

## AN EDITORIAL IMPASSE: THE DAWKS-BOWYER-NICHOLS PRINTER'S NOTEBOOK\*

I FIND MYSELF IN AN IMPASSE, and wonder what to do. In desperation I consult a dictionary, a Concise Oxford to be exact. This explains that I have run into a *blind alley*, from which only retreat seems possible, or worse still, I am stuck in a *position from which there is no escape*. How frustrating to any would-be editor!

The source of my difficulty is a Notebook I began to work on about ten years ago. It had belonged to and been used by three eighteenth-century London printers, and by the wife of one of them. I possess a photocopy of this document, but the very existence of this electrostatic copy might be said to be the root of my problem. The Notebook has much in it of interest to historians of printing and of typography, sufficient to make it, in my opinion, worthy of publication. And not only in mine, for in 1985 the Oxford Bibliographical Society advertised 'An edition of the Dawks-Bowyer-Nichols Notebook' among its 'works in progress'. Soon, however, the Society changed its mind, and decided that it could no longer accept my proposal to publish, not even in principle. This was no immediate concern to me, for shortly thereafter, with the invaluable collaboration of John Lancaster, I began the long process of revising and seeing through the press the Maslen-Lancaster edition of the Bowyer ledgers. (After many years in preparation, this was published early in 1991 jointly by the Bibliographical Society and the Bibliographical Society of America, with distribution to non-members through Oxford University Press.)

The Notebook was brought to my attention in December 1973, at a Bibliographical Society meeting I had addressed on the subject of the Bowyer ledgers. Barry Bloomfield informed me that in the British Library of Political and Economic Science was to be found yet another Bowyer record. Generously, Barry passed over to me his interest in this work. Knowing that I had in 1966 enlarged my original plan of publishing the Bowyer paper stock ledger so as to include the related group of ledgers discovered in the Library of the Grolier Club of New York, he correctly supposed that I would embrace almost any further addition of material. Early in the New Year, just before returning to New Zealand, I arranged to examine this new Bowyer find. Barry had thoughtfully given me the shelf-mark — or I should say call-mark, a term more appropriate for material held in a closed stack. The call-mark was and is MS Collection G 1521. (*Call-mark* brings to mind Shakespeare's Hotspur answering Owen Glendower, who had offered to 'call spirits from the vasty deep': 'Why, so can I, or so can any man, / But will they come when you do call for them?') On that occasion however the thing itself duly appeared. The Librarian allowed me to make a photocopy of it, not a very good one, I fear, but, as it turned out, definitely better than nothing. I was also given permission to make 'any use' I wished of the contents. Smooth progress so far!

It proved to be a quarter-bound book with marbled board covers. On its spine a label, perhaps added after accession, bore the inscription 'J.B. Nichols and Sons MS. Book'. I decided that it should be named the Dawks-Bowyer-Nichols Notebook, after its eighteenth-century owners, who alone had written in it, and not after any subsequent owners. The leaves of the Notebook measured 200 by 150mm, approximately

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\*An abridged version of a paper delivered to members of the Oxford Bibliographical Society on 31 October 1991.

A5 in size. There were 94 of them, that is, 188 pages; but only 124 pages had writing or printing on them.

Where had this latest Bowyer record been hiding all these years? This was not hard to discover. The Notebook had entered the Library on 19 December 1939, from the recently defunct printing firm of Nichols. Ten days before, a notice in the *Times Literary Supplement* lamented the passing of this firm, which had printed the *Votes of the House of Commons* ever since 1731.<sup>1</sup> The first of the Nichols dynasty — John, the famous antiquary — no doubt acquired the Notebook in 1777. This was the year in which he succeeded to the printing business of William Bowyer the younger, with whom he had been in partnership since 1766. Bowyer evidently took possession of it in 1737, as executor to his Aunt Sarah Dawks, who died 6 June 1737. Before that it had belonged to Sarah's husband, Ichabod Dawks, the printer of the celebrated *Newsletter*, said to have died 27 February 1731.<sup>2</sup> I should explain that the relation between the Bowyer and Dawks families was close. Ichabod's sister Dorothy had married, for her second husband, William Bowyer the father. And Ichabod's niece, Ann Prudom, became the first wife of Bowyer's son, also William.<sup>3</sup> Such a network of family relationships is typical of the London book trade in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Continuities and cohesiveness among the members of a trade imply convergence in practice. Hence by revealing something of the working methods of individual printers the Notebook will open a window on to the trade as a whole.

Not quite so clear-cut as ownership is the Notebook's pattern of use. Ichabod used a few pages at each end from about 1700 to 1704. The first dated entry is 'March 11. 1700'. Thereafter, little or nothing happened until the mid 1730s, when there come miscellaneous receipts, such as for portorage, having to do with Ichabod's wife Sarah, who is variously referred to as 'Madm Dawks' and 'Mrs S. Dawks'. One receipt, on folio 5 recto, for £2, signed Isaac Ilive, presumably concerns Ilive the printer and typesetter. An isolated entry (on folio 1 verso), dated 'Febry 1. 1729-30' and headed 'A sure way to Destroy Buggs', is written in an uncertain hand, possibly Sarah's. I am assured by a very knowing lady of my acquaintance, who has lived in India, that this recipe is good. I therefore pass it on: 'Take of the highest rectified Spirits of Wine, or Lamp Spirits, half a Pint, new Distilled Oil, or Spirit of Turpentine, half a Pint, mix them together; then put in half an Ounce of Camphir in small bits, which will soon Dissolve, shake it well together, and with Small Brush, not a Pencil, anoint the Bedstead, Curtain or Valens, (which it will not hurt or stain,) very well in places where the Bugs or Nitts can harbour, and it will kill them all.' Certainly, for the Dawks, the Notebook was of more personal than professional use.

The next owner was William Bowyer, the son, whose fluent hand occurs freely on some thirty pages. The earliest dated entries fall in 1751 — this is on folio 4 verso — while the latest date is in 1765. It may nevertheless be supposed that the younger Bowyer began to use the Notebook sometime during the 1740s; it is difficult to be more precise. There is no sign that Bowyer's father had a hand in the Notebook. He died on 17 December 1737, and had been in poor health during the last year of his life.

The entries for which Bowyer was responsible, directly or indirectly, have almost all to do with the printing-house. The first use he made of the Notebook was probably for what is called on folio 7 recto 'A SPECIMEN of the Printing Types of *W. Bowyer*.'<sup>4</sup>

The first thing you would notice if you could see the original Notebook is that this title, and indeed the whole specimen, filling fifteen pages, is made up of printed slips, whereas the rest of the book is predominantly manuscript. (See the reproduction made from the Maslen photocopy.) These slips, totalling forty-eight in number, were pasted in. It was James Mosley who first suggested that these pieces had apparently been 'cut from a single broadside specimen sheet'.<sup>5</sup> My reconstructed Specimen differs slightly from Mosley's in more closely following Notebook order. I shall comment on it very briefly. First its rarity. Type specimens from the eighteenth century are uncommon, and type specimens of printers rather than founders very rare. I can think of only two or three earlier than this.<sup>6</sup>

The Specimen is undated. Nevertheless, I believe that it represents most of the stock of types owned by the younger Bowyer sometime early in his period as sole master. Chiefly missing are the very large and the very small sizes, such as the case 'full [of] 8-Line Caps' and the pearl roman and italic, which are mentioned elsewhere in the Notebook, the pearl no doubt being that regularly used for printing Bowyer's part of the *Singing Psalms for the Company of Stationers*. Mosley tentatively dates the Specimen as 'c.1740', and this cannot be far out.

Perhaps we should not worry too much about dating the Specimen, either as printed or as cut and pasted. It would surely be better to know when each individual face was acquired, and when it ceased to be employed. The Specimen offers some help with this process. Some entries have been crossed out — see for instance the English roman and italic number 3 in the reproduction of folio 17 recto. The cancellation no doubt means that these fonts were subsequently discarded. Later additions to the stock are recorded elsewhere in the Notebook. There is for instance some roman and italic dated '1750', and a 'New Pica Greek' is listed among 'letter to be added Sept. 1763'. You gain the vivid impression, not of a dead stock, such as is familiar from probate inventories, but of something never static, always slowly evolving. Other Bowyer documents record sales of type metal and purchases of types. A Bowyer receipt book reveals repeated purchases from Caslon between 1738 and 1742 amounting in all to some £140, and this trade seems only to have increased with time.<sup>7</sup> During the 1730s, as I have recently had the pleasure of telling friends in Dublin, George Faulkner twice bought large quantities of types second-hand from his friend Bowyer.<sup>8</sup> All this, and much more besides yet to be gleaned from Bowyer records, is what you would expect of a flourishing business, and especially at a time when English type-founders were coming into their own.

What sort of a stock is represented in the Specimen? Again, I will have to be amazingly brief. A total of 64 faces is shown, plus 3 indicated only by manuscript headings (not displayed). These may be placed into 8 broad categories: Hebrew, Greek, Saxon (i.e. Anglo-Saxon), Gothic, Coptic, Black Letter, roman, and italic. There are 3 Hebrew faces (and 1 not displayed), 14 Greek, including titling fonts (plus 1 not displayed), 1 Gothic, 1 Coptic, 7 Black Letter, and no fewer than 17 roman and 18 italic (plus 2 each of these dated '1750' — not displayed). Most remarkable I suppose are the exotic fonts, which imply a learned press, and this we know from the ledgers to have been very much the case. The Bowyers were pre-eminent in the century for their learned printing, notably in connection with the rapidly growing tradition of English scholarship, so much of which is associated with the Nonjurors. (Bowyer senior

was himself a Nonjuror.) That there are not more faces may be explained as due to the fire of 30 January 1713, which destroyed the elder Bowyer's printing-house. At that time he lost, for instance, the Anglo-Saxon he had used in Elizabeth Elstob's *English-Saxon homily* of 1709.

Were 64 faces and sizes sufficient? That depends. John Smith, author of the *Printer's grammar* of 1755 (which I have shown to have been printed in the large establishment of Samuel Richardson), has this to say.<sup>9</sup> 'To give a Printing-house the epithet of *Complete*, amounts to no more than a compliment, since (in a strict and literal sense) no Printing-house can be said to be complete, unless it is provided with all the Fusil Materials for Modern and Antient languages. But as it would be folly to attempt such a vanity that would only waste a man's substance, it is sufficient for a well-establish'd Printer to be possessed of different Founts of Letter for the national language of the country where he is settled; and not to want such other metal utensils as are appurtenant to them . . .' (p.118) By this standard Bowyer would seem to have been extremely well equipped.

Printed Bowyer specimens occupy only 15 out of the 124 pages used. What else the Notebook contains I shall sketch even more cursorily. Almost immediately following the Specimen come three hand-written pages of 'Rules & Orders to be observed in this Printing House'. These are in Bowyer's hand, and they too are undated. As I published them in 1976 from the Bibliography Room of the University of Otago under the title of *Bowyer's Chapel rules*, I need say no more about them now.

Next comes a manuscript inventory of Bowyer's types and other printing materials and equipment. This occupies some twenty pages. The first page is all in Bowyer's hand, suggesting that he began it and then handed it over to another person or persons to complete.

About inventories, I may be permitted to quote from myself, from a monograph which reproduces an inventory and associated *List of printing material, &c.*, prepared by the nineteenth-century printers Matthews, Baxter & Co. of Dunedin, New Zealand: 'The close relation between inventory and *List* is especially rare and interesting. Inventories of early printing-shops, more or less complete and precisely detailed, have often been published, but seldom are these associated with specimens showing what the typefaces looked like so that they might be identified.'<sup>10</sup>

In the case of the Bowyer inventory and Specimen the relation between the two is certainly close, but not altogether straightforward. Specimen and inventory do not seem to represent the one single act of taking stock, and for the inventory too there is a problem of dating. What can clearly be observed is that the inventory is in two parts. First comes a list of printing equipment and materials with an indication of their whereabouts in the printing-house, beginning with the 'Little Composing Room', going on to the 'Press room', and then to the 'Great Composing Room'. The second part of the inventory lists much the same items, if more succinctly, but this time it supplies an estimate of the value of each item in pounds, shillings, and pence, and for the printing types the weight of each face and size in pounds (avoirdupois). The weights are of course important. For instance, 'Caslon's newest English', which corresponds to the No.4 roman and italic in the Specimen, weighs 750 pounds — for the No.4 italic see the reproduction of folio 17 recto. This is in fact a predictable quantity, for John Smith

notes that 'a Bill of Pica Roman, and Half a Bill of Italic, weigh 800lb.'<sup>11</sup> Such quantities were needed by any printer in order to maintain production. Large amounts of type had to be literally locked up, or tied up, while the inevitably protracted process of proof correction went on. No good business man willingly refuses work or keeps customers waiting unduly, all jokes about printers notwithstanding. The order of items in this priced list closely follows that of the Specimen, although beginning with the roman and the italic (nos.33 and following in the Specimen), rather than, as in the Specimen, with the Hebrew and the Greek.

The inventory, like the Specimen, is undated; well, not entirely, for at the end of the priced list some dated entries are inserted. For instance, under the heading 'Letter to be added Sept. 1763' are listed five items, representing over two tons of metal. The very quantity suggests a lapse of time since the inventory proper had been drawn up, presumably in a single act of stock-taking. The inventory proper may date from about 1750. A peripheral note of material 'In the Desk' is dated 'Aug. 1752', while a reference to a quantity of type said to be standing 'In Greenland' must denote the work which Bowyer completed in that year, namely [William Goodall], *The adventurers of Capt. Greenland*, a duodecimo dated 1752. The Bowyer ledgers reveal that he printed 12 sheets in volume 4 and delivered 2000 copies from 10 March 1752. (Maslen-Lancaster number 3740). Bowyer apparently gave up using the Notebook in the mid 1760s. In 1766 John Nichols was appointed junior partner, and he presumably began to keep his own set of accounts. These have been lost. The Bowyer printing ledgers, which comprise Bowyer's own accounts, are very patchy from this time on, and are brought to a close — by Nichols himself — shortly after Bowyer's death on 18 November 1777.

For twenty years Nichols did nothing with the Notebook. Then in 1797 he too used it for an inventory, not for recording his stock as a whole, but only that most troublesome part, the special sorts, and where to find them. There are some thirty pages of this, much of it in Nichols's own hand, and all of it demonstrating his methodical attention to detail. Where Bowyer had characteristically been content to say 'In the Parlour', Nichols particularises 'Closet No.2. 3rd Shelf'. Nichols, and Bowyer before him, used the Notebook to keep a record of 'Sorts lent to different Printers' — see folio 6 verso in the following reproduction. Nichols occasionally was a borrower, for instance of sorts from Caslon, the typesetter, but mostly he notes materials lent. A typical entry is 'Mr. Strahan. Three Coptic words. March 7, 1801'. Such small quantities, in themselves and by their character, pose no threat to belief in the integrity of a printer's stock. Note that neither Bowyer nor Nichols writes of lending or borrowing printer's ornaments! Nevertheless, the possibility of borrowing should not be disregarded. Nichols's entries come to an end in 1802, whether or not to be carried on in another book one cannot guess. His printing records were apparently destroyed in his printing-house fire of 8 February 1808. The masses of Nichols papers in London, Oxford, Cambridge (England), and New York (at Columbia University) relate chiefly to his other activities as editor of the *Gentleman's magazine* and various antiquarian publications.<sup>12</sup> Seldom do they permit glimpses of his activities as a printer such as are offered by his portion of the Dawks-Bowyer-Nichols Notebook.

I now must consider the editorial problem of coping with all this various material. I suppose that you would expect nothing less than the text *in toto*, with the printing types reproduced in high quality photo-facsimile. Naturally, you would expect an introduction, notes — especially to identify the types shown in the Spec by 1985, having for instance transcribed and typed up as much of the material as lends itself to this.

The work of identifying the types is the most challenging, but considerable progress has been made, even from the photocopy. Sixty-four faces are shown in the Specimen; another four dated 1750 are likewise shown, though apparently not part of the original Specimen. With help over the years from Harry Carter, ever generous with his great learning, from James Mosley and his authoritative work on William Caslon, and recently from John Lane, whose energy and skill appeared just when it seemed mine were declining, well over half this number have been tentatively identified.

However, I must now admit to the existence of a serious obstacle both to this work of identification and to prosecution of the edition as a whole. The original is missing! The only copy available is that which I made in 1974, or derivatives of it. You will agree that the photocopy is unsuitable for the exacting business of type recognition, and quite unsatisfactory for facsimile reproduction. Since the Specimen is one of the chief interests of the Notebook, an edition without it seems scarcely thinkable. And another half a dozen pages of the Notebook contain printed matter or diagrams and drawings of special sorts, which would be much better reproduced from the original rather than in type facsimile or in the form of redrawn diagrams. To be sure, I cannot go on!

Of course, the unexpected might happen. The original might yet turn up. The Library Archivist, Dr Angela Raspin, has suggested that most probably it went missing between the old Library and the University Depository in 1974. Repeated searches over the years have so far drawn a blank. What is to be done? Should I pretend that the thing never existed? Should all that information be left in a bibliographical limbo, waiting for the original to turn up? I spent twenty-five and more years editing the Bowyer ledgers. Should I further tempt Providence by waiting for even twenty-five months?

Let me think again about that impasse, in its literal sense of a blind alley from which one is able to retreat. Why not in order to seek an alternative route? Could I not get round my problem by constructing a corpus of types to be found in works printed by Bowyer in the late 1730s and early 1740s? I know the books. I own quite a few of them, hence no problem of securing and paying for photographs. Such lists of types have been compiled for Caxton, and for the Cambridge University Press in the early eighteenth century. I would of course have the extra duty of proving that the types used in the printed books exactly matched those in the Specimen, or rather in my rather fuzzy photocopy of the Specimen. To do this in every case, and especially for the smaller sizes of roman and italic, would be no easy task. Indeed, the smallest sizes would probably defeat almost any eye, no matter how good the specimen. Nevertheless, once I have completed my current project, a study of Samuel Richardson's printer's ornaments, and with help from those more expert than myself, I mean to try what might be done. (You will easily guess that I have over the years gained a little familiarity with some of the types used by the Bowyers.) Only once I have tested the

practicality of this procedure will I dare once more approach the Oxford Bibliographical Society, or some other publisher, with a proposal.

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#### NOTES

1. 9 December 1939, p.724.
2. John Nichols, *Literary anecdotes*, 1812-15; iii 290-1.
3. John Nichols, *op.cit.*, iii 279n.
4. Described at greater length in 'A Specimen of the printing types of William Bowyer, c.1740', a paper given at the Annual Conference of the Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand, 26 August 1983.
5. See *British type specimens before 1831: a hand-list*, Oxford Bibliographical Society Occasional Publication no.14, 1984, item P.13.
6. There are for instance the *Prooves of the Several Sorts of Letters cast by Joseph Moxon* dated 1669 – see *Mechanick Exercises on the Whole Art of Printing (1683-4) by Joseph Moxon*, ed. Herbert Davis and Harry Carter, 1958; also *A Specimen of Mr. Jorme's Printing-House; which is now to be Disposed of* is assigned to 1698 – see *A History of the old English Letter Foundries*, Talbot Baines Reed, revised A.F. Johnson, 1952, p.181.
7. Accession number 19473 in the Library of the Grolier Club of New York.
8. The evidence may be got by first looking up 'Faulkner' in the Names and Titles Index of the Maslen-Lancaster edition of the Bowyer ledgers. The occasion was the Autumn Seminar of the Rare Books Group of the Library Association of Ireland, held 4 October 1991 on the topic of 'Ireland and the European book trade before 1800'. My paper 'George Faulkner and William Bowyer: the London connection' is forthcoming in *Long Room*.
9. 'Samuel Richardson and Smith's *Printer's grammar*', *The Book Collector*, 18 (1969), 518-19.
10. K.I.D. Maslen, *Victorian Typefaces in Dunedin, New Zealand*, Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand Occasional Publication No.2, Melbourne, 1981, p.5.
11. *Op.cit.*, p.42.
12. For details of these records see *The Bowyer Ledgers*, ed. Keith Maslen and John Lancaster, 1991, pp.xlii-xliv.

40.54

# Books sent to different Printers

Mr. James Channing Lane  
L.P. Math  
Jan. 19, 1805.

Don. Mr. James Lane  
2 books of L.P. Math  
Capt. J.

Mr. J. Rousseau, Woodst.  
L.P. fields some Pica 5  
Long Primer Fractious.  
Jan. 20, 1805.

~~1802.  
Jan. 25. Sent Mr. J.  
Metcalf some of  
Capt. J.~~

Mr. Hamilton, Falconer  
Sent 7 Optic words, Pica,  
CE, TCG, ZIX, ETHI, EFTIH,  
ZIX, 204.  
February 11, 1805.

~~YONTO CAT & NHX  
Jan. 27. Sent Mr. Hamilton  
a word of Capt. J.  
YONTO CAT & NHX~~

Mr. Strahan  
Three Optic words  
March 7, 1805.

~~Feb. 2. Sent Mr.  
Hamilton 4 or 5  
Capt. J. M. D.~~

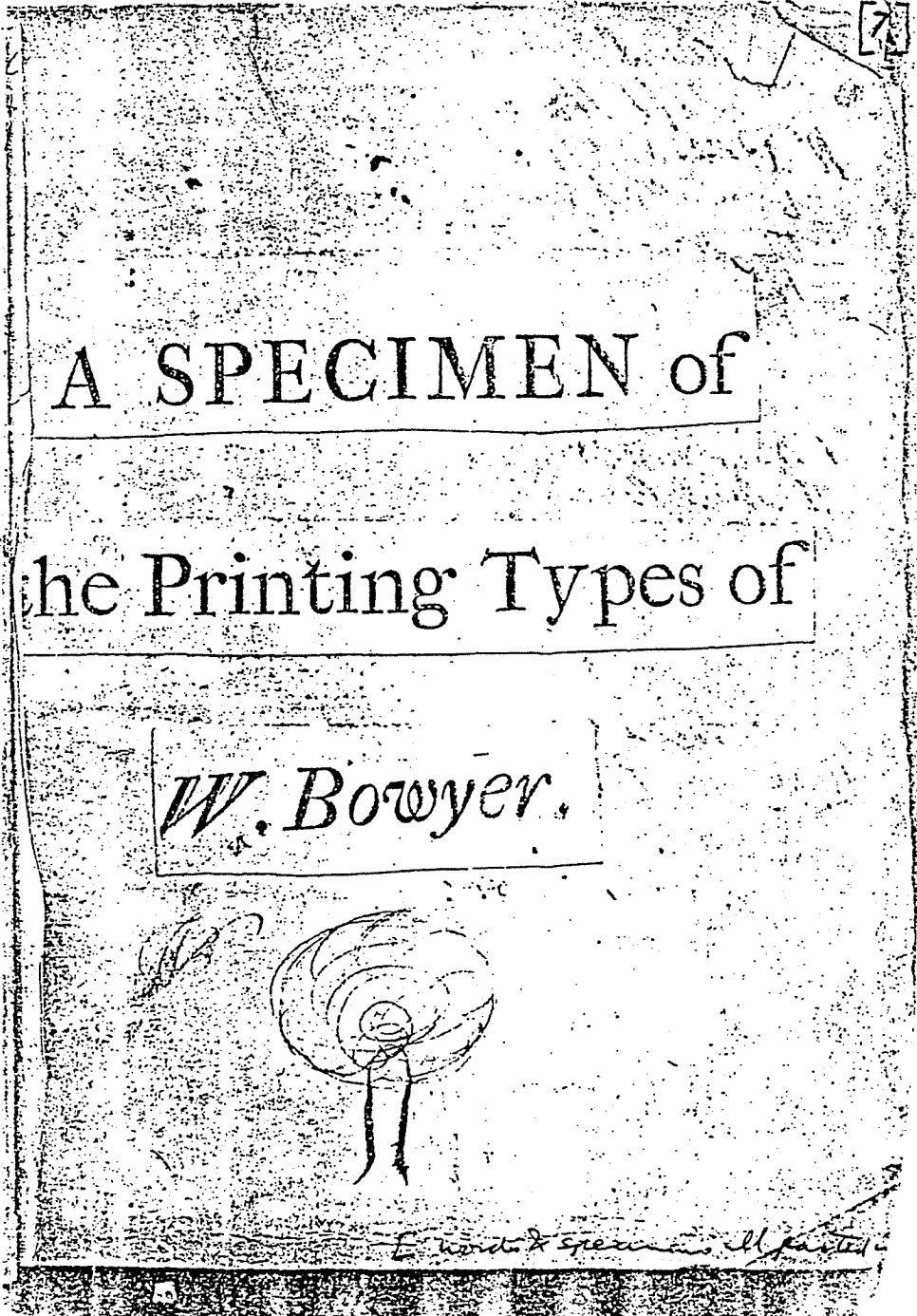
Mr. Hamilton, Falconer  
5 or four Optic words  
April 7, 1805.

Mr. Wilkes O  
math

67 55  
Continued in

Mr. Strahan  
L. P. Math +  
19<sup>th</sup> March 25  
1805





English Roman. N. 3.

Ad has tot tantasque res adhibenda sunt ornamenta innumerabilia, quae sola tum quidem tradebantur ab iis, qui dicendi numerabantur magistri. Quo fit ut veram illam & absolutam eloquentiam nemo consequatur,

English Italic. N. 3.

*Ad has tot tantasque res, adhibenda sunt ornamenta innumerabilia, quae sola tum quidem tradebantur ab iis, qui dicendi numerabantur magistri. Quo fit ut veram illam & absolutam eloquentiam nemo consequatur, quod*

English Roman. N. 4.

Postum sit ut igitur in primis, quod post magis intelligetur, sine philosophia non posse effici, quem quærimus, eloquentem. Non ut in ea tamen omnia sint, sed ut sic adjuvet, ut palestra histrionem. Parva enim

English Italic. N. 4.

*Postum sit igitur in primis, quod post magis intelligetur, sine Philosophia non posse effici, quem quærimus, eloquentem. Non ut in ea tamen omnia sint, sed ut sic adjuvet, ut palestra histrionem. Parva enim magnis*

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