

## COLLATION HOLES

PAM PRYDE

BIBLIOGRAPHERS ARE ACCUSTOMED to seeing small holes on the edges of certain leaves within a gathering when the volume has not been cut or the sheets not folded evenly. These are pin (or point) holes. Gaskell<sup>1</sup> has claimed that pins for books printed before 1800 were positioned, in imposition schemes other than twelvemo, so as to fall in the grooves in the cross piece, which normally joined the mid-points of the longer sides of the chase to act as a brace when the forme was locked up. This would position the pins in the inner margin between conjugate leaves or in a bolt, and the resultant holes should subsequently be lost in the binding or in trimming. But there are other holes — usually smaller — sometimes visible at a corner of a leaf corresponding with a corner of the original sheet. These puzzling holes clearly do not serve the purpose of pin holes, and it has been privately suggested to me that the holes may result from pinning the sheets up to dry after printing. However, the answer is much simpler, and an explanation of this phenomenon depends on an examination of warehousing practices.

After gathering, and before being folded and pressed ready for delivery to the binder, the sheets were collated. Savage describes this process as follows:

The person who has to collate . . . takes a heap of a gathering and places the first or signature page uppermost, towards his right hand, and with the point of a sharp bodkin, or a penknife, picks up the corner of each sheet, in order to see that each signature is right, passing his thumb under them as they rise . . .<sup>2</sup>

Savage refers to this process as the 'customary' one, but notes also an alternative method:

I have known a warehouseman use neither a bodkin nor a penknife, but slip up the corner of the sheet with the end of his forefinger, in order to examine the signatures . . .<sup>3</sup>

This alternative method of collating the sheets was a less desirable one, according to Savage, because unless the collator was particularly careful to have clean fingers the sheets would end up soiled in the corners.

The collation holes, which result from Savage's preferred method, were intended to be lost in trimming — and this, no doubt, has overwhelmingly been the case. However, on occasion, collation holes may still be observed in unopened or uncut volumes or in volumes only lightly trimmed. An example may be found in the Monash University copy of Jabez Earle's *Sacramental Exercises in Two Parts*, Glasgow: printed by Robert Chapman and Alexander Duncan, 1784 (uncatalogued). The volume is a twelvemo with two signatures,

collates  $\pi^2$  A-Q<sup>6</sup> R<sup>4</sup>, and is printed on laid paper with horizontal chain lines in A-P, and vertical chain lines in  $\pi$ , Q-R. Collation holes can be observed on the outer lower corners of L1 and N1.<sup>4</sup> Warehousing practices explain the occurrence of these holes — and it may be possible on occasion to use such evidence to help determine format in volumes printed on wove paper: one collation hole equals one sheet.<sup>5</sup>

*Melbourne*

#### NOTES

1. Gaskell, P. *A New Introduction to Bibliography*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1972 (corrected reprint, 1979), p.128.
2. Savage, W. *A Dictionary of the Art of Printing*, 1841 (reprint, London: Gregg, 1966), p.173.
3. Savage, p.174.
4. Pin holes are also located on the upper edges of C2 and E5.
5. Though if collation holes survive it is probable that deckles are visible as well.

**Copyright of Full Text rests with the original copyright owner and, except as permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, copying this copyright material is prohibited without the permission of the owner or its exclusive licensee or agent or by way of a license from Copyright Agency Limited. For information about such licences contact Copyright Agency Limited on (02) 93947600 (ph) or (02) 93947601 (fax)**