



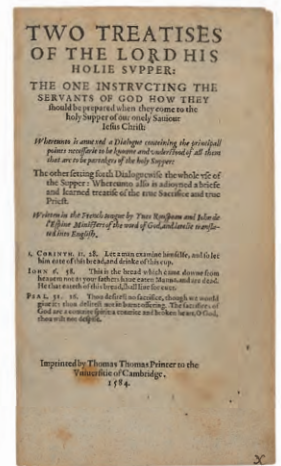
CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

A brief  
history of  
Cambridge  
University  
Press



OPPOSITE, LEFT: Henry VIII's Letters Patent of 1534. Although it was written on vellum, which is very durable, the document, now in the University Archives, has deteriorated over the years; but the fine initial with the king's portrait inside it and the large first line of script are still discernible.

RIGHT: Title page of the first Cambridge University Press book, 'Two Treatises of the Lord His Holie Supper', 1584, printed by Thomas Thomas.



## The history of Cambridge University Press

Cambridge University Press is both the oldest publishing house in the world and the oldest university press. It originated from Letters Patent (a 'royal charter') granted to the University by Henry VIII in 1534, and has been operating continuously as a publishing business since the first University Press book was printed in 1584.

University printing began shortly after the first practising University Printer, Thomas Thomas, was appointed in 1583. He set up a printing house on the site of what became the Senate House lawn in Cambridge – a few yards from where the Press's bookshop now stands. In those days, the Stationers' Company in London jealously guarded its monopoly of printing (which partly explains the delay between the date of the University's Letters Patent and the printing of the first book).

At one point Thomas was described by the London opposition as 'vtterlie ignoraunte in printinge'. He was in fact a very competent printer – as can be seen from the title page of one of the earliest Cambridge books (opposite) – and he was a fine scholar.

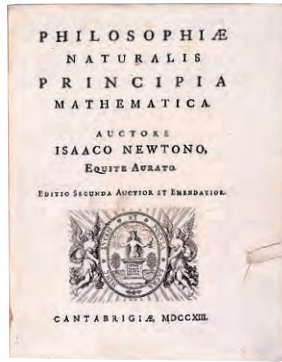


The first Cambridge Bible, 1591. John Legate printed his small octavo Bible in roman type using the Geneva Version, then the preferred version of Puritan readers. It had the advantage of a portable small format, readable type, verse numbers for easy reference, and useful editorial matter. It was the Bible of Shakespeare and Bunyan, and of the first settlers in North America.

In 1591, Thomas's successor, John Legate, printed the first Cambridge Bible, an octavo edition of the popular Geneva Bible. The London Stationers objected strenuously, claiming that they had the monopoly on Bible printing. The University's response was simply to point out the provision in its charter to print 'all manner of books'. Thus began the Press's long tradition of printing and publishing the Bible, a tradition that has endured for over four centuries, beginning with the Geneva Bible, and continuing with the Authorised Version, the Revised Version, the New English Bible and the Revised English Bible.



*Richard Bentley (1662–1742), whose energy and initiative fuelled the revival of the Press in Cambridge. Bentley was a close adviser to the Chancellor of the University on matters relating to the Press, and later became Regius Professor of Divinity and Master of Trinity College.*



*The second edition of Newton's 'Principia'. The first edition of this work appeared in London in 1687 and quickly went out of print. This revised edition, published in 1713 after three years of lengthy correspondence and correction, was largely the fruit of Bentley's encouragement.*

The restrictions and compromises forced upon Cambridge by the dispute with the London Stationers did not really come to an end until the scholar Richard Bentley was given the power to set up a 'new-style press' in 1696.

It is difficult to overestimate Bentley's importance in the history of the University Press. Hitherto, the Press had been located in property owned by whoever happened to be appointed University Printer. Under Bentley's reforms, the buildings and equipment of the Press became the property of the University, and Bentley must be given most of the credit for the basic idea of an academic press, owned by the University, supervised by a body of its senior members, and aiming to publish works of learning to the greater credit of the University as a place of education, religion, learning and research. Bentley also developed the concept of entrepreneurial publishing at a time when the productive role of the printer and the selling role of the bookseller were much more dominant. One of Bentley's major initiatives was a series of editions of the classics, including his own edition of Horace. But his greatest achievement was a new edition of

Newton's *Principia Mathematica* (1713) – one of the most important scientific works ever printed.

It was in Bentley's time that a body of senior scholars ('the Curators', later 'the Syndics') was appointed to be responsible to the University for the Press's affairs. The Press Syndicate still meets regularly, and the role of its publishing committee still includes the review and approval of the Press's planned publishing output.

John Baskerville became University Printer in the mid-eighteenth century. Baskerville's concern was the production of the finest possible books using his own type-design and printing techniques. His Folio Bible of 1763 is one of the finest ever produced. Of this edition, Baskerville wrote: 'The importance of the

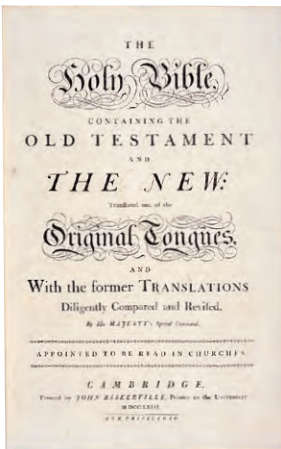
*A meeting of the Press Syndicate in the Oriel Room of the Pitt Building. Publishing committee meetings are still held regularly on alternate Friday afternoons during term-time.*





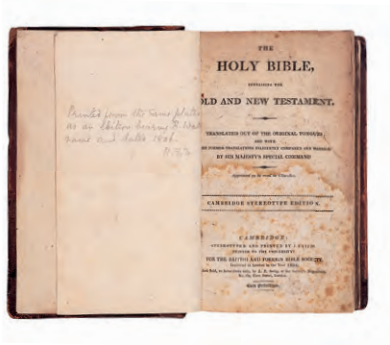
work demands all my attention; not only for my own (eternal) reputation; but (I hope) also to convince the world, that the University in the honour done me has not intirely misplaced their favours.'

Caxton would have found nothing to surprise him if he had walked into the Press's printing house in the eighteenth century: all the type was still being set by hand; wooden presses, capable of producing only 1,000 sheets a day at best, were still in use; and books were still being individually bound by hand. A technological breakthrough was badly needed, and it came when Lord Stanhope perfected the making of stereotype plates. This involved making a mould of the whole surface of a page of type and then casting plates from that mould. The Press was the first to use this technique, and in 1805 produced the technically successful and much-reprinted Cambridge Stereotype Bible.



*In 1763 John Baskerville produced one of the most beautiful Bibles ever printed, using his own types and printed ornaments. The ink and the paper were also specially manufactured, and, after printing, the sheets were hot-pressed to give them smoothness and gloss. The Bible was sold by subscription to wealthy patrons, though it is doubtful if Baskerville recovered all his costs.*

*The Cambridge Stereotype Bible, 1805. This edition was prepared for the newly-founded British and Foreign Bible Society of London, a charitable enterprise that attracted great public support and soon found itself supplying Europe and the newly colonised territories of Africa and Asia.*



The Press's successful exploitation of stereotyping and of other innovations, such as the durable iron press, enabled it to make the transition from a small printing office to a large printing works.

By the 1850s the Press was using steam-powered machine presses, employing two to three hundred people, and occupying several buildings in the Silver Street and Mill Lane area. The most important of these buildings, and one that the Press still occupies, is the Pitt Building (1833), which was built specifically for the Press and in honour of William Pitt the Younger.

Under the stewardship of C J Clay, who was University Printer from 1854 to 1882, the Press increased the size and scale of its academic and educational publishing operation.



*The Pitt Building and its dominating façade on Trumpington Street. 'The Pitt Press', a water-colour by George Belton Moore.*



*Charles John Clay.*



*The Revised Version of the Bible, 1885. At the meeting of the Press Syndicate on 1 July 1870 it was agreed to publish the forthcoming Revised Version in partnership with Oxford University Press.*



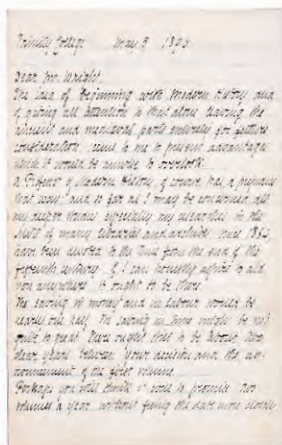
LEFT: R T Wright, Secretary to the Press Syndicate, 1892–1911.

BELOW: Lord Acton.

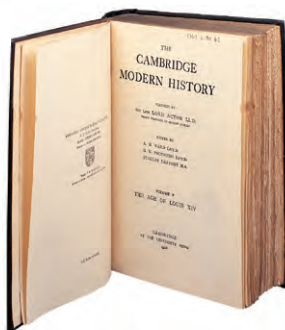


An important factor in this increase was the inauguration of the Press's list of schoolbooks (including what came to be known as the 'Pitt Press Series'). During Clay's administration, the Press also undertook a sizeable co-publishing venture with Oxford: the Revised Version of the Bible, which was begun in 1870 and completed in 1885.

The appointment of R T Wright as Secretary of the Press Syndicate in 1892 marked the beginning of the Press's development as a modern publishing business with a clearly defined editorial policy and administrative structure.



Part of the early correspondence from Lord Acton concerning the planned 'Cambridge Modern History Series', of which he was to become the first editor. Acton retired on grounds of ill health in 1901 but the series of twelve volumes was finally published under three co-editors between 1902 and 1912 (Volume V published in 1908 is shown above).



It was Wright (with two great historians, Lord Acton and F W Maitland) who devised the plan for one of the most distinctive Cambridge contributions to publishing – the Cambridge Histories.

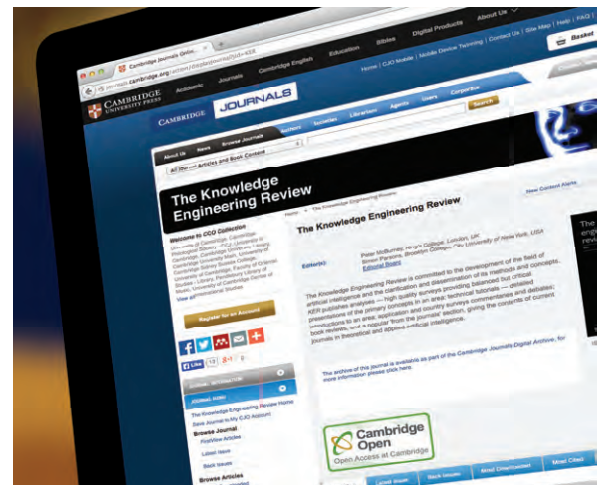
The *Cambridge Modern History* was completed in 1912. Nine years later the Press issued the first volumes of the freshly-edited complete works of Shakespeare, a project of nearly equal scope that was not finished until 1966.

The Press's list in science and mathematics began to thrive, with men of the stature of Albert Einstein and Ernest Rutherford subsequently becoming Press authors. The Press's impressive contribution to journal publishing began in 1893, and today it publishes over 300 journals.



LEFT: Ernest Rutherford, author of 'Radio-Activity', 1904.

BELOW: Cambridge Journals Online.







*The New York Global Connectivity Center, home to the offices of the Press's Americas Branch.*

The story of the last 150 years is one of phenomenal growth and development. In the 1850s, the Press was predominantly a printing business, and primarily a printer of Bibles and prayer-books. Today, its publishing output covers virtually every educational subject seriously studied in the English-speaking world, with the last part of the twentieth century seeing diversification into professional books, textbooks, reference works, English language teaching publications, software and electronic publishing.

The Press takes its responsibility to the environment very seriously, and its UK operation has been certified with ISO 14001, a prestigious international standard which demonstrates our commitment to reduce the impact of our business on the environment.

In 1992 the Press opened its own bookshop at 1 Trinity Street, on a historic site in the centre of Cambridge. The £1.3m worth of Press publications sold each year through this bookshop is a small proportion of our global sales, and one of the most exciting developments of the past fifty years has been the expansion of our international presence. With branches, offices and agents throughout the world, the Press today is able to draw on a remarkable range of authors (currently over 50,000 from over 190 countries) and to market and distribute material (both print and electronic) to readers everywhere. Over

2,000 staff in over 50 offices service an inventory of over 50,000 in-print titles (of which around 24,000 are also available as e-books).

The future will see more growth and diversity as the Press publishes in new formats and media, establishes a presence in emerging educational markets, responds to intellectual developments in the subject areas where it is already active, and continuously invests in technological change to improve its production, distribution and information systems. Our presence at the technological cutting-edge has led us to seek out new directions, opportunities and business models that will enable us to fulfil our mission in the digital age. In this we will continue to observe our core values of integrity and rigour, at the same time bringing creativity and innovation to an expansion that remains directly related to the Press's statutory aims and realised through a unitary, international publishing organisation, with its constitutional centre in Cambridge.



*The Cambridge University Press bookshop at 1 Trinity Street, Britain's oldest known bookshop site.*

Cambridge University Press  
advances learning, knowledge  
and research worldwide.



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