

## BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

### No. 8 FLAP-TITLES

B.J. MCMULLIN

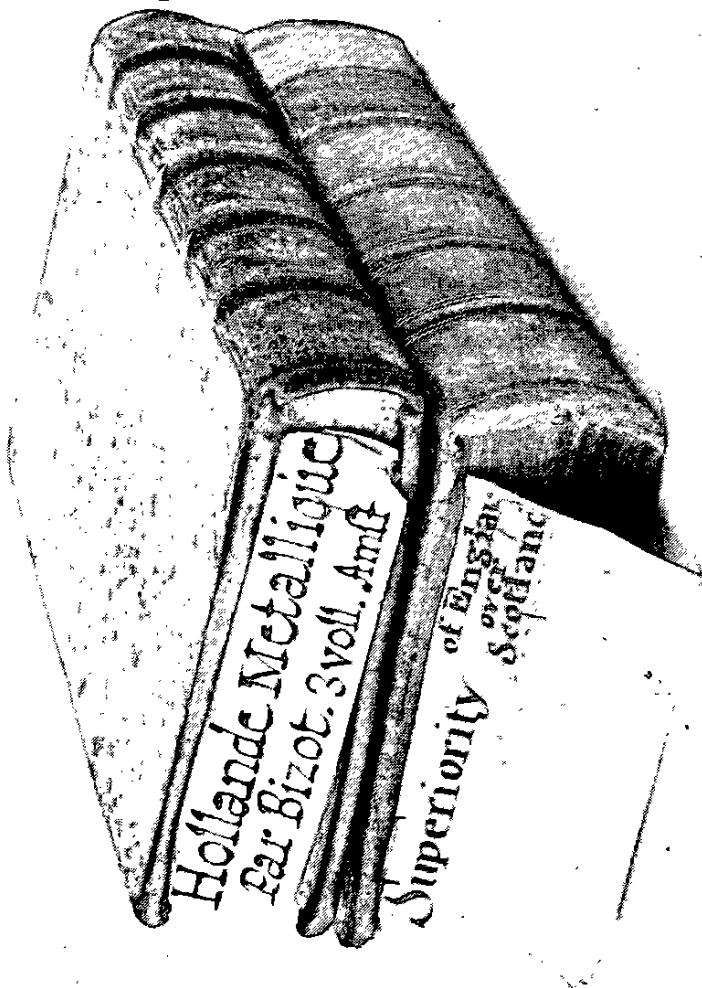
It is axiomatic – at least when a collection numbers more than a handful of volumes – that books need identifying from the outside, that there needs to be a mechanism for establishing what a volume contains without having to remove it from the shelf. Whereabouts on the volume the identification appears will depend on how the volume is shelved: whether upright, spine out or fore edge out; or flat, front board uppermost (the volume on a sloping lectern) or one of the edges facing out (the volume flat on a horizontal shelf). Methods of identifying books from the outside have formed at least a part of three articles: William A. Jackson, 'English title-labels to the end of the seventeenth century', *Harvard Library Bulletin* 2(1948), 222-9; J.C.T. Oates, 'Fore-edge titles in Cambridge University Library', *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society* 3(1959-63), 163-5; Graham Pollard, 'Changes in the style of bookbinding, 1550-1830', *The Library*, 5th ser., 11(1956), 71-94.

The form of identification which is the subject of this note is the writing of the title on a slip of paper (or vellum) which is then attached to the inside of the back board in such a way that it projects over the edge of the text block. The insertion of such slips is clearly the work of an owner and implies that books so identified were shelved flat on a horizontal shelf but with an edge other than the spine facing out. There is no accepted term for such slips: Jackson refers to them as hand-written labels, Oates as manuscript fore-edge labels, and Pollard as manuscript labels. Given their physical appearance, and taking my cue from Pollard, who refers to the use of a vertical label 'to form a flap over the fore-edge'(p.92), a usage echoed by Trevor Mills,<sup>1</sup> I suggest that they be called 'flap-titles'.

The use of flap-titles is well attested: Jackson (plates Ia and Ib) illustrates the usual form, while Pollard (plate Id) and Oates (plate I) illustrate variants – Pollard a *printed* flap-title, Oates a *horizontal* one (i.e. one designed to be read with the volume standing upright). Whatever their form, however, they were vulnerable to detachment and loss, either by accident or as a result of the volume in question subsequently being shelved upright, spine out, with – as Jackson (p.223) observes – traces of paste on the inside of the back board affording the evidence of their one-time presence; those that *have* survived have probably done so by

---

<sup>1</sup> Trevor Mills, 'Vertical titles: 101 uses?', *Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand Bulletin* 7(1983), 120-23.



having been folded back inside the volume. The two examples illustrated here owe their survival to having been folded back in this way. They occur in:

(a) Bizot, *Histoire metallique de la republique de Hollande*, new ed, Amsterdam, chez Pierre Mortier, 1688-90, 3v. (Monash University \*SW 737.2 B625H - the only volume with a flap-title is the second);

(b) [William Atwood], *The Superiority and direct dominion of the imperial crown of England, over the crown and kingdom of Scotland*, London, for J. Hartley, 1704 (Monash University \*SW 327.42041 A887S).

The purpose of the present note is to report variations that the two exhibit from what might be considered the norm - i.e. attached to the inside of the back board, fore edge facing out. And since they are the only two flap-titles that I have encountered it is quite conceivable that there are other variations awaiting report (top edge? front board?); and what is the latest date at which they have been inserted? (is, for example, 1704 - the *terminus post quem* of (b) - rather late or not?).

First is their *position*, overlapping the bottom edge rather than the fore edge. This placement clearly implies that the volumes in question were shelved not only flat but also with the bottom edge facing out, a disposition which may well have been resorted to in order to save space - note that both are orthodox octavos, just under 20cm tall, thus not requiring an unusually deep shelf. It might be noted here too that Oates's plate I also illustrates volumes with (in addition to their horizontal flap-titles) titles *written* on the bottom edge, presumably dating from before their arrival in the Cambridge University Library in 1647/8.

Second is the fact that in (b) the flap-title is attached not to the back board but to the recto of 2L4, in a volume which collates A<sup>8</sup> c1 B-G<sup>8</sup> h<sup>4</sup> H-N<sup>8</sup> O<sup>4</sup> P-U<sup>8</sup> \*U<sup>8</sup> X-2O<sup>8</sup> - i.e. the particular leaf seems to have been chosen to allow the flap title to sit more or less centrally on the edge (as in (a), the roughly torn slip of paper has been folded into three to give the flap-title strength; it has been unfolded for the purpose of illustration). This is perhaps a surprising practice, in that the flap-title is likely to have got in the way during reading and even to have led to damage to the leaf to which it was attached. But it is not without precedent: Mr Richard Overell has drawn my attention to the portrait of John Dryden by James Maubert, c.1695, in which there is a pile of 5 books at the subject's left elbow, all of which have *fore-edge* flap-titles attached to a leaf rather than to the back board.<sup>2</sup> The portrait flap-titles may represent merely artistic licence; on the other hand they may equally represent late-seventeenth-century practice.

2 A detail of the portrait, in the National Portrait Gallery, London, was used for the frontispiece and cover of James Anderson Winn, *John Dryden and His World* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987); the volumes are the works of Shakespear, Homer, Virgil, Horace and Montaigne.

The purpose of flap-titles is not in doubt: they provide that necessary mechanism for identifying the volume from the outside. And in themselves they provide evidence for how particular volumes were shelved at at least one period of their history. But a puzzling aspect of their insertion is that they are found in volumes which are lettered in the 'modern' fashion, on the backstrip. Of the two examples illustrated here, (b) may be discounted as having been rebacked, probably within the last century, but (a) is in a contemporary binding, with lettering which cannot be far removed in date from the binding itself, if at all. Pollard (pp.74-5) has noted the difficulties posed for binding historians by the practice of adding lettering to the backstrip at a date which may be far removed from that of the binding, perhaps when owners or libraries began to arrange their volumes on the shelf with the spine facing out.<sup>3</sup> Could (a), though, perhaps be an instance of a set of volumes bought retail already bound and lettered but shelved by an early owner flat and hence supplied with a flap-title? - i.e. the converse of the assumed normal sequence.

*Monash University*

---

<sup>3</sup> However, Bernard C. Middleton, *A History of English Craft Bookbinding Technique* (New York and London: Hafner, 1963), p.182, maintains that 'in the majority of cases there is no doubt as to whether or not the gilding is contemporary with the binding'; such confidence may indeed be justified when the lettering has been added a century or more after the binding, but I imagine that it would take an expert's eye to identify lettering applied to a trade binding presumptively within decades rather than centuries.