by Mrs. Burby 26. 3. 08. Bd to Cuthbert Burby 14. 3. 01 (Arber II.253). Described by Burby as his servant 24. 8. 07 (Plomer, Wills, 42).

This might be interpreted as follows: Nicholas Bourne (place of origin unknown?), bound apprentice in the traditional manner to the Printer Cuthbert Burby, freeman of the Stationers' Company, and freed from his bond by Burby's widow at the full term of apprenticeship some seven years later.

Something of the pressures of the trade is indicated by the laconic footnote to the indenture of another of Burby's apprentices: "This appr is rune away. And neur^e to be free and his Ind is cancelled"; and by the editor's wry comment, "Not the first to part from Burby in this fashion". This may well be so, but when one takes into consideration Burby's obvious capacity for training future master-printers, and his particularly generous treatment of one apprentice, Nicholas Bourne, one is left with a radically different impression. There are certain dangers inherent in casual editorial comment, and it may be profitable to look more closely at the case of Cuthbert Burby.

Cuthbert Burby of Cornhill nr. the Royal Exchange is best remembered for his publication of the 1598 quarto of *Love's Labours Lost*, very probably printed from the author's MS. But he might equally well be noted for a codicil in his will [Plomer, *Abstracts from the Wills of English Printers*, p. 42] which commended Bourne "in respect of his true and faithful service donne to me". It was of course not unusual for a talented apprentice to take over the master's establishment, but there are indications of a generosity in the codicil which is distinctively more than the embellishments of legal phraseology. And the relevant section concludes: "the lease estate and tearme of yeres . . . and in my said Schopp situate in Cornhill at or neere the Royall Exchaunge which lease I then freelie give and be bequeth to the said Nicholas Bourne."

Burby's Cornhill shop was then to become the future base for Nicholas Bourne's association with Nathaniel Butter and to a lesser degree with Thomas Archer (another Burby apprentice) in a most prolific and influential dissemination of corantos and news sheets. The entry for Bourne in the volume under review contains a list of eight apprentices (a surprisingly small number) who had served under him during the total period of 1632 to 1657. It seems likely that Bourne died in 1660, and certain that he was three times Warden of the Stationers' Company.

At this point, remembering Professor McKenzie's published work on printers' ledgers of the eighteenth

century and on the formative years of the Cambridge University Press, one begins to regret that his massive acquaintance with the working conditions of seventeenth and eighteenth century presses has not tempted him to supply more substantial introductions to these Lists and rather more than the absolute minimum of informative guidance to their use. The assumption that the bibliographer should draw up either a skeletal check-list with only minimal detail or else a fully descriptive interpretation of the subject does not always commend itself to the common reader who must run as well as read. And it is important that the reader in social history as well as in, say, drama should avail himself freely of bibliographical tools of this kind. It is then in the hope that Professor McKenzie might apply himself to the "detailed discussion of apprenticeship in the Stationers' Company" so tantalizingly mentioned in the very brief introduction to the first volume, that one ventures to suggest a few lines of enquiry which could well prove of value to the non-specialist reader.

Firstly one might consider the matter of the free movement of apprentices between shops. Granted that there was a great deal of overlapping between the trades of publisher, printer, bookbinder and bookseller, is there not some evidence to suggest a more than haphazard circulation of apprentices between the related trades, especially when the entire range of publishing trades was not to be found within the confines of any one particular shop? Thus in lists of Apprentices Out of Order 1635 - 1636 (conveniently on p. 330 of Greg's *Companion to Arber*) one finds the following note:

Thomas Spencer bound to a Bookebinder, turned over to a Bookeseller afterward brought vpp to printing by mr Okes & mr Purfoot, is now made free & worketh at the trade.

Again, one wonders at what point in an apprenticeship of three or seven years a youth who had proved himself apt and industrious might expect to be employed as corrector, compositor or pressman without the following kind of formal complaint:

That noe Apprentice now being ymployed either in composing or working at the Presse, while anie workemen Printer able to discharge such worke, and resonably requiring the same, and being of honest and good behaviour shall want

worke, Nor that hereafter the yeares of others being expired, any more Apprentices be into any Printing house taken other than according to the meaning of the Decree made in Star-chamber bearing date the 23 June in the 28th yeare of the Raigne of our Soveraigne Queene Elizabeth of blessed memory. [Arber, IV, 21]

Finally, one might well wonder whether a consistent and fairly comprehensive portrait of the Stationers' Company apprentice might not emerge from the many references in the popular literature of Tudor and Stuart times. For example, the bookseller's apprentice often seems to develop a somewhat hucksterish approach to the advertising and sale of his master's books, displaying new title-pages, drawing in customers to his stall with this kind of spiel:

Prentice. Truely, sir, I'le assure you, you may make vertuous use of this Booke divers wayes, if you have the grace to use it kindly; as for example: sit alone privately in your Chamber reading of it, and peradventure the time you spend on viewing it will keepe you from Dice, Taverne, Bawdy-house, and so foorth.

Gentleman. Nay, if your Booke be of such excellent qualitie and rare operation wee must needes have some Traffique together. Heere take your money, is't sixpence?

Prentice. I certaine : tis no lesse, sir: I thanke yee sir.¹

After a simple browsing through *Stationers' Company Apprentices, 1641 - 1700*, one inevitably attempts to flesh out the skeleton in such ways as suggested above, and one finally lays the book aside with a renewed respect for the scholarly enterprise that lies behind the total project of such an inventory pursued through three volumes. But the translation of cryptic notes into a comprehensive view of both printer and prentice and their constantly changing relationship now seems more desirable than ever.

Cyprian Blagden's account of the Stationers' Company in the Civil War Period [*The Library*, 5th Series, vol. XIII, 1958] does go part of the way towards defining the conditions of apprenticeship to the Stationers' Company, and Professor McKenzie's article which appeared later in the same volume

1. Sam Rowlands, *'Tis Merrie When Gossips Meete*, (London, 1602), reprinted for the Hunterian Club, 1875, pp.7-8.

of *The Library* gives a "slightly more detailed statistical record of apprenticeship intake for the years from 1555 to 1640". But for the time being, those readers who look for a fuller account of apprentice-master relationships in more than shorthand and quantitative terms must return to the *Twelve Studies* of Leona Rostenberg and to Cyprian Blagden's comprehensive *Stationers' Company: A History, 1403 - 1959*.

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