

**THE RECORDS OF THE
WORSHIPFUL COMPANY
OF STATIONERS**

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The records of the Worshipful company of stationers by Charles Robert Rivington

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CHARLES ROBERT RIVINGTON

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OF
THE WORSHIPFUL
COMPANY OF STATIONERS.

BY

CHARLES ROBERT RIVINGTON,
CLERK OF THE COMPANY.



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25, PARLIAMENT STREET.

1883.



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OF

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BY CHARLES ROBERT RIVINGTON,

CLERK OF THE COMPANY.

Read 12th December, 1881.

It is but a few years since the late Mr. J. G. Nichols read an interesting paper on this Company, which will be found in the second volume of the Society's Transactions, and still more recently Mr. Edward Arber published a Transcript of the Registers of the Company from 1554 to 1640 in 4 vols. the prefaces to which contain much valuable information.

Although the Company of Stationers, as we shall hereafter learn, occupied but a modest position amongst the Civic Guilds, yet "Stationers' Hall" can boast of a greater notoriety than any other similar institution.

A brotherhood or fellowship of Stationers, of whom, amongst other eminent printers, Wynkyn de Worde appears to have been a member, was first founded in the year 1403, about half a century before the in-

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vention of printing and perhaps an entire century before the exercise of that art could extend to a profession. The printing trade naturally fell into their hands and gave them consequence as the manufacturers and vendors of books.

In 1556 the brotherhood obtained from Philip and Mary a charter of incorporation. This charter is prefaced thus, "Know ye that we considering and manifestly perceiving that certain seditious and heretical books, rhymes, and treatises are daily published and printed by divers scandalous, malicious, schismatical, and heretical persons, not only moving our subjects and lieges to sedition and disobedience against us, our Crown and dignity, but also to renew and move very great and detestable heresies against the faith and sound doctrine of Holy Mother Church, and wishing to provide a suitable remedy in this behalf," and incorporates "The Master and Keeper or Wardens and Commonalty of the Mystery or Art of a Stationer of the City of London." Thomas Dockwray being the first master, and John Cawood and Henry Cooke the first wardens.

The charter prohibits any person from printing within the realm without the licence of the Company, except patentees, and grants to the Company power to search, seize, and destroy or appropriate all unlicensed books.

The charter was granted by Philip and Mary, with the object of creating a fresh tool for the suppression of books against the Government, and what the authorities pleased to pronounce a heresy. On the 18th August, 1553, a proclamation had been issued by

Queen Mary, prohibiting the printing of "books, ballads, rhymes, and interludes," without special licence. In the following year the opposition to the Spanish marriage was so great, that Parliament prohibited the setting forth of any book to the slander or reproach of "the King or Queen," under the penalty of the loss of the right hand. Many Protestants fled abroad to escape persecution, and settled at Frankfurt, Zurich, Strasburg, and other towns, and in June, 1555, a proclamation was made to the wardens of every Company in London, to search for heretical books which had come from abroad. These proclamations were little heeded, and the prayer of the members of the printing craft for incorporation was listened to favourably.

The cost of obtaining the charter is thus set out in the Company's book:

The Charges layde out for o' Corporation.

fyrste for 2 times wrytinge of o' booke before y ^t was signyed be the kynge and the quenes matie highness 0 . 18 . 0
It. for the syngned and the prevy seale 6 . 6 . 8
It. for the greate seale 8 . 9 . 0
It. for the wrytinge and inrolynge 3 . 0 . 0
It. for wax lace and examenacion 0 . 3 . 4
It. to the clerkes for expedycion 0 . 10 . 0
It. for lymyng and for the skyn 0 . 20 . 0

The incorporation of the Company was celebrated by a dinner at the Hall, the charges of which will be found set forth in detail in Mr. Arber's publication.

On the 10th November, 1559, Queen Elizabeth confirmed the charter.

On the 22nd January, 1573, a precept was issued by the Mayor to the Company, requiring them at their peril forthwith to produce their charters or grants for enrolment.

The original charters were destroyed at the Great Fire, and the Company have exemplifications only, which were obtained about 1684.

In 1663 a writ of *quo warranto* was brought by the Attorney-General against the Company's charter, and Dr. Bayly was entreated to see the Lord Chancellor about it, and subsequently it was suspended "until Mr. L'Estrange, Surveyor of the Press, settle with the Company some method for suppressing seditious and unlicensed publications." A writ of *quo warranto* was exhibited against the Company's charter in 1684, but in 1690 the judgment was reversed.

The most ancient and curious record in the Company's possession is the first warden's account book. This commences with the master and wardens named in the charter, and includes under each year distinct departments for the binding of apprentices, grants of freedom, and registers of copies. The book itself was presented to the Company by a member of the Court, and is bound in leather, which is in good preservation; each side of the cover is ornamented with the figures of a stag, a hare, and some other animal within a double border. The first entry is an account of the master and wardens' receipts and disbursements from 1554 to 1557. Thomas Berthelet was master when the account commenced, but died soon afterwards, as appears from an item of 13*s.* 4*d.* received from Margerye his widow "for a rewarde to the

Companye for comynge to the sayde Thomas Barthelet his buryall." For many years it was presumed that the first register of copies was lost, as stated by Mr. Steevens in the edition of Shakespeare published in 1778, until Mr. John Northouck discovered that the entries of copies previous to 1571 were contained in the wardens' accounts. There is still a gap of five years, the first separate register of copies commencing 1576. From this date to the present day the registers are intact. But let us first trace the history of the Company to their present Hall. Previous to the incorporation the Brotherhood appear to have possessed a hall in or near Milk Street, and some time before 1570 to have moved to St. Paul's churchyard. The supposed site of the first hall is still in the possession of the Company. The second hall was probably on the south side of St. Paul's, within the ward of Castle Baynard, as the Ward Inquest Committee met at Stationers' Hall in 1555. This second hall was leased to Mr. Edward Kynaston, a vintner, in 1606, who converted it into a tavern called the "Feathers Tavern," and the site was in 1671 sold to Sir William Turner for 420*l*.

In 1611 Abergavenny House was purchased by the partners in the English Stock, and adapted for the use of the Company. It comprised the ground lying between Amen Corner and the Chapter-house estate on the north, St. Martin Ludgate church on the south, the city wall on the west, and the garden of London House on the east. The Company purchased the portion of this garden, which now forms the east side of Ave Maria Lane, but afterwards sold it.

In 1654 the hall was so much out of repair, the dinner to the livery on Lord Mayor's day had to be held elsewhere, and the following year the "Book of Martyrs" was sold to pay for the rebuilding. The Book of Martyrs was frequently reprinted, and was so highly appreciated that when in 1631 it was out of print some "persons of quality," being desirous that it might be reprinted for the general good of the kingdom, threatened to print it themselves if the Company did not immediately issue a fresh edition. A copy of the Book of Martyrs of the best paper, ruled, bound in Turkey leather, gilt, with the king's arms stamped on it, was presented to His Most Excellent Majesty Charles the Second, in 1660, as a token of the Company's duty and submission to his royal person and government.

In 1666 the hall was entirely destroyed by the Fire of London. At the time there was a large quantity of valuable property belonging to the Company in the hall, and everything appears to have been burnt (including the seal of the Company) excepting the registers, which were probably in the clerk's house on Clerkenwell Green. For several weeks after the fire the wardens employed watchmen to guard the ruins and salvage.

The first meeting of the court after the fire was held at Cook's Hall, and the subsequent courts until the hall was rebuilt at the Lane Hospital Hall, *i. e.* St. Bartholomew's Hospital. In 1670 a Committee was appointed to rebuild the hall, and in 1674 the court agreed with Stephen Colledge (the famous Protestant joiner—who was afterwards hanged at Oxford