

**TRANSACTIONS OF THE
BIBLIOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY;
VOLUME III, JANUARY,
1895 TO JUNE, 1896**

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THE BIBLIOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY.



JOURNAL OF THE THIRD SESSION.

January to June, 1895.

JANUARY MEETING.

On Monday, the 21st, Mr. A. H. Huth in the Chair, Mr. H. R. Plomer read a Paper on *Robert Wyer*.

Mr. Wyer's paper will be printed in due course, but is being held back at present in the hope that some additions may be made to the bibliography. The usual abridgment is, therefore, here printed.

SUMMARY.—Robert Wyer was a printer of popular literature. The few biographical facts known about him are, that he carried on the business of a printer and bookseller at the sign of the St. John the Evangelist, at Charing Cross; that he settled there about the year 1530; and that there are evidences of his being at work there in 1556.

Up to 1536 the house in which Wyer printed was part of the rental of Norwich House, hence the allusion to the Bishop of Norwich's Rentes in Wyer's colophons. In the year 1536, Norwich House passed into the

hands of the "Duke of Suffolk," and this change of landlords is also noted by Wyer. In studying his work it is important to bear this change of address in mind.

No less than one hundred books can be traced to Wyer, and copies of fifty of these are in the British Museum, the Bodleian has four or five not to be found in other collections, while the University Library at Cambridge and the Lambeth Library have valuable specimens of his work.

The main difficulty in judging Wyer's work is his undated books. Out of the number recorded above, only eleven bear any date, and not all of these are dates of printing, while of this small number only five or six are within the reach of the student. Thus to classify the undated books of this printer is no light task, nor are the methods adopted by the late William Blades in his *Life of Caxton*, easily followed by one who has not a technical knowledge of the printer's art. Briefly stated, however, the results of my investigations are as follows :—

Wyer's books may be divided into four broad classes.

1. Those with the Norwich colophon, printed before 1537.
2. Those with the Suffolk colophon, printed after 1536.
3. Those printed for other printers.
4. Miscellaneous books giving no clue to date of printing.

Those having the Norwich colophon and bearing date are with one exception printed in "Secretary" type. The undated books with this colophon have the same characteristics.

The books with the Suffolk colophon cover a wide space of time, from 1536 to 1556; but there is not a single book known with this colophon with a date. But there are books with dates subsequent to 1536, and others the dates of which can be fixed by internal evidence. A close study of the books of this period shows that the "Secretary" type continued in use for

the body of books down to 1542, after which "Black Letter" was substituted, and the "Secretary" used only for supplementary matter.

One or two books of Wyer's show that he printed with other men's type, and had books printed for him by other printers. On the other hand he did a great deal of work for his brother craftsmen, notably Richard Banckes.

Wyer had several founts of type, some of them good, notably a Great Primer which he used for the first lines of titles and colophons, etc. He had also several sets of initial letters, one at least of which he copied from Wynkyn de Worde, if they were not some of the same set.

One work of his, the *C. Hystories of Troy*, is profusely illustrated and shows very great enterprise on the part of the printer, if not much artistic skill. His full-page device, which is the best example his works show of wood engraving, was probably foreign.

There were three other printers or booksellers of the same name in London in the sixteenth century; but the books having their names are found to be printed with the types and blocks of Robert Wyer. The most important of the three, Nicholas Wyer, seems to have carried on the business after 1556, and to have been subsequently joined by Thomas Colwell.

Wyer's work took in many branches of literature, notably theology and medicine. Many of his publications were tracts of a few pages, easily saleable, and their nature reflects the grossly superstitious character of the people.

Some, however, such as Marshall's *Defence of Peace*, a folio, and the *C. Hystories of Troy*, were evidently meant to attract the attention of more wealthy readers.

If he had done no more than print these two books, he would deserve a place amongst the first printers of his day. But the large amount of popular literature he issued is a still stronger title to the notice of bibliographers.