

## THREE FURTHER INSTANCES OF 'W'

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TO THE RECENT REPORTS in these pages<sup>1</sup> of volumes including 'W' in their signature sequence may be added three further instances:

1. George Adams, *An Essay on electricity*, 3rd ed. (London: printed by R. Hindmarsh for the author, and sold by him at Tycho Brahe's-Head, N<sup>o</sup> 60 Fleet Street. 1787.)

8<sup>o</sup>; a-k<sup>4</sup> l<sup>2</sup> B-U<sup>4</sup> W<sup>4</sup> X-2U<sup>4</sup> 2W<sup>4</sup> 2X-3L<sup>4</sup> 3M1.

2. John Price, *An Historical and topographical account of Leominster* (Ludlow: printed and sold by H. Procter; sold also by J. Barrow, Leominster; D. Walker, & J. Allen, Hereford; Holl & Co. Worcester; and by T. Longman Pater-Noster-Row, London. 1795.)

8<sup>o</sup>; π<sup>2</sup> τA<sup>4</sup> A-V<sup>4</sup> W<sup>4</sup> X-2K<sup>4</sup>.

3. Philip Yorke, *The Royal tribes of Wales* (Wrexham printed by John Painter. 1799.)

4<sup>o</sup>; [a]<sup>2</sup> χ1 b<sup>4</sup> A-U<sup>2</sup> W<sup>2</sup> X-2U<sup>2</sup> 2X-3A<sup>2</sup> [3B]1.

It is difficult to believe that there is any common feature in these three publications other than that they were all printed by half-sheet imposition, and *that* surely cannot be the reason that they all include 'W' in the signature sequence. All the imprints are plausible, and it would seem improbable that any of them are false. The two provincial imprints lend strength to the suggestion that the use of 'W' is evidence of non-metropolitan printing, but Adams's *Essay on electricity* serves to show that it is not an exclusively provincial phenomenon. All three publications date from the very end of the eighteenth century and could be regarded as representing the transition from the 23-letter signature alphabet to the greater variability exhibited by nineteenth-century books, where 24-, 25- and 26-letter signature alphabets are to be found, but they hardly represent a trend or movement.

On the basis of these three instances one is forced, I think, to conclude that 'W' has no obvious value in 'localizing' volumes containing it.<sup>2</sup> At best one might suggest that the use of 'W' indicates later-eighteenth century rather than earlier-, that it may have value in *dating*; but the range of instances already reported shows that even that value is limited.

The use of 'W' is clearly rare — there is only one instance in Sayce's sample of 2800. Despite a number of contrary instances, subsequent reports have lent weight to his suggestion that 'W' is probably a British phenomenon but have demonstrated that its incidence is greater than his sample revealed, though still remaining rare. The three instances reported here derive from a sample of 1000 British eighteenth-century publications;<sup>3</sup> tentatively one might suggest, therefore, that the incidence of W in eighteenth-century British publications is about 0.3%, though larger sampling is required before a figure can be given

with any confidence (e.g. an incidence of 1% in the 1780s and 2% in the 1790s — which my sample implies — is likely, on the basis of casual observation, to prove too high).

A final point might be made about the use of 'W': within the one volume its use may not be consistent — i.e. when the volume extends beyond one alphabet 'W' may not be used in each. An example is afforded by Yorke's *Royal tribes of Wales*, where 'W' appears in the first alphabet but not in the second. Why this should be so is not at all obvious. On the one hand one might suppose that a W was included by a compositor ignorant of the conventions of signing or, for whatever reason, acting in an aberrant way. On the other one might suppose that a W was omitted by a compositor acting in conformity with the conventions of signing despite an unconventional (and newly introduced?) house rule. The doubts may have no bearing on the question of localization but raise another question: if W was intended to be used, why? Why not also J and both U and V?

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#### NOTES

1. B.J. McMullin, 'Gatherings signed 'W': a footnote to Sayce', 6(1982), 41-3; Roderick Cave, 'Gatherings signed 'W': a footnote to a footnote', 6(1982), 152; John Harris, 'Gatherings signed W: a further note', 7(1983), 124; Ra Foxton, 'Another 'W' gathering', 8(1984), 219; L.M. Rutherford, 'Compositorial and missionary practices: the eighteenth-century Dutch press in Colombo', 13(1989), 63-71; L.M. Rutherford, 'John Wesley's Bristol printer: another W gathering', 13(1989), 147-51.
2. See R.A. Sayce, 'Compositorial practices and the localization of printed books, 1530-1800', *The Library*, 5th ser., 21(1966), 1-45 (p.19); also published, with addenda and corrigenda, by the Oxford Bibliographical Society (Occasional Publication 13), 1979.
3. Daria S. Fedewytsch, 'A Study of compositorial practices as a means of localizing and dating works printed in the British Isles in the eighteenth century' (Unpublished M.A. thesis, Monash University, 1985).

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