

Hello, and welcome to the Renaissance English History Podcast. I'm your host, Heather Teysko, and I'm a storyteller who makes history accessible because I believe it's a pathway to understanding who we are, our place in the universe, and being in touch with our own humanity. This is episode 62, Printing and Literature from Caxton to Shakespeare. Being someone who loves books, this is something I've wanted to delve into for a long time, and I'm excited to do this episode.

But before I get started, a few reminders. Firstly, please check out the Agora Podcast Network, of which this podcast is a proud member. The Agora podcast of the month is The Egyptian History Podcast.

So there's a lot going on right now in Englandcast World, and I want to make you aware of some of the goodness that's going on. First, the Tudor Digital Advent Calendar was really popular last year, so I'm going to do it again. You'll get a lovely Advent Calendar with a window that opens up each day to some kind of Tudor Holiday Goodness - a recipe for Wassail, a Christmas playlist, or decoration ideas. Everyone on the mailing list will get it, and I'll be sending it out at the end of November - so just make sure you're signed up. And if you sign up after December 1, no big deal, you'll still get it, but sign up asap so you can start right away on the first. Second, the Tudor Planner is selling really well, and I'm only printing 500 of them, so be sure to order yours if you want to spend 2017 with the Tudors. Also, remember we're taking a trip to England in late April, early May 2017, to experience both the history and music of southern England, with stops in Cambridge, Oxford, Ely, Bath, Winchester, and Windsor. So if you're interested in that, be sure to check out the full itinerary and costs. All of this is at [Englandcast.com](http://Englandcast.com), so check it out.

Okay, history. About two years ago I did an episode on William Caxton, who brought the moveable type printing press to England in the last 15th century, and I've wanted to explore this topic in more depth for a while. To me it seems like the printing press made so many of the main themes of the 16th century possible; religious reform and the Bible being spread in English, pamphlets about religion, and of course the growth of the theater and printing Shakespeare's plays. By the time of Shakespeare, we saw the stationers around St. Paul selling books, pamphlets, broadsheets, and we had the Worshipful Company of Stationers receiving a royal charter in 1557. So in this episode I'm going to talk about some of the main highlights of printing and literature in the 16th century.

I've done a few episodes on literature and the theater, as well as Tudor poets, so I'd urge you to go back to the archive to listen to those specifics. For this episode I want to talk about the ideas, and what changed in the 16th century.

To get a good sense of that we need to go back to how books were produced before the printing press. Books were luxury items, created by hand by monks writing out each word. It would take weeks, if not months, for each book to be created and illustrated, and so you can imagine how much

they would cost. Only the very wealthy would have access to any of these manuscripts, and the idea of non-noble people being able to read at all was foreign.

This began to change when Caxton brought the printing press to England. The moveable type printing press made mass production much easier. In the show notes I have a video showing how you used one, but basically you had molds of each letter, kept in individual cases. The capital letters were kept in cases above the regular ones, giving us the name upper case and lower case. You would pick out the letters you wanted, situate them in the printing press, put your ink over them, the same way we might do with stamping today, and then run the paper over it. You can see how once you have the press set up, you could easily print multiple copies of each page.

One of the first books printed in England was by Anthony Rivers, who was the brother to Elizabeth Woodville, Henry VIII's grandmother through his mother, Elizabeth of York. Like her mother, Elizabeth of York took a keen interest in learning, and there is evidence that she personally taught her younger children their letters and handwriting, including the young Henry before he was the heir to the throne.

Rivers' book was dedicated to his brother in law, Edward IV, and it was an early example of dedications being used to flatter, or gain patronage or protection from Kings and nobles. This would become a theme throughout the early printing period. Writers would dedicate books to nobles in part asking for their patronage, but it was also a form of protection in case they were publishing something that could be seen as seditious or controversial. Monarchs and their ministers could control the narrative and very clearly come out in support or opposition of a particular belief simply by allowing themselves to receive a dedication. If you dedicated a book to a particular person, it was as if that person was giving their agreement.

Henry VIII himself had a printer who was solely responsible for printing the books that had been dedicated to Queens. All of his queens were the recipients of books being dedicated to them, and show the variations between what was clearly sanctioned by the King and what was dedicated to the royal family simply for patronage. Katherine of Aragon was the recipient of dedications of many books that were in support of Catholicism as well as some that were purely for entertainment like Thomas Wyatt's translation of Plutarch's *Quiet of Mind*. Throughout the changes in Henry's wives, different books were released that hinted at either support or not at the treatment of Katherine of Aragon, or Anne Boleyn. Later, Henry's final wife Katherine Parr, would publish her own book *Psalms or Prayers*, anonymously.

Dedications could also be seen as a request for money, and some Elizabethan writers would cleverly dedicate various editions of the same book to different nobles in different parts of the country to increase their chances of receiving money from them.

The sheer number of books being printed in Europe in the 16th century could very well be compared to the influx of information we have all experienced in the past 20 years with the internet. In 1500, printing presses in operation throughout [Western Europe](#) had already produced more than twenty million volumes. In the 16th century, with presses spreading further afield, their output rose tenfold to an estimated 150 to 200 million copies. The operation of a press became so synonymous with the enterprise of printing that it lent its name to an entire new branch of media, the **press**.

There was an increased interest in education during this period, and literacy rates exploded. While illiteracy rates were still significantly high, especially for women and low class citizens, more learning resources opened for children of all rankings at very young ages. Literacy in this time period implied an ability to read, not write, English. As Protestant religions expanded, they placed importance on direct reading and devotion of the Bible and other religious texts as a moral duty. Historians face a dilemma in accurately analyzing literacy rates, and insight into this is still in its primitive stages. Professor David Cressy took an interesting approach to the material by evaluating public documents such as court documents, marriage licenses, and wills to define literacy rates in his book *Literacy and the Social Order*. Englishmen lacking the ability to read signed these with a signature mark instead of their actual name. Cressy then compiled the data to show trends of illiteracy among the social hierarchy, sexes, careers, and location.

So let's talk about what types of books were being published in this time. One of the great things about the printing press was that you could easily have standardized textbooks, which made ensuring education much easier. One example of an early standardized textbook was by John Stanbridge. He was a schoolmaster, and taught Magdalan College, Oxford. He wrote several grammar books; one of the most famous is the *Vulgaria* from 1509. This was a much different type of grammar book than we would expect to see. He was one of the earliest schoolmasters to bring humanist education to England, but in the *Vulgaria* we see scatological language, flirtations, and things like shopping or insults. It was largely a latin book that students would use to translate, and an example of the vocabulary included was "Here be many pretty maids" and other useful phrases like that. The *Vulgaria* is a fascinating look at what a humanist scholar thought would be a fun learning tool.

In addition to textbooks, another type of book to take off during this period were cookbooks and books on household management. These would be used by the ladies of the house, or perhaps as literacy spread even the chief servant in charge of the household. The first person to make a living writing books on cooking and household management was a tad bit past our time, Hannah Wooley, who was born in 1622 and wrote recipe books, and other Martha Stewart types of books. Even though Hannah was the first person to make a full time living doing this, there were plenty of cookbooks and women sharing their recipes and tips in the Elizabethan period. It was one of the most popular forms of literature at the time.

Similarly to what we see with the internet, pornography took off in Elizabethan England. One of the most famous writers who imported his writing was an Italian named Pietro Aretino who was a satirist, and also made a very good living advising people in sex, and then blackmailing them. Both Francis I of France and Charles V of the Holy Roman Empire employed him at the same time, trying to get him to find dirt on the other. He kept most of Europe in suspense over what kind of vice he would find on someone next, similar to tabloid magazines today. But he also printed his stories of vice, with a satire of a Platonic dialog set in a brothel, and one of his most famous books is called *The School of Whoredom* which offers references to the physical contortions expected of the serious professional ("the crane", "the horizontal shuffle", "the grazing sheep"). The courts ate it up, and the word is that he eventually died from suffocation

when he laughed too much, which is, I think, a really hilarious way to die. Christopher Marlowe, the famous playwright who could easily have rivalled Shakespeare if he'd lived, translated Ovid's *Amores*, and *The Fairy Queene*, one of the most famous poems of the time, is based on King Arthur's supposed dream of intercourse with a goddess.

On the other end of the spectrum, of course we can't talk about printing without bringing religion into the conversation. Like I said before, you can easily make a case that the Protestant Reformation succeeded in a large part thanks to the printing press, which allowed for tracts to be easily and widely disseminated. This is where we hear many famous stories such as William Tyndale, who translated the Bible into English, and was executed for it. Having the Bible in a language people could read and understand was a main tenant of the Protestant Reformation, and it was also one of the main reasons people were executed. Of course in the early days it would be Protestants, but during Elizabeth's reign England would also see Catholics imprisoned and executed for bringing in seditious materials. Tyndale first published the Bible in English in 1525 in Cologne, and would have it smuggled into England for distribution to Protestants there. In 1611, the 54 scholars who produced the [King James Bible](#) drew significantly from Tyndale, as well as from translations that descended from his. One estimate suggests that the New Testament in the King James Version is 83% Tyndale's and the Old Testament 76%

By the end of the Elizabethan period, the book trade was centered around St. Paul's, and had also expanded to Holborn. Nowadays Bloomsbury is the capital of the book publishing industry in London, so it hasn't moved much. If you walk around Bedford Square, or Russell Square, you will see in the nondescript buildings all around you the evidence of the book trade that has been growing there for four hundred years. The Company of Stationers was first sanctioned in the 1540's, and it was eventually charged with regulating the number of printers, and could help keep seditious materials from being widely circulated.

What concerned authorities the most, though, were the presses on the Continent that published unfriendly or illegal material, and smuggled it in. The fact that so much illegal material remains shows that it was pretty ineffective, though.

One of the most interesting and tantalizing books we have from this time is the personal journal that Edward VI wrote. It's tantalizing because of how much it leaves out, and the lack of emotion it often shows. But in the days before everyone and their mother had a blog, this journal shows a unique insight into what he was dealing with on a personal level, as well as in policy. The rift in religion between Edward and his sister Mary was famous, and in 1551 he wrote: "The lady Mary, my sister, came to me to Westminster, where after greetings she was called with my council into a chamber where it was declared how long I had suffered her mass, in hope of her reconciliation, and how now, there being no hope as I saw by her letters, unless I saw some speedy amendment I could not bear it. She answered that her soul was God's and her faith she would not change, nor hide her opinion with dissembled doings. It was said I did not constrain her faith but willed her only as a subject to obey. And that her example might lead to too much inconvenience."

I could go on forever giving examples of the books written during this time period, but I hope that you at least now have an introduction to the types of materials that were written and published in the 16th century, the effect that mass printing had on the spread of ideas, literary, and education, as well as the way it was tried to be regulated. If you go to [Englandcast.com](http://Englandcast.com) and check out the show notes, I have links to many of these resources mentioned, and you can learn a lot more.

Remember you can get the show notes, and this transcript, as well as sign up for the newsletter all at the site, or by texting the listener support line at 801 6TEYSKO or tweeting me @teysko. That's also the best way to get in touch, or also through the facebook page at [facebook.com/englandcast](https://facebook.com/englandcast). Remember also to sign up for the newsletter to get the digital advent calendar!

Thanks so much for listening everyone. The next episode will be my interview with Linda Porter on her new book on the Children of Charles I, as well as her work on the new BBC One Six Wives series, so stay tuned for that. I have a growing list of topics I want to cover in 2017, but the final episode of 2016 will be on cosmetics and looking good in Elizabethan England, which will be a partner episode to last year's episode on Fashion and Sumptuary Laws. So I will talk with you soon, and thanks again for listening!