

# A history of the old english letter founderies

with notes

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## Chapter I

# The English Type Bodies and Faces

We have laid before the reader, in the Introductory Chapter, such facts and conjectures as it is possible to gather together respecting the processes and appliances adopted by the first letter-founders, and shall, with a view to render the particular history of the English Letter Foundries more intelligible, endeavour to present here, in as concise a form as possible, a short historical sketch of the English type bodies and faces, tracing particularly the rise and development of the Roman, Italic, and Black letters before and subsequent to their introduction into this country; adding, in a following chapter, a similar notice of the types of the principal foreign and learned languages which have figured conspicuously in English typography.



## Type-bodies

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The origin of **type-bodies** and the nomenclature which has grown around them, is a branch of typographical antiquity which has always been shrouded in more or less obscurity. Imagining, as we do, that the moulds of the first printers were of a primitive construction, and, though conceived on true principles, were adjusted to the various sizes of letter they had to cast more by eye than by rule, it is easy to understand that founts would be cast on no other principle than that of ranging in body and line and height in themselves, irrespective of the body, height and line of other founts used in the same press. When two or more founts were required to mix in the same work, then the necessity of a uniform standard of height would become apparent. When two or more founts were required to mix in the same line, a uniformity in body, and if possible in alignment, would be found necessary. When **initials** or **marginal notes** required to be incorporated with the text, then the advantage of a mathematical proportion between one body and another would suggest itself.

At first, doubtless, the printer would name his sizes of type according to the works for which they were used. His **Canon** type would be the large character in which he printed the canon of the Mass. His Cicero type would be the letter used in his editions of that classical author. His Saint Augustin, his Primer, his Brevier, his Philosophie, his Pica type, would be the names by which he would describe the sizes of letter he used for printing the works whose names they bore. It may also be assumed with tolerable certainty that in most of these cases, originally, the names described not only the body, but the “face” of their respective founts. At what period this confused and haphazard system of nomenclature resolved itself into the definite printer’s terminology it is difficult to determine. The process was probably a gradual one, and was not

perfected until typefounding became a distinct and separate trade.

The earliest writers on the form and proportion of letters, — **Dürer** in 1525, **Tory** in 1529, and Ycair in 1548, — though using terms to distinguish the different faces of letter, were apparently unaware of any distinguishing names for the bodies of types. Tory, indeed, mentions Canon and **Bourgeoise**; but in both cases he refers to the face of the letter; and Ycair's distinction of "teste y glosa" applies generally to the large and small type used for the text and notes respectively of the same work.

In England, type-bodies do not appear to have been reduced to a definite scale much before the end of the sixteenth century. Mores failed to trace them further back than 1647; but in a Regulation of the Stationers' Company, dated 1598, Pica, English, Long Primer, and Brevier are mentioned by name as apparently well-established bodies at that time; and in a petition to the same Company in 1635, **Nonpareil** and "two-line letters" are mentioned as equally familiar.

**Moxon**, our first writer on the subject, in his *Mechanick Exercises*, in 1683, described ten regular bodies in common use in his day, and added to his list the number of types of each body that went to a foot, viz.:—

"We have one body more," he adds, "which is sometimes used in England; that is, a **Small Pica**: but I account it no great discretion in a master-printer to provide it, because it differs so little from the Pica, that unless the workmen be carefuller than they sometimes are, it may be mingled with the **Pica**, and so the beauty of both founts may be spoiled."

In this sentence we have the first record of the introduction of irregular bodies into **English typography**, an innovation destined very speedily to expand, and within half a century increase the number of English bodies by the seven following additions.

The origin of these irregular bodies it is easy to explain. Between Moxon's time and 1720 the country was flooded with **Dutch type**. The English founders were beaten out of the field in their own market, and James, in self-defence,

had to furnish his foundry entirely with Dutch moulds and matrices. Thus we had the typefounding of two nations carried on side by side. An English printer furnished with a Dutch fount would require additions to it to be cast to the Dutch standard, which might be smaller or larger than that laid down for English type by Moxon, and yet so near that even if it lost or gained a few types in the foot, it would still be called by its English name, which would thenceforth represent two different bodies. If, on the other hand, a new fount were imported, or cut by an ill-regulated artist here, which when finished was found to be as much too large for one regular body as it was too small for another, a body would be found to fit it between the two, and christened by a new name. In this manner, Minion, **Bourgeois**, Small Pica, Paragon, and two-line Pica insinuated themselves into the list of English bodies, and in this manner arose that ancient anomaly, the various body-standards of the English foundries. For a founder who was constantly called upon to alter his mould to accommodate a printer requiring a special body, would be likely to cast a quantity of the letter in excess of what was immediately ordered; and this store, if not sold in due time to the person for whom it was cast, would be disposed of to the first comer who, requiring a new fount, and not particular as to body, provided the additions afterwards to be had were of the same gauge, would take it off the founder's hands. *Facilis descensus Avern!* Having taken the one downward step, the founder would be called upon constantly to repeat it, his moulds would remain set, some to the right, some to the wrong standard, and every type he cast would make it more impossible for him or his posterity to recover the simple standard from which he had erred.

Such we imagine to have been the origin of the irregular and ununiform bodies. Even in 1755, when **Smith** published his *Printer's Grammar*, the mischief was beyond recall. In no single instance were the standards given by him identical with those of 1683. Indeed, where each founder had two or three variations of each body in his own foundry it is impossible to speak of a standard at

all. Smith points out that, in the case of English and **Pica** alone, **Caslon** had four varieties of the former, and the Dutch two; while of the latter, Caslon had three, and **James** two. Nevertheless, he gives a scale of the bodies commonly in use in his day, which it will be interesting to compare with Moxon's on the one hand, and the standard of the English foundries in 1841 as given by Savage, on the other.

This list does not include Trafalgar, Emerald, and Ruby, which, however, were in use before 1841. The first named has disappeared in England, as also has Paragon. The *Printer's Grammar* of 1787 mentions a body in use at that time named "Primer," between **Great Primer** and English.

It is not our purpose to pursue this comparison further or more minutely; nor does it come within the scope of this work to enter into a technical examination of the various schemes which have been carried out abroad, and attempted in this country, to do away with the anomalies in type-bodies, and restore a uniform invariable standard. The above table will suffice as a brief historical note of the growth of these anomalies.

As early as 1725, in **France**, an attempt was made to regulate by a public decree, not only the standard height of a type, but the scale of bodies. But the system adopted was clumsy, and only added to the confusion it was designed to remove. Fournier, in 1737, invented his typographical points, the first successful attempt at a mathematical systematisation of **type-bodies**, which has since, with the alternative system of **Didot**, done much in simplifying French typography. England, Germany, and Holland have been more conservative, and therefore less fortunate. Attempts were made by **Fergusson** in 1824, and by Bower of Sheffield about 1840, and others, to arrive at a standard of uniformity; but their schemes were not warmly taken up, and failed.

Before proceeding to a brief historical notice of the different **English** type-bodies, we shall trouble the reader with a further table, compiled from specimen-books of the 18th century, showing what have been the names of



the corresponding bodies in the foundries of other nations,—premising, however, that these names must be taken as representing the approximate, rather than the actual, equivalent in each case.

A few notes on the origin of the names of English type-bodies will conclude our observations on this subject.

## Canon

The **Canon** of the Mass was, in the service-books of the Church, printed in a large letter, and it is generally supposed that, this size of letter being ordinarily employed in the large Missals, the type-body took its name accordingly: a supposition which is strengthened by its German name of Missal. Mores, however (who objects equally to the epithets of Great or French as unnecessary and delusive), considers this derivation to be incorrect, and quotes the authority of **Tory**, who uses the term Canon to apply to letter cut according to rule—*lettres de forme*—as distinguished from letters not so cut, which he terms *lettres bastardes*. So that the *lettre qu'on dict Canon* was originally a generic term, embracing all the regular bodies; and subsequently came to be confined to the largest size in that category. The theory is ingenious and interesting; but it seems more reasonable to lay greater stress on the actual meaning of a word than on its equivocal interpretation. In other countries two-line **Great Primer** was commonly called Canon, and our French Canon was called by the Dutch Parys Kanon; by which it would seem that both **England** and Holland originally received the body from the **French**. In modern letter-founding the name Canon applies only to the size of the face of a letter which is a three-line Pica cast on a four-line Pica body.

Passing the next four bodies, which with us are merely reduplications, we note that—

## Double pica

which at present is Double Small Pica, was in Moxon's day, what its name denotes, a two-line Pica. When the irregular Small Pica was introduced, **Double Pica** was the name given to the double of the interloper, the double of the Pica being styled two-line Pica. In **Germany**, Double Pica was called Text or Secunda—the former name probably denoting the use of this size in the text of Holy Writ, while the latter indicates that the body was one of a series, the Doppel Mittel, corresponding to our two-line English, being probably the Prima.

## Paragon

The double of Long Primer, though a body unnamed in **Moxon's** day, was a size of really old institution; it having been a favourite body with many of the earliest printers, and particularly affected by **Caxton** in this country. Its name points to a French origin; and, like most of the other fanciful names, proves that the appellation had reference in the first instance, not to the depth of its shank, but to the supposed beauty of the letter which was cut upon it. It was a body which did not take deep root in this country, and for the most part disappeared with the first quarter of the present century. It is noteworthy that Paragon and Nonpareil are the only bodies which have preserved their names in all the countries in which they have been adopted.

## Great primer

For this body, Mores claims an indisputable English origin. He considers it possible that it may date back to before the Reformation, and that it was the body on which were printed the large Primers of the early Church. This derivation would be more satisfactory were it found that these works, or the school primers of a later date, were, as a rule, printed in type of this size But this is not the case.

*Primers, Pyes, and Breviaries* occur printed in almost all the regular bodies. **Great Primer** was a favourite body with the old printers, and having been adopted by many of the first Bible printers, was sometimes called Bible Text. The French called it **Gros Romain**; and the “Great Romaine letter for the titles,” mentioned in Pynson’s indenture in 1519, may possibly refer to an already recognised type-body of this size. In Germany it was called **Tertia**, being the third of the regular bodies above the Mittel. In Holland, Italy, and Spain it was called Text.

## **English**

**English** is also a body which undoubtedly belongs to us. Until the end of last century the name served not only to denote a body, but the face of the English Black-letter; and many of the old founts used in the law books and Acts of Parliament were English both in body and face. As in **Germany**, where it is called Mittel, English was the middle size of the seven regular bodies in use among us: the Great Primer, **Double Pica**, and two-line English (the Tertia, Secunda, and Prima of the Germans) being on the ascending side, and Pica, Long Primer, and Brevier on the descending. The French call it St. Augustin, and the Spaniards Atanasia, apparently from its use in printing the works of these Christian Fathers. Although the middle body, its standard has been subject to much variation, particularly in France and Germany, where large and small English are two distinct bodies.

## **Pica**

This important body, now the standard body in English typography, presumably owes its name to its use in printing the ordinal of the services of the early Church, and is coeval with Great Primer. “The Pie,” says Mores, of which this is the Latin name, “was a table showing the course of the service in the Church in the times of darkness. It was called the Pie because it was written in letters of black and red; as the Friars de **Pica** were so

named from their party-coloured raiment, black and white, the plumage of a magpie.” “The number and hardness of the rules of this Pie” is referred to in the preface to our Prayer-book; and it will be remembered that **Caxton**’s famous advertisement related to “Pyes of Salisbury use.” But as a larger type-body than Pica was generally used to print these, it is possible the name may refer to nothing more than the piebald or black-and-white appearance of a printed page. Some authorities derive Pica from the Greek πίναξ, a writing tablet, and, hence, an index. The name was, in fact, applied to the alphabetical catalogue of the names and things in rolls and records. In France and Germany the body was called Cicero, on account of the frequent editions of Cicero’s Epistles printed in this size of letter. It was the Mediaan body of the Dutch.

### **Small Pica**

**Small Pica** as already stated, was an innovation in Moxon’s day, and was probably cast in the first instance to accommodate a foreign-cut letter, too small for pica and too large for long-primer. It subsequently came into very general use, one of the first important works in which it appeared being Chambers’s *Cyclopædia*, in 1728. The French called it Philosophie, and appear to have used it as a smaller body on which to cast the Cicero face. The Germans called it Brevier, the Dutch (it being one body below the Mediaan) called it Descendiaan, and the Italians, when they had it, followed the French, and called it Filosofia.

### **Long Primer**

Mores suggests, was another of the old English bodies employed in liturgical works. He explains the use of the word Long to mean that **Primers** in this size of type were printed either in long lines instead of double columns, or that the length of the page was disproportionate to the width, or more probably, that they contained the service

at full length a long, or without contraction. These *Primers*, however, are rarely to be met with in this body. The French named the body **Petit Romain**, preserving a similar relationship between it and their **Gros Romain**, as we did between our Long Primer and Great Primer. The other countries evidently attributed the body to **France**, and named it after Claude **Garamond**, the famous French letter-cutter, pupil of Tory, one of whose Greek founts, cut for the Royal Typography of Paris, was on this body. The Germans, however, also called the body *Corpus*, on account of their *Corpus Juris* being first printed in this size.

## **Bourgeois**

This irregular body betrays its nationality in its name, which, however, is probably derived, not from the fact that it was used by the bourgeois printers of France, but from the name of the city of Bourges, which was the birthplace of the illustrious typographer, Geofroy **Tory**, about the year 1485. Tory originally applied the term *bourgeoise* to the *lettre de somme*, irrespective of size, as distinguished from the *lettre Canon*. The French call the body Gaillarde, probably after the printer of that name, although it is equally possible the name, like Mignon or Nonpareille, may be fanciful. As a type-body, Bourgeois did not appear in **England** till about 1748, and **Smith** informs us that it was originally used as a large body on which to cast Brevier or Petit.

## **Brevier**

The smallest of the English regular bodies claims equal antiquity with **Great Primer**, Pica, and Long Primer. The conjecture that it was commonly used in the *Breviaries* of the early Church is not borne out by an examination of these works, most of which are printed in a considerably larger size. The name, like the French and German “Petit,” may mean that, being the smallest body, it was used for getting the most matter into a brief space. The

Germans, when they cut smaller-sized letters, called the Petit Jungfer, or the Maiden-letter.

### **Minion**

**Minion** a body unknown to Moxon, was used in England before 1730; and, like the other small fancifully named bodies, appears to have originated in France. The Dutch and Germans call it Colonel, and the Spaniards Glosilla.

### **Nonpareil**

**Nonpareil** now an indispensable body, because the half of Pica, was introduced as a peerless curiosity long before **Moxon's** day, and has preserved its name in all the countries where it has gone. It is said first to have been cut by **Garamond** about the year 1560. Mores supposes that, because the Dutch founders of Moxon's day called it "Englese Nonpareil" in their specimens, the body was first used in this country. The Dutch name, however, evidently refers to the face of the letter, cut in imitation of an English face, or adapted to suit English purchasers. Paulus Pater says that on account of its wonderful smallness and clearness, the Dutch Nonpareil was called by many the "silver letter," and was supposed to have been cast in that metal.

### **Pearl**

**Pearl** though an English body in Moxon's day, appears to have been known both in France and Holland at an earlier date. In the former country it was celebrated as the body on which the famous tiny editions at Sedan were printed. The Dutch Joly corresponded more nearly to our modern Ruby than to Pearl. But Luce, in 1740, cut the size for France, and provoked Firmin **Didot's** severe criticism on his performance—"Among the characters, generally bad, which Luce has engraved, . . . is one which cannot be seen."

## Diamond

**Diamond** was unknown in England until the close of last century, when Dr. Fry cut a fount which he claimed to be the smallest ever used, and to get in “more even than the famous Dutch Diamond.” This **Dutch** fount was of some antiquity, having been cut by Voskens about 1700. Previous to this, **Van Dijk** had cut a letter on a body below Pearl, called Robijn, a specimen of which appears on Daniel **Elzevir**’s sheet in 1681. M. Henri Didot, however, eclipsed all these minute-bodied founts by a Semi-nonpareil in 1827.

It now remains to trace briefly the origin and development of the leading type-faces used in English Typography.





## Roman

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To trace the history of the **Roman** character would almost require a *résumé* of the works of all the greatest printers in each country of Europe. It must suffice to point out very briefly the changes it underwent before and after reaching England.

### Italy

The **Italian** scribes of the fifteenth century were famous for their beautiful manuscripts, written in a hand entirely different from the Gothic of the Germans, or the Secretary of the French and **Netherlands** calligraphers. It was only natural that the first Italian printers, when they set up their press at Subiaco, should form their letters upon the best model of the national scribes. The *Cicero de Oratore* of 1465 is claimed by some as the first book printed in Roman type, although the character shows that the German artists who printed it had been unable wholly to shake off the traditions of the pointed Gothic school of typography in which they had learned their craft. The type of the *Lactantius*, and the improved type of the works subsequently printed by Sweynheim and Pannartz at Rome, as well as those of Ulric Hahn, were, in fact, Gothic-Romans; and it was not till **Nicholas Jenson**, a Frenchman, in 1470, printed his *Eusebii Præparatio* at Venice, that the true Roman appeared in Italy, which was destined to become the ruling character in European Typography. Fournier and others have considered that Jenson derived his Roman letter from a mixture of alphabets of various countries; but it is only necessary to compare the *Eusebius* with the Italian manuscripts of the period, to see that no such elaborate selection of models was necessary or likely. The claims of Italy in the matter of Roman type have of late years been somewhat seriously challenged by the researches of M. **Madden**, who in a

series of remarkable studies on the typographical labours of the Frères de la Vie Commune at Wiedenbach, near Cologne, contends that the Roman type known as the fount of the bizarre,” on account of the peculiar form of that capital letter, was used in that monastery in 1465; and that among the typographical fugitives from Mentz at that time dwelling in Cologne, there is little doubt that Jenson was here initiated into the art which he subsequently made famous. The close resemblance between the Roman of the Wiedenbach monks and that of the *Eusebius* is, M. Madden considers, clear evidence that the same hand had trained itself on the one for the marvellous perfection of the other. Jenson’s fount is on a body corresponding to English. The form is round and clear, and differing in fashion only from its future progeny. The capital alphabet consists of twenty-three letters (J, U, and W not being yet in use); the “lower-case” alphabet is the same, except that the “u” is substituted for the “v,” and in addition there is a long f, and the diphthongs æ and œ. To complete the fount, there are fifteen contractions, six double letters, and three points, the .: making seventy-three punches in all. Jenson’s Roman letter fell after his death into the hands of a “firm” of which Andrea Torresani was head. Aldus Manutius subsequently associated himself with Torresani, and, becoming his son-in-law and heir, eventually inherited his punches, matrices, and types. The Roman founts of Aldus were eclipsed by his Italic and Greek, but he cut several very fine alphabets. Renouard mentions eight distinct founts between 1494 and 1558.

## Germany

Whether the fount of the Wiedenbach monks was the progenitor of the Venetian Roman, or whether each can claim an independent origin, there seems little doubt that the fount of the bizarre” is entitled to rank as the first Roman letter in Germany. The accompanying facsimile from the *Sophologium* will give a good idea of the form and size of this most interesting fount, and will at the

same time show how slightly the form of the **Roman** alphabet has changed since its first introduction into Typography.

Roman type was adopted before 1473 by **Mentelin** of Strasburg, whose beautiful letter placed him in the front rank of German printers. Gunther Zainer, who settled at Augsburg in 1469, after printing some works in the **round Gothic**, also adopted, in 1472, the Roman of the Venetian School, founts of which he is said to have brought direct from Italy. The German name of Antiqua, applied to the Roman character, has generally been supposed to imply a reluctance to admit the claim of Italy to the credit of introducing this style of letter. As, however, the Italians themselves called the letter the "Lettera Antiqua tonda," the imputation against Germany is unfounded.

The French, Dutch, and English called it "Roman" from the first.

## **France**

The **French** received printing and the Roman character at the same time, the first work of the Sorbonne press in 1470 being in a handsome Roman letter about **Great Primer** in size, with a slight suggestion of Gothic in some of the characters. Gering, a German himself, and his associates, had learned their art at Basle; but cut, and probably designed, their own letter on the best available models. Their fount is rudely cast, so that several of their words appear only half-printed in the impression, and have been finished by hand. It has been stated erroneously, by several writers, on the authority of Chevillier, that their fount was without capitals. The fount is complete in that respect, and **Chevillier's** expression, "lettres capitales," as he himself explains, refers to the initial letters for which blank spaces were left to be filled in by hand. Besides the ordinary capital and "lower-case" alphabets, the fount abounds in abbreviations. This letter was used in all the works of the Sorbonne press, but when Gering left the Sorbonne and established himself at the "Soleil d'Or," in 1473, he made use of a Gothic letter. In

his later works, however, new and greatly improved founts of the Roman appear. Jodocus **Badius**, who by some is erroneously supposed to have been the first who brought the Roman letters from Italy to France, did not establish his famous “Prelum Ascensianum” in Paris till about 1500, when he printed in Roman types—not, however, before one or two other French printers had already distinguished themselves in the same direction.

## **Netherlands**

The Roman was introduced into the **Netherlands** by Johannes de Westfalia, who, it is said, brought it direct from Italy about the year 1472. He settled at Louvain, and after several works in semi-Gothic, published in 1483 an edition of *Æneas Silvius* in the Italian letter. His fount is elegant, and rather a lighter face than most of the early Roman founts of other countries. This printer appears to have been the only one in the Low Countries who used this type during the fifteenth century; nor was it till **Plantin**, in 1555, established his famous press at Antwerp, that the Roman attained to any degree of excellence. But Plantin, and after him the **Elzevirs**, were destined to eclipse all other artists in their execution of this letter, which in their hands became a model for the typography of all civilisation. It should be mentioned, however, that the Elzevirs are not supposed to have cut their own punches. The Roman types which they made famous, and which are known by their name, were cut by Christopher **Van Dijk**, the form of whose letter was subsequently adopted by the English printers.

## **Switzerland**

**Switzerland** early distinguished itself by the Roman letter of Amerbach of Basle, and still more so by the beautiful founts used by Froben of the same city, who between 1491 and 1527 printed some of the finest books then known in Europe. His Roman was very bold and regular. Christopher Froschouer of Zurich, about 1545, made use

of a peculiar and not unpicturesque form of the Roman letter, in which the round sorts were thickened, after the **Gothic** fashion, at their opposite corners, instead of at their opposite sides.

## England

The **Roman** did not make its appearance in **England** till 1518, when Richard Pynson printed Pace's *Oratio in Pace Nuperrimâ*, in a handsome letter, of which we show a facsimile at p. 93. This printer's Norman birth, and his close relationship with the typographers of Rouen, as well as his supposed intimacy with the famous Basle typographer Froben, make it highly probable that he procured his letter abroad, or modelled it on that of some of the celebrated foreign printers of his day. The fount is about **Great Primer** in body, and though generally neat and bold in appearance, displays considerable irregularity in the casting, and, like most of the early Roman founts, contains numerous contractions.

The **Roman** made its way rapidly in English typography during the first half of the sixteenth century, and in the hands of such artists as Faques, Rastell, Wyer, Berthelet, and Day, maintained an average excellence. But it rapidly degenerated, and while other countries were dazzling Europe by the brilliancy of their impressions, the English Roman letter went from good to bad, and from bad to worse. No type is more beautiful than a beautiful Roman; and with equal truth it may be said, no type is more unsightly than an ill-fashioned and ill-worked Roman. While Claude **Garamond** in **France** was carrying out into noble practice the theories of the form and proportion of letters set out by his master, Geofroy Tory; while the Estiennes at Paris, Sebastian Gryphe at Lyons, Froben at Basle, Froschouer at Zurich, and Christopher **Plantin** at Antwerp, were moulding and refining their alphabets into models which were to become {45} classical, English printers, manacled body and soul by their patents and monopolies and state persecutions, achieved nothing with the Roman type that was not retrograde. For a time a

struggle appears to have existed between the Black-letter and the Roman for the mastery of the English press, and at one period the curious spectacle was presented of mixed founts of the two. We present our readers with a specimen of English printing at a foreign press in this transition period, as illustrative not only of the compromise between the two rival characters, but of the average unappetising appearance of the typography {46} of the day. Always impressionable and unoriginal, our national Roman letter, in the midst of many admirable models, chose the Dutch for its pattern, and tried to imitate Plantin and Elzevir, but with very little of the spirit of those great artists. No English work of the time, printed in English Roman type, reproduces within measurable distance the elegant *embonpoint*, the harmony, the symmetry of the types of the famous Dutch printers. The seeker after the beautiful looks almost in vain for anything to satisfy his eye in the English Roman-printed works of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. A few exceptions there are; and when the English printers, giving up the attempt to cut Roman for themselves, went to Holland to buy it; or when, as in the case of Oxford and Thomas James, the English foundries became furnished with Dutch matrices, our country was able to produce a few books the appearance of which does not call forth a blush.

The first *English Bible* printed in Roman type was Bassendyne's edition in Edinburgh, in 1576. We have it on the authority of Watson that, from the earliest days of Scotch typography, a constant trade in type and labour was maintained between Holland and Scotland; and he exhibited in his specimen pages the Dutch Romans which at that day were the most approved letters in use in his country.

Utilitarian motives brought about one important departure from the first models of the Roman letter in the different countries where it flourished. The early printers were generous in their ideas, and cut their letters with a single eye to artistic beauty. But as printing gradually ceased to be an art, and became a trade, economical

considerations suggested a distortion or cramping of these beautiful models, with a view to “getting more in.” In some cases the variation was made gracefully and inoffensively. The slender or compressed Roman letters of the French, Italian, and in some cases the Dutch printers, though not comparable with the round ones, are yet regular and neat; but in other cases, ours among them, there was little of either delicacy or skill in the innovation. The early part of the seventeenth century witnessed the creation abroad of some very small Roman faces, foremost among which were those of the beautiful little Sedan editions of Jannon, which gave their name to the body of the microscopic letter {47} in which they were printed. **Van Dijk** cut a still smaller letter for the Dutch in Black-letter, and afterwards in Roman; and for many years the Dutch Diamond held the palm as the smallest fount in Europe. **England** followed the general tendency towards the minute, and though it is doubtful whether either Pearl or Diamond were cut by English founders before 1700, an English printer, Field, accomplished in 1653 the feat of printing a 32mo Bible in **Pearl**. Among English printers in the seventeenth century who did credit to their profession, Roycroft is conspicuous, especially for the handsome large Romans in which he printed Ogilby’s *Virgil*, and other works. Yet Roycroft’s handsomest letter—that in which he printed the Royal Dedication to the *Polyglot* of 1657—was the fount used nearly a century before by Day, whose productions few English printers of the seventeenth century could equal, and none, certainly, could excel. Of **Moxon**’s attempt in 1683 to regenerate the Roman letter in England, we shall have occasion to speak elsewhere. His theories, as put into practice by himself, were eminently unsuccessful; and though the sign-boards of the day may have profited by his rules, it is doubtful if typography did. His enthusiastic praise of the Dutch letter of Van Dijk may have stimulated the trade between England and Holland; but at home his precepts fell flat for lack of an artist to carry them out.

That artist was forthcoming in William **Caslon** in 1720, and from the time he cut his first fount of pica, the Roman

letter in **England** entered on a career of honour. Caslon went back to the **Elzevirs** for his models, and throwing into his labour the genius of an enlightened artistic taste, he reproduced their letters with a precision and uniformity hitherto unknown among us, preserving at the same time that freedom and grace of form which had made them of all others the most beautiful types in Europe. Caslon's Roman became the fashion, and English typography was loyal to it for nearly 80 years. Baskerville's exquisite letters were, as he himself acknowledged, inspired by those of Caslon. They were sharper and more delicate in outline, and when finely printed, as they always were, were more attractive to the eye. But what they gained in brilliance they missed in sterling dignity; they dazzled the eye and fatigued it, and the fashion of the {48} national taste was not seriously diverted. Still less was it diverted by the experiments of a "nouvelle typographie," which Luce, Fournier, and others were trying to introduce into France. The stiff, narrow, cramped Roman which these artists produced scarcely finds a place in any English work of the eighteenth century. The **Dutch type** was now no longer looked at. Wilson, whose letter adorned the works of the Foulis press, and Jackson, whose exquisite founts helped to make the fame of Bensley, as those of his successor Figgins helped to continue it, all adhered to the Caslon models. And all these artists, with Cottrell, Fry, and others, contributed to a scarcely less important reform in English letter-founding, namely, the production by each founder of his own uniform series of Roman sizes,—a feature woefully absent in the odd collections of the old founders before 1720. Towards the close of the century the Roman underwent a violent revolution. The few founders who had begun about 1760 in avowed imitation of Baskerville, had found it in their interest before 1780 to revert to the models of Caslon; and scarcely had they done so, when about 1790 the genius of **Didot** of Paris and Bodoni of Parma took the English press by storm, and brought about that complete abandonment of the Caslon-**Elzevir** models which marked, and in some cases



disfigured, the last years of the eighteenth century. The famous presses of Bensley and Bulmer introduced the modern Roman under the most favourable auspices. The new letter was honest, businesslike, and trim; but in its stiff angles, its rigid geometrical precision, long hair-seriffs, and sharp contrasts of shade, there is little place for the luxuriant elegance of the old style. In **France**, the new fashion, even with so able an exponent as Didot, had a competitor in the Baskerville type, which, rejected by us, was welcomed by the French *litterati*. Nor was this the only instance in which the fashion went from **England** to France, for in 1818 the Imprimerie Royale itself, in want of a new *typographie* of the then fashionable Roman, came to London for the punches.

The typographical taste of the first quarter of the present century suffered a distinct vulgarisation in the unsightly heavy-faced Roman letters, which were not only offered by the founders, but extensively used by the printers; and the date at which we quit this brief survey is not a glorious one. The simple uniformity of faces which characterised the specimens of Caslon and his disciples had been corrupted by new fancies and fashions, demanded by the printer and conceded by the founder,—fashions which, as Mr. Hansard {49} neatly observed in 1825, “have left the specimen of a British letter-founder a heterogeneous compound, made up of fat-faces and lean-faces, wide-set and close-set, proportioned and disproportioned, all at once crying “*Quousque tandem abutère patientia nostra?*”

Some of the coarsest of the new fashions were happily short-lived; and it is worth transgressing our limit to record the fact that in 1844 the beautiful old-face of Caslon was, in response to a demand from outside, revived, and has since, in rejuvenated forms, regained both at home and abroad much of its old popularity.

It will not be out of place to add a word, before leaving the Roman, in reference to letter-founders’ specimens. When printers were their own founders, the productions of their presses were naturally also the published specimens of their type. They might, like Schoeffer, in the

colophon to the *Justinian* in 1468, call attention to their skill in cutting types; or, like Caxton, print a special advertisement in a special type; or, like Aldus, put forward a specimen of the types of a forthcoming work. But none of these are letter-founders' specimens; nor was it till letter-founding became a distinct trade that such documents became necessary. **England** was probably behind other nations when, in 1665, the tiny specimen of Nicholas Nicholls was laid under the Royal notice. It is doubtful whether any founder before **Moxon** issued a full specimen of his types. He used the sheet as a means of advertising not only his types, but his trade as a mathematical instrument maker; and his specimen, taken in connection with his rules for the formation of letters, is a sorry performance, and not comparable to the Oxford University specimen, which that press published in 1693, exhibiting the gifts of Dr. Fell and Junius. Of the other English founders before 1720, no type specimen has come down to us; that shown by Watson in his *History of the Art of Printing* being merely a specimen of bought **Dutch types**. **Caslon's** sheet, in 1734, marked a new departure. It displayed at a glance the entire contents of the new foundry; and by printing the same passage in each size of Roman, gave the printer an opportunity of judging how one body compared with another for capacity. Caslon was the first to adopt the since familiar "Quousque tandem" for his Roman specimens. The Latin certainly tends to show off the Roman letter to best advantage; but it gives an inadequate idea of its appearance in any other tongue. "The Latin language," says Dibdin, "presents to the eye a great uniformity or evenness of effect. The *m* and *n*, like the solid sirloin upon our table, have a substantial appearance; no garnishing with useless herbs . . . to disguise its real character. Now, in our own tongue, by the side of the *m* or *n*, or at no great distance from it, comes a crooked, long-tailed *g*, or a *th*, or some gawkishly ascending or descending letter of meagre form, which are the very flankings, herbs, or dressings of the aforesaid typographical dish, *m* or *n*. In short, the number of

ascending or descending letters in our own language—the *p*'s, *l*'s, *th*'s, and sundry others of perpetual recurrence—render the effect of printing much less uniform and beautiful than in the Latin language. Caslon, therefore, and Messrs. Fry and Co. after him,”—and he might have added all the other founders of the eighteenth century,—“should have presented their specimens of printing-types in the *English* language; and then, as no disappointment could have ensued, so no imputation of deception would have attached.” Several founders followed Caslon's example by issuing their specimens on a broadside sheet, which could be hung up in a printing-office, or inset in a cyclopædia. Baskerville appears to have issued only specimens of this kind; but Caslon, Cottrell, Wilson and Fry, who all began with sheets, found it necessary to adopt the book form. These books were generally executed by a well-known printer, and are examples not only of good types, but of fine printing. Bodoni's splendid specimens roused the emulation of our founders, and the small octavo volumes of the eighteenth century gave place at the commencement of the nineteenth to quarto, often elaborately, sometimes sumptuously got up. Mr. Figgins was the first to break through the traditional “Quousque tandem,” by adding, side by side with the Latin extract, a passage in the same-sized letter in English. But it has not been till comparatively recent years that the venerable Ciceronian denunciation has finally disappeared from English letter-founders' specimens.



## Italic

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The **italic** letter, which is now an accessory of the Roman, claims an origin wholly independent of that character. It is said to be an imitation of the handwriting of Petrarch, and was introduced by Aldus **Manutius** of Venice, for the purpose of printing his projected small editions of the classics, which, either in the Roman or Gothic character, would have required bulky volumes. **Chevillier** informs us that a further object was to prevent the excessive number of contractions then in use, a feature which rendered the typography of the day often unintelligible, and always unsightly. The execution of the Aldine Italic was entrusted to Francesco da Bologna, who, says Renouard, had already designed and cut the other characters of Aldus' press. The fount is a "lower-case" only, the capitals being Roman in form. It contains a large number of tied letters, to imitate handwriting, but is quite free from contractions and ligatures. It was first used in the *Virgil* of 1501, and rapidly became famous throughout Europe. Aldus produced six different sizes between 1501–58. It was counterfeited almost immediately in Lyons and elsewhere. The Junta press at Florence produced editions scarcely distinguishable from those of Venice. Simon de Colines cut an Italic bolder and larger than that of Aldus, and introduced the character into **France** about 1521, prior to which date Froben of Basel had already made use of it at his famous press. **Plantin** used a large Italic in his *Polyglot*, but, like many other Italics of the period, it was defaced by a strange irregularity in the slopes of the letters. The character was originally called Venetian or Aldine, but subsequently took the name of Italic in all the countries into which it travelled, except Germany, which, acting with the same independence as had been displayed towards the Roman, called it "Cursiv." The Italians also adopted the Latin name, "Characteres cursivos seu cancellarios."

The Italic was at first intended and used for the entire text of a classical work. Subsequently, as it became more general, it was used to distinguish portions of a book not properly belonging to the work, such as introductions, prefaces, indexes, and notes; the text itself being in Roman. Later, it was used in the text for quotations; and finally served the double part of emphasising certain words in some works, and in others, chiefly the translations of the Bible, of marking words not rightly forming a part of the text.

In **England** it was first used by De Worde, in *Wakefield's Oratio*, in 1524. Day, about 1567, carried it to a high state of perfection; so much so, that his Italic remained in use for several generations. Vautrollier, also, in his *New Testaments*, made use of a beautiful small Italic, which, however, was probably of foreign cut. Like the Roman, the Italic suffered debasement during the century which followed Day, and the Dutch models were generally preferred by English printers. These were carried down to a minute size, the "Robijn Italic" of Christopher **Van Dijk** being in its day the smallest in Europe.

It is not easy to fix the period at which the **Roman** and Italic became united and interdependent. Very few English works occur printed wholly in Italic, and there seems little doubt that before the close of the sixteenth century the founders cast Roman and Italic together as one fount. The Italic has undergone fewer marked changes than the Roman. Indeed, in many of the early foundries, and till a later date, one face of Italic served for two or more Romans of the same body. We find the same Italic side by side with a broad-faced Roman in one book, and a lean-faced in another. Frequently the same face is made to serve not only for its correct body, but for the bodies next above or below it, so that we may find an Italic of the Brevier face cast respectively on Brevier, **Bourgeois**, and **Minion** bodies. These irregularities were the more noticeable from the constant admixture in seventeenth and eighteenth century books of Roman and Italic in the same lines; the latter being commonly used

for all proper names, as well as for emphatic words. The chief variations in form have been in the capital letters, and the long-tailed letters of the lower-case. The tendency to flourish these gradually diminished on the cessation of the Dutch influence, and led the way to the formal, tidy Italics of Caslon and the founders of the eighteenth century, some of whom, however, consoled themselves for their loss of liberty in regard to most of their letters, by more or less extravagance in the tail of the which commenced the *Quousque tandem* of their specimens. As in the case of the Roman, Caslon cut a uniform series of Italics, having due relation, in the case of each body, to the size and proportions of the corresponding Roman. The extensive, and sometimes indiscriminate, use of Italic gradually corrected itself during the eighteenth century; and on the abandonment, both in Roman and Italic, of the long *f* and its combinations, English books were left less disfigured than they used to be.





## Black letter

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The **Gothic** letter employed by the inventors of printing for the *Bible*, *Psalter*, and other sacred works, was an imitation of the formal hand of the German scribes, chiefly monastic, who supplied the clergy of the day with their books of devotion. This letter, as a typographical character, took the name of **LETTREDEFORME**, as distinguished from the rounder and less regular manuscript-hand of the Germans of the fifteenth century, which was adopted by Schoeffer in the *Rationale*, the *Catholicon*, and other works, and which became known as **LETTREDESOMME**. The pointed Gothic, or **LETTREDEFORME**, a name generally supposed to have reference to the precision in the figure of the old ecclesiastical character (although some authorities have considered it to be a corrupt, rather than a standard form of handwriting), preserved its character with but little variation in all the countries to which it travelled. It is scarcely necessary to detail its first appearance at the various great centres of European typography, except to notice that in **Italy** and France it came later than the Roman. In **England** it appears first in **Caxton's** type No. 3, and figures largely in nearly all the presses of our early printers. De Worde was, in all probability, the first to cut punches of it in this country, and to produce the letter which henceforth took the name of "English," as being the national character of our early typography. De Worde's English, or as it was subsequently styled, Black-letter, was for two centuries and a half looked upon as the model for all his successors in the art; indeed, to this day, a Black-letter is held to be excellent, as it resembles most closely the character used by our earliest printers. The Black being employed in England to a late date, not only for Bibles, but for law books and royal proclamations and Acts of Parliament, has never wholly fallen into disuse among us. The most beautiful typography of which we as

a nation can boast during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, is to be found in the Black-letter impressions of our printers. The Old English was classed with the Roman and Italic by Moxon as one of the three orders of printing-letter; and in this particular our obligations to the Dutch are much less apparent than in any other branch of the printing art. Indeed, the English Black assumed characteristics of its own which distinguished it from the **LETTREFLAMAND** of the Dutch on the one hand, and the **FRACTUR** of the Germans on the other. It has occasionally suffered compression in form, and very occasionally expansion; but till 1800 its form was not seriously tampered with. **Caslon** was praised for his faithful reproduction of the genuine Old English; other founders, like Baskerville, did not even attempt the letter; the old Blacks were looked upon as the most useful and interesting portion of **James's** foundry at its sale; and the Roxburgh Club, those Black-letter heroes of the early years of this century, dismissed all the new-fangled founts of modern founders in favour of the most venerable relics of the early English typographers. Of these newfangled Blacks, it will suffice to recall Dibdin's outburst of righteous indignation—"Why does he (*i.e.*, Mr. Whittingham), and many other hardly less distinguished printers, adopt that frightful, gouty, disproportionate, eye-distracting and taste-revolting form of Black-letter, too frequently visible on the frontispieces of his books? It is contrary to all classical precedent, and outrageously repulsive in itself. Let the ghost of Wynkin de Worde haunt him till he abandon it!"

The **LETTREDESOMME** of the Germans, which, as we have seen, was adopted by Schoeffer in 1459, became in the hands of the fifteenth century printers a rival to the **Gothic**. Whether, as some state, it was derived from the Gothic, or was a distinct hand used by the lay scribes, we need not here discuss. Its name has been generally supposed to owe its origin to the fact that among the earliest works printed in this character was the *Summa fratris S. Thomas de Aquino*. Others derive the name from the carelessly formed letters used in books of

account. This letter developed in considerable variety among the early presses of the fifteenth century. Its main characteristics being that of a **round Gothic**, or at least of a Gothic shorn of its angles, it lent itself readily to the influence of the Roman, and we find it, as in the case of the first Italian books, merging into that character; while in the case of many of the German and **Netherlands** presses we find it occasionally absorbing that character, adopting its form frequently in the capitals, and “Gothicising” it in the lower-case. But to arrive at an accurate idea of the changes and varieties of the **LETTREDESOMME**, it is necessary to study carefully the productions of the various presses and schools of typography in which it was used. In **England** it appeared, as might be expected, in some of the early works of the first Oxford press, whither it was brought from Cologne. But it never took root in the country, and was speedily rejected for the national Gothic, only to reappear as an exotic or a curiosity.



## Secretary

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The **Secretary**, or Gros-Bâtarde was the manuscript-hand employed by the English and Burgundian scribes in the fifteenth century. It was, therefore, only natural that Caxton, like his typographical tutor, Colard Mansion of Bruges, should adopt this character for his earliest works, in preference to the less familiar Gothic, Semi-Gothic, or Roman letter. The French possessed a similar character, which, according to Fournier, was first cut by a German named Heilman, resident in Paris about 1490. But several years before 1490 the Gros-Bâtarde was in use in **France**; in some cases the resemblance between the French and English types being remarkable. The Rouen printers, who executed some of the great law books for the London printers early in the sixteenth century, used a particularly neat small-sized letter of this character. Like the Semi-Gothic, the Secretary, after figuring in several of the early London and provincial presses, yielded to the English Black-letter, and after about 1534 did not reappear in English typography. It developed, however, several curious variations; the chief of which were what Rowe Mores describes as the **SET-COURT**, the **BASESECRETARY**, and the **RUNNINGSECRETARY**. Of the first named, **James**'s foundry in 1778 possessed two founts, come down from Grover's; but as the old deformed Norman law hand which they represented was abolished by law in 1733, the matrices, which at no time appear to have been much used, became valueless. The name **COURTHAND** has since been appropriated for one of the modern scripts. Its place was taken in law work by the **ENGROSSING** hand, which Mores denominates as Base Secretary. Of this character, the only fount in England appears to have been that cut by Cottrell about 1760. The **RUNNINGSECRETARY** was another law hand, described by Mores as the law Cursive of Queen Elizabeth's reign. It was similar to the French Cursive, of

which Nicolas Granjon in 1556 cut the first punches at Lyons. Granjon's letter at first was called after its author, but subsequently became known as **LETTREDECIVILITÉ**, on account of its use, so Fournier informs us, in a work entitled *la Civilité puerile et honnête*, to teach children how to write. **Plantin** possessed a similar character in more than one size, which he made use of in dedications and other prefatory matter. The English fount in Grover's foundry appears to have been the only one in this country.

## Script

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The **Script** by which is meant the conventional copy-book writing hand, as distinguished from the **Italic** on the one hand and the law hand on the other, is another form of the Bâtarde, and is supposed to have originated with Pierre Moreau of Paris, whose widow in 1648 published a very curious *Virgil*, the first volume of which is printed in this character, in four or five sizes. The Dutch founders copied it, and the curious founts in Grover's foundry were probably most of them of Dutch origin. About 1760 Cottrell and Jackson both cut improved founts of this character. The Script, which the French have called **LETTRECOULÉE** and **LETTREDEFINANCE**, and the Germans **GESCHREVENSCRIPT**, has undergone a good many changes, especially during the present century. M. **Didot** in 1815 introduced a series of ligatures, or connectors, which had the effect of making the letters in each word join continuously; and at the same time cast his letters on an inclined body, so as to fit closely together, and be self-supporting. His system, however, involved a large number of combination-letters and ligatures, which rendered it generally impracticable; and it was eventually replaced by a square-bodied Script, contrived to unite all the advantages, and obviate all the disadvantages, of his ingenious system.





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