

## The Use of Web Seam Evidence to Determine Format

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In a 1999 note, Pamela Pryde addressed the problem of determining the format of British books gathered in sixes during the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup> Pryde lists characteristics that help identify format — leaves per gathering, direction of chain lines, location of tranchefiles, position of watermark and countermark, location of the deckle and cut edges, the disposition of press figures, and the position of point holes<sup>2</sup> — but she also cites two developments in paper making during this period that complicate that determination: the positioning of watermarks at the edge of the sheet of the paper, and the introduction of wove paper with its lack of chain lines and tranchefiles.<sup>3</sup> Still further complications arose with the introduction of machine-made paper immediately after the period that Pryde examines, for until 1839 this paper lacked watermark designs as well.<sup>4</sup> With the new paper, however, came a feature that can prove helpful in determining format: the web seam.

The web seam is the point where the two ends of the wire web of the papermaking machine are sewn together. During the production process it leaves its imprint on the finished paper, an imprint that may rightfully be considered a form of watermark. Gaskell provides a beta radiograph of a page from a nineteenth-century book illustrating a web seam, yet he does not elaborate its bibliographical significance.<sup>5</sup> Though the presence of a web seam confirms that a paper is machine-made rather than handmade, an extensive investigation of the bibliographical uses of web seams remains to be undertaken. One instance that I have encountered, however, suggests that web-seam evidence may be used to determine format.

An 1820 copy of Frances Burney's *Cecilia: Or, Memoirs of an Heiress*, printed by R. and A. Taylor in three volumes, demonstrates this function.<sup>6</sup> The structure for this book is as follows: *Vol.1: A<sup>2</sup> B-2I<sup>6</sup> 2K<sup>6</sup> (-K4 K5 K6)*. *Vol.2: A<sup>2</sup> B-2L<sup>6</sup>*. *Vol.3: A<sup>2</sup> B-2H<sup>6</sup> 2I<sup>2</sup>*. Like the books of Pryde's study, this one is gathered in sixes, but, with its edges trimmed during the binding process, this book lacks all of the characteristics mentioned above that are useful for determining format, except for the number of leaves per gathering. However, it does contain web seams that occur in a pattern to suggest the format of an eighteenmo, imposed as three half sheets of a duodecimo worked together.<sup>7</sup>

With only three exceptions, which are discussed below, when a web seam occurs in this copy, it occurs in three consecutive gatherings and appears on either \$1 and

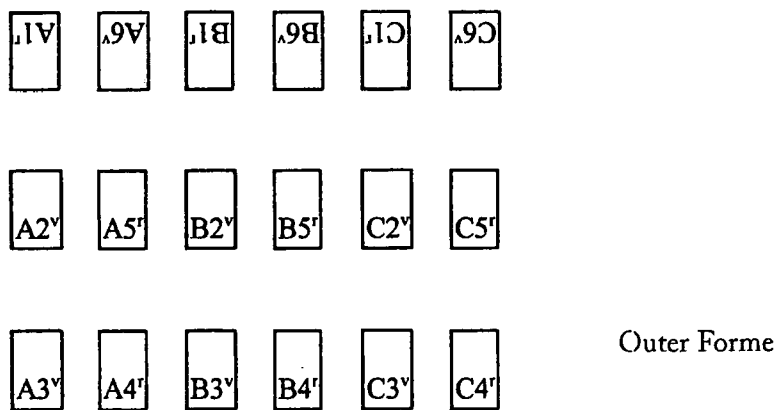
\$6, \$2 and \$5, or \$3 and \$4. Furthermore, gatherings without web seams occur in multiples of three. The following table represents the distribution of web seams in the three volumes of this book. The gatherings where a seam is found are given followed by the leaf numbers on which it appears.

Vol.1: B, C, D 3.4 O, P, Q 3.4 2A 1

Vol.2: E, F, G 2.5L, M, N 2.5R, S, T 3.4 2H 6

Vol.3: B, C, D 1.6H, I, K 2.5<sup>8</sup> 2C, 2D, 2E 1.62F, 2G, 2H 2.5

The seams in this book all run horizontal across the leaf, and the position of the seam on the leaves in the consecutive gatherings suggests that one continuous seam runs the length of the sheet of paper that was laid on the press. If the seam occurs toward the middle of the leaf in the first gathering of the sequence, then it occurs toward the middle of the leaf in the two subsequent gatherings; or, if it runs at an angle on the first leaf, then it follows this angle logically through the contiguous leaves. The following diagram illustrates the inferred imposition scheme for this book.<sup>9</sup>



Gatherings A and C lie along the shorter edges of the sheet with B running down the centre. A1.6, B1.6, C1.6 and A3.4, B3.4, C3.4 lie contiguous along the long edges of the sheet, and A2.5 B2.5 C2.5 lie contiguous across the middle of the sheet.

2A1 (Vol.1) and 2H6 (Vol.2) appear anomalous to the scheme that I have laid out. The seam on 2H6 follows a slight angle, running onto the leaf midway across the foot and running off the leaf at the fore edge. The 2H6 seam would have been imposed on one edge of the same sheet as 2G and 2F, and therefore would have no leaf contiguous to its fore edge. It is plausible that this seam appeared in these three consecutive gatherings, but fell so close to the foot of the leaves that it was cut off during the binding process on all but this one leaf. The seam on 2A1

does not run off the foot of the leaf and varies from others in this book, as it does not run the full width of the leaf. It is possible that this seam represents a repair in the web rather than the seam where the two ends of the web were sewn together.

Fortunately, the seams in this book fall into a neat pattern that assists in determining format; however, this will not always be the case. As Gaskell points out, the paper, as it came off the machine, can be cut in various ways in order to make the printable sheet, and the grain of the paper in books does not always run in the same direction.<sup>10</sup> Yet, as more attention is given to web seams and an adequate method for reporting their occurrence is developed, their bibliographic significance and uses may be better understood.

#### *Endnotes*

I would like to thank David Vander Meulen for reading and commenting on a draft of this note.

<sup>1</sup>Pamela E. Pryde, "Determining The Format of British Books of the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century Gathered in Sixes," in *BSANZ Bulletin* 23:2 (1999): 67-77.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>4</sup> Philip Gaskell, *A New Introduction to Bibliography* (New York and Oxford: OUP, 1972), 218.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 225.

<sup>6</sup>Frances Burney, *Cecilia: Or, Memoirs of an Heiress* (London: Payne and Foss, et al., 1820). The copy considered here is in the author's personal collection.

<sup>7</sup>See Gaskell p.100 for a diagram of the two half sheets of duodecimo worked together.

<sup>8</sup> A web seam does not appear on K5; it runs at an angle off the bottom K2.

<sup>9</sup> This imposition scheme is designated number four by Pryde and can be found in: William Savage, *A Dictionary of the Art of Printing* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1841), 354, number 62.

<sup>10</sup>Gaskell, *Bibliography*, 225-26.