

A 1630 BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER

THE PURPOSE OF THIS ARTICLE is to report an apparently unique example of *The Booke of Common Prayer* (1630) now in Australia. The book is an octavo printed in double column roman type and collates A-F⁸G⁴. The State prayers are found on B5^r; the Psalter begins on D5^r; and the Godly prayers begin on G3^r. It thus forms part of a series of octavo prayer books having the code 8/14 in the new STC. The earliest imprint in the series is 1627 and the new STC lists at least one member of the series for each of the subsequent years up to and including 1640.

The interest of the present example lies in part in its imprint, which reads 'Imprinted at London by Bonham Norton, and Iohn Bill, Printers to the Kings most Excellent Majestie. M.DC.XXX.' In order to appreciate the oddity of this, it is necessary to recall the remarkable series of lawsuits which took place between the various aspirants to the office of King's Printer in the early seventeenth century.¹

At the accession of James I in 1603, the office of King's Printer was held by Robert Barker by virtue of letters patent granted by Elizabeth I to his father, Christopher. The letters patent conferred on him a monopoly of printing the Bible, the Book of Common Prayer and all official documents. This monopoly was extremely valuable and Barker was a very wealthy man, owning a substantial amount of real estate and having an income of £3000 per year, an enormous sum in those days.

Next to Barker, the wealthiest and most important stationer in London in the early years of the seventeenth century was Bonham Norton, whose name appears in the imprint already quoted. Norton appears to have been a pugnacious and not altogether likeable man. However, he and Barker were initially on close terms and in 1615 a marriage was arranged between Barker's eldest son, Christopher, and Norton's eldest daughter, Sarah.

It was shortly after this that the trouble began. It appears that Barker, despite his valuable monopoly and great wealth, had got into financial difficulties, possibly by reason of his extravagance but possibly also by reason of the great expense to which he had been put in printing the King James Bible of 1611. At all events, he needed money and on two occasions transferred various interests under his letters patent to Bonham Norton and John Bill. The first transfer occurred at some time before 1615. The precise nature of the interest transferred is not clear,² but it seems to have had the result that thereafter Norton and Bill were, at least for some purposes, in partnership with Barker. Whether the partnership extended to the printing of Bibles and Prayer Books is, perhaps, open to doubt. Certainly, the names of Norton and Bill do not appear on the imprints of the Bibles and Prayer Books of the time.³

In July 1617 the second transfer occurred. Barker transferred his remaining

interest in the King's Printing House to Norton and Bill for the sum of approximately £6000. This second transfer had dramatic and far-reaching consequences, and in 1618 the first of the lawsuits between the parties began. The main point at issue was the character of the second transfer. Norton and Bill said that it was a transfer by way of outright sale and purchase, while Barker claimed that it was a transfer by way of security only and could be redeemed within a year and a day. The imprints of the 1618 Bibles and Prayer Book lend some support to Barker's story, since Norton and Bill are described as 'deputies and assignes' of Barker.⁴ The word 'deputy' is difficult to reconcile with an outright assignment⁵ and the phrase would be more readily understood if Norton and Bill were assignees of a part interest (before 1615) but something less than outright assignees of the remainder. Not surprisingly, Norton's attitude became harder after the lawsuit began and Barker's name disappears entirely from the imprints in early 1619.⁶ In the event, Bill won and Norton lost. On 7 May 1619, the Court of Chancery held that Bill was a *bona fide* purchaser but that Norton had obtained his further interest by way of security only and must transfer it back when the moneys advanced had been repaid.

This left the trio in uneasy partnership under the first agreement. It could hardly last. In late 1619, Barker agreed to buy Norton out for £11,000. Thus Norton's name for the time being disappeared from the imprints.⁷ However, this third agreement was destined, like its predecessor, to cause trouble. The agreement contained a clause that if Barker failed in his payments or any part of them Norton was to be reinstated in his moiety as King's Printer. Inevitably, Norton claimed that Barker *had* failed in his payments and so seized office again. His name then replaced Barker's in the imprints. Further litigation broke out and this continued for most of the decade. Finally, on 20 October 1629 the Court of Chancery gave final judgment in favour of Barker and ordered Norton to deliver up the moiety of the King's Printing House to Barker. This was therefore the last date on which Norton could properly describe himself as 'Printer to the Kings most Excellent Majestie'. The question arises as to how his name comes to appear on the above-mentioned Prayer Book of 1630.

Some light is cast on the problem by the circumstances surrounding the 1629 judgment. Bonham Norton did not bear his defeat with dignity. Despite being Master of the Company of Stationers for 1629, he had already been committed to Fleet Prison for part of that year for refusing to comply with an earlier order of the Court. Now, after the judgment of October 1629, he and two of his sons broke into the King's Printing House by night and carried off the stock and implements so that no more books could be printed. After Christmas, Barker complained to the Court about the matter and on 12 May 1630 Norton was committed close prisoner to the Fleet for his effrontery.

Nor was this all. Norton petitioned the King alleging that the decree of 20 October 1629 had been procured by 'injustice and bribery'. He was promptly prosecuted for preferring the petition and for 'raysinge and spreading abroad false tales and rumours'. The case was tried in July 1630 and Norton lost once again. His

claim that the Court of Chancery was 'like hell' and 'worse than purgatory' has a Dickensian ring about it. But the Court found no evidence of bribery or even 'soe much as a New Years gift at Christmas' to any of the judges, an interesting comment on the permissible level of corruption at the time. Once again, Norton was ordered to be imprisoned. He died on 5 April 1635, but whether he was still imprisoned at the time is not clear. Meanwhile John Bill, who does not seem to have taken an active part in the litigation after his initial success, died on 5 May 1630.

Returning to the Prayer Book of 1630, it is clear that this was either printed legitimately before the decree of 20 October 1629 or illegitimately some time after that date but before events finally overtook Norton in May 1630. Some light is cast on the matter by a study of the other prayer books in the series classified by the new STC as 8/14. I have already explained that this series runs from 1627 up to at least 1640. The new STC lists two editions in the series in each of 1627 and 1628.⁸ In 1629 and 1630 the editions are as follows:

- (1) STC 16377 by Bonham Norton, and John Bill 1629
- (2) STC 16380.5 by Bonham Norton, and John Bill 1630
- (3) STC 16380.7 by Robert Barker, and John Bill 1630
- (4) STC 16381 by Robert Barker . . . and by the Assignes of John Bill 1630

I have examined examples of all four of these.⁹ Each of the first three must have been printed before Bill's death on 5 May 1630. The fourth was printed later and, indeed, after 29 May, since the State prayers refer to Prince Charles, the future Charles II, who was born on that date.

All four editions have the same architectural surround on the title-page. There is a large number of ornaments in the text, many occurring in more than one edition and five occurring in all four editions. Furthermore, the general appearance of all four editions is closely similar. It thus seems likely that the printers of all four editions had access to the same ornaments and the same founts of type. Despite Norton's dramatic seizure of the stock and implements of the King's Printing House, Barker must have had access to them for a sufficient period between the decree of 20 October 1629 and Bill's death on 5 May 1630 to add an edition to the 8/14 series. It is to be noted that STC 16380.7 is a completely new edition and not merely STC 16380.5 with a cancel title-page. During this period, Barker and Bill also produced a folio Prayer Book (STC 16378), a quarto Prayer Book (16378.5) and two Bibles (Darlow and Moule 429 and 430).¹⁰ In fact, so far as one can tell, the business of King's Printer proceeded substantially as if nothing had happened.

All of this suggests that Norton's raid on the King's Printing House did not leave him for any substantial length of time physically in a position to go on printing the 8/14 series Prayer Books using the ornaments which he had used for earlier editions. The architectural surround, most of ornaments, and probably the founts of type as well, remained under Barker's control for most of the early part of 1630. It is true that after Bill's death several new ornaments started to appear in the 8/14 series,¹¹ but the ornaments of the Barker and Bill Prayer Book of 1630 are more characteristic of the earlier than the later members of the series. Thus the change

does not seem to be due to a need to replace stock seized by Norton.

For these reasons, it seems more likely that the Norton and Bill Prayer Book of 1630 was in fact printed before 20 October 1629. Other examples of such post-dating are of course known. It is likely that the new edition was printed shortly before the decisive decree so as to be available in the new year or, perhaps, when supplies of the earlier edition ran out. After the decree, however, its history was probably a turbulent one. We know that Norton seized the stock of the King's Printing House in his raid, the 1630 Prayer Books presumably amongst it. Thereafter he was restrained from dealing with them, but there is no reason to suppose that they were returned to Barker, for the latter had his own edition in early 1630. Moreover, one may guess that he would be unwilling in the highly charged circumstances of the time to sell books with Norton's name as King's Printer on the title page. Indeed, he may well not have been legally entitled to do so. If he had obtained possession of the stock, an obvious expedient would be to reissue it with a cancel title-page. However, there is no evidence that this was ever done. Accordingly, it seems most likely that the stock of his 1630 edition remained in Norton's possession after his raid. He may well have hoped that in due course the decree of 20 October 1629 would be reversed and he would be lawfully able to sell it. However, thereafter his ruin proceeded apace, and in a few months he fell from being wealthy Master of the Stationers' Company to prisoner in the Fleet.

What happened after that to his Prayer Books of 1630 can only be guessed. While it is notoriously unwise to proceed from an apparent present-day scarcity of a book to any conclusion about the scarcity of the book in its own century, in this case the surrounding circumstances support just such a conclusion. It seems likely that most of the copies of Bonham Norton's last Prayer Book were destroyed at the time of the shipwreck of his own career. The present apparently unique copy survives as evidence of his determination to fight until the last possible moment, and as a reminder that the relationship between history and bibliography is often not as simple as it appears at first sight.

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NOTES

¹ The history of these lawsuits is set out by Henry R. Plomer in 'The King's Printing House under the Stuarts', *Library* (1901) 353-375.

² Barker describes Norton as having 'some interest in some part' of the office during his, Barker's, lifetime but the Court of Chancery subsequently referred to a co-partnership. See Plomer at pp.356 and 360.

³ Bill's name does, however, appear in the imprints of some of the King's writings in 1615 and 1616. See new STC 14344, 14345, 14367 and 14368.

⁴ See Darlow and Moule 362 and new STC 16350. The new STC also lists a Prayer Book with a curious imprint referring to Bonham Norton and John Bill *and* assignees of Robert Barker: 16349.7. This must surely be a mistake.

⁵ Nevertheless the nature of the property concerned, being a grant under Royal letters patent, may have raised doubts as to whether it was capable of outright assignment. If this were so, the word

'deputies' could have been included in the instrument of transfer from an abundance of caution and subsequently been used in the imprints of books printed pursuant to the Royal Monopoly.

⁶ See Darlow and Moule 365-372 and new STC 16351, 16352 and 16352.5. However, in Darlow and Moule 366, which is dated 1619, Norton and Bill are described as 'Deputy Printers for the King's most excellent Majesty'.

⁷ If the first agreement gave Norton a right to have his name on the imprints of Bibles and Prayer Books, then there was a period during 1619 when one would expect all three names to be included. However, this combination is not recorded in Darlow and Moule or in the new STC.

⁸ In 1627 new STC 16370 and 16370.5 and in 1628 16373a and 16373b.

⁹ STC 16377 is in the Bodleian (CP 1629.f.1). STC 16380.5 is the subject of the present article. STC 16380.7 and 16381 are in the British Library (respectively 1480.a.31 and 3408.c.30). The latter is also in the Bodleian (CP 1630.f.1).

¹⁰ The dating of the Prayer Books depends not only on the imprint but also on the absence of any mention of Prince Charles in the State prayers. The dating of the Bibles depends on the imprint only and may be less reliable. The Psalter in new STC 16378 and the New Testament in Darlow and Moule 429 both have section titles giving Norton and Bill as printers. Presumably these parts of the books were printed earlier.

¹¹ See, for instance, the table given by H.M. Adams (*Library*, 5th Ser., v.13 (1958), opposite p.284. A comparison of this table with the four Prayer Books discussed above suggests that Adams's ornaments 15 and 17 occur for the first time in the Barker and Bill edition of 1630. They appear again in the later 1630 edition after Bill's death, and ornaments 16, 19 (= 24), 22 and 25 appear in that edition for the first time. This conclusion may not be reliable, since Adams gives only a selection and not a complete list of the ornaments used. However, I note that none of the ornaments from number 15 to 33 inclusive are listed by Adams as appearing before 1630.

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