



Incendiary texts: book burning in England, c.1640 – c.1660

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Books have souls as well as men, which survives their martyrdom, and are not burnt, but crowned by the flames that encircle them.

[Quoted in *Notes & Queries*, 1st series, 8 (1853), p. 626]

Manuscripts don't burn.

[Mikhail Bulgakov, *The Master and Margarita* (1938; trans. Michael Glenny, Harvill Press, 1996), p. 326]

1. On Monday, 11 March 1650 Jacob Bothumley, a Leicester shoemaker who had risen to the rank of Quartermaster in the parliamentary army, was tried by a court martial at Whitehall upon several articles of blasphemy contained in his book *The Light and Dark sides of God* (printed for William Larner, at the Black-more in Bishopsgate-street, 1650). Bothumley was condemned to have his tongue bored through with a red hot iron and his sword broken over his head, to be cashiered from the army and to have his book burned before his face in the Palace Yard, Westminster and at the Exchange, London. Sentence was executed on Thursday, 14 March 1650. Copies of his book were also sent to Leicester and Hertford – where he had probably preached – to be burned.^[1] This attempt by military authorities to prevent Bothumley from spreading his opinions through the spoken and written word was partially successful, for although he was to dispute with Quakers his only other publication was *A brief Historical Relation of the most Material Passages and Persecutions of the Church of Christ* (printed for William Redmayne at the Crown upon Addle Hill, 1676). Dedicated to the Mayor and Aldermen of Leicester, this 'little Treatise' compiled from the first, second and third books of John Foxe's *Actes and Monuments* was intended to show the sufferings of those in former ages 'whom God hath called out and made eminent, in the witnessing of his truth'.^[2] The last person burned at the stake for heresy in England had been Edward Wightman at Lichfield on 11 April 1612.^[3] Though heretics were no longer incinerated, had Bothumley been convicted of blasphemy before two Justices of the Peace and refused to recant he could have suffered death under the provisions of an ordinance of May 1648.^[4] That he was not martyred by fire distinguished him from the German Behmenists Konrad Nordermann and Quirinus Kuhlmann, who were burned as heretics in Moscow on 4 October 1689.^[5]
2. According to the Hebrew Bible in the fourth year of the reign of King Jehoiakim of Judah the prophet Jeremiah dictated the words of the Lord to Baruch, who wrote them in ink upon a roll of a book. The following year three or four leaves were read in the presence of the king and princes, whereupon Jehoiakim cut the roll with a knife and 'cast it into the fire that was on the hearth' (Jeremiah 36:1-26). Far more destructive was the Seleucid monarch Antiochus IV, who in 168 B.C.E. ordered Jewish 'books of the law' found in Jerusalem to be 'rent in pieces' and burned (1 Maccabees 1:56). These accounts of deliberate book burning find echoes in classical Greece, ancient China and ancient Rome. Thus the philosopher Protagoras' writings were supposedly burned in fifth-century Athens, the emperor Ch'in Shih-huang commanded the burning of Confucian books in 213 B.C.E.,^[6] and the senator Aulus Cremutius Cordus' *History* was burned by the aediles in 25 C.E. Cordus committed suicide but his work survived, prompting Tacitus to deride 'the stupidity of people who believe that today's authority can destroy tomorrow's memories'.^[7] Yet ancient texts have sometimes been lost to posterity because of fire. Augustus reportedly burned more than two thousand copies of Greek and Latin prophetic verse. At Ephesus many Christian converts were said to have burned their magical books (Acts 19:19). Diocletian allegedly decreed c.295 that forbidden books by the ancient Egyptians concerning alchemy were to be thrown to the flames, while only fragments survive of the Neoplatonist Porphyry's *Against the Christians* which was condemned to be burned by the Church in 448.^[8] There are also traditions of three infernos, either accidental or intentional, that engulfed the two great Alexandrian libraries.^[9] In an age before printing, irreplaceable texts written on papyrus or parchment perished more readily by fire – possibly at temperatures exceeding Fahrenheit 451 – than those inscribed on brick, stone or copper.
3. Exercising censorship through book burning – even if not always successful – continued to be an aspect of European ecclesiastical and civil policy for several centuries. In 1239 Pope Gregory IX sent letters to

the kings, archbishops and bishops of France, England, Navarre, Castile, Leon and Portugal instructing them to confiscate the Talmud and other Jewish books because 'the outstanding reason that Jews remain obstinate in their perfidy is the influence of their books'. With the encouragement of Louis IX of France twenty-four cartloads of Talmudic literature were burned at Paris in June 1242.^[10] Thereafter the Talmud was burned in 1248 at the instigation of Pope Innocent IV, prohibited by Philip III of France (*d.* 1285), burned with other Jewish books at Paris in December 1309, burned at Toulouse in November 1319, confiscated on the orders of Pope John XXII and burned at Pamiers and Paris in 1321.^[11] A number of Hebrew Bibles and other Jewish books were also burned in 1490 at the behest of the Spanish Inquisition, while about 5000 Arabic manuscripts were consumed by flames in the public square at Granada in 1499 on the orders of Ximénez de Cisneros, Archbishop of Toledo.^[12] Moreover, following an order of the Roman Inquisition in 1553 the Talmud and other works were burned in the Papal States and Venetian territory with an estimated loss of possibly hundreds of thousands of books. In 1568 the Venetian government confiscated and burned thousands more Hebrew books.^[13] Yet it was not only texts by Jews and Muslims that were consigned to the fire but writings by Christians as well.

4. Martin Luther was burned in effigy at Rome in 1519 and his books subsequently met the same fate at Cologne, Cottbus, Halberstadt, Louvain, Mainz, Meissen and Merseburg. He retaliated by having his supporters burn the works of his opponents Johann Eck, Hieronymus Emser and Johann Tetzel. Luther himself cast the papal bull of excommunication into a pyre at Wittenberg on 10 December 1520.^[14] Nevertheless, as in German cities so in London an unknown quantity of Luther's books were burned at Paul's Cross on 12 May 1521 and 'great baskets full' at St. Paul's cathedral on 11 February 1526.^[15] Nor were these isolated incidents. William Tyndale's English translation of the New Testament was burned at Cheapside Cross on 19 November 1530 and his body at Antwerp in October 1536.^[16] Books and manuscripts held in the library of Münster cathedral were burned by Anabaptists in March 1534.^[17] Volumes listed in the Index of Prohibited Books were confiscated by the Roman Inquisition and burned at Venice in July 1548.^[18] The Spanish heretic Michael Servetus was burned in effigy together with most of his treatise *Christianismi restitutio* at Vienne on 17 June 1553; Servetus himself was burned at Geneva on 27 October 1553.^[19] The Protestant martyrs William Wolsey and Robert Pygot were burned at Ely with 'a great sheet knit full of books' in 1555.^[20] Similarly, when the Protestant cleric John Hullier was executed the next year on Jesus Green, Cambridge, 'a company of books' were cast into the fire.^[21] In February 1557, having been posthumously condemned of heresy, the bodies of the theologians Paul Fagius and Martin Bucer were exhumed. Their coffins were fastened onto a stake in the market-place at Cambridge and burned with 'a great sorte of bookes' that had been condemned with them.^[22]

5. During Elizabeth's reign iconoclastic assaults on symbols of Catholic identity resulted in breviaries, missals, primers and psalters along with rood-lofts, relics and vestments being 'committed to the fire'.^[23] Protestant heretics were likewise targeted. Two Dutch Anabaptists were burned at Smithfield in July 1575, while a proclamation dated 3 October 1580 ordered the books of Henrick Niclaes and other writings of the Family of Love to be destroyed and burned.^[24] In the same vein, a proclamation issued on 30 June 1583 called for the burning or defacing of 'sundry seditious, schismatical and erroneous printed books' authored by the separatists Robert Browne and Robert Harrison. Two of their followers, John Copping and Elias Thacker, were subsequently executed by hanging at Bury St. Edmunds in July at which time forty copies of the offending books were burned.^[25] In 1595 five continental Catholic works were ordered to be burned at Stationers' Hall by John Whitgift, Archbishop of Canterbury.^[26] Four years later Whitgift and Richard Bancroft, Bishop of London issued an order to the master and wardens of the Stationers' Company prohibiting further publication of several epigrams and satires as well as unlicensed plays and unapproved English histories. These included: Sir John Davies's *Epigrammes and Elegies* (Middelburg, no date); Edward Guilpin's *Skialatheia. Or, A Shadowe of Truth, in certain epigrams and satyres* (1598); Joseph Hall's *Virgidemiarum sixe bookes* (1598); John Marston's *The metamorphosis of Pigmaliions image and certaine satyres* (1598); Marston's *The scourge of villanie* (1599); Thomas Middleton's *Micro-cynicon. Sixe snarling satyres* (1599); all of Thomas Nashe's books; Robert Tofte's *Of Marriage and Wiuing*; an anonymous English version of *The xv ioyes of marriage* and Christopher Marlow's translation of *Certaine of Ovids Elegies* (Middelburg, no date). Copies of these titles – with the notable exception of Hall's *Virgidemiarum* and possibly also Nashe's works – were burned at Stationers' Hall on 4 June 1599.^[27] That same month about 1,500 impressions of the second edition of John Hayward's *The First Part of the Life and Raigne of King Henrie IIII* (1599) were burned at Fulham Palace, the Bishop of London's residence. Regarded by the Queen as guilty of treason for encouraging the earl of Essex's political ambitions, Hayward was imprisoned in the Tower and only released following Elizabeth's death.^[28]

6. Books and manuscripts continued to perish by fire throughout the early Stuart period, though it is significant how few were burned. Indeed, only about fifteen identified titles were consigned to the flames by royal, civil or ecclesiastical authority during the reign of James I. Among them was the third edition of Edwin Sandys's *A Relation of the State of Religion* (1605), burned on 3 November 1605 at St. Paul's churchyard by order of the court of High Commission.^[29] By contrast John Cowell's law dictionary *The Interpreter* (Cambridge, 1607), a 'very unadvised' and 'undiscreet' book, was suppressed by royal

proclamation on 25 March 1610 and its author summoned before the king.^[30] Even so, the House of Commons resolved some months later that the Speaker burn certain scandalous 'pacquets' found at Parliament's door.^[31] Moreover, in 1611 the Arminian Conrad Vorstius's *Tractatus Theologicus* (1610) was burned in St. Paul's churchyard and at Oxford and Cambridge University because James I considered it full of 'monstrous blasphemie and horrible Atheisme'.^[32] Another foreign publication meeting with royal displeasure was the Jesuit Franciscus Suárez's *Defensio fidei Catholicae* (Coimbra, 1613), burned at Paul's Cross on 21 November 1613.^[33] Likewise, Richard Mockett's collection *Doctrina, et politia ecclesiae Anglicanae* (1617) offended James I and was consequently condemned and its 'Errors' expiated by public burning – earning its author a reputation as 'the roasted Warden' of All Souls, Oxford.^[34] Henry Dod's 'ridiculous' translation of the Psalms was also according to the poet George Wither, 'by authority worthily condemned to the fire' about 1620.^[35] The German Protestant theologian David Pareus's commentary on the thirteenth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans was burned at Paul's Cross, Oxford and Cambridge in June 1622.^[36] More than 800 copies of the puritan minister Edward Elton's posthumously published *Gods Holy Mind* (1625) and his *A Plaine and easie exposition vpon the Lords Prayer* (1624) were burned together with 'a litle book' by another puritan minister Stephen Denison at Paul's Cross on 13 February 1625. In the licenser's eyes this 'purging by fire' of Sabbatarian 'errors' was the 'greatest holocaust' of its kind within living memory.^[37]

7. Infrequent if sometimes spectacular book burnings were also a feature of the first fifteen years of Charles I's reign when roughly fifteen known titles were incinerated. These included Roger Maynwaring's two sermons on *Religion and Alegiance* (1627) preached before the king and printed by his special command, which on 14 June 1628 the House of Lords ordered burned at London, Oxford and Cambridge.^[38] An octavo edition of the King James Bible issued in 1631 was burned and the printers fined £300 because they omitted 'not' from the seventh commandment.^[39] The prophetess Lady Eleanor Davies had her books burned by Archbishop Laud during her appearance before the court of High Commission on 23 October 1633.^[40] William Prynne's treatise against stage plays *Histrion-Mastix* (1633) was burned on 7 and 10 May 1634. Having been condemned in the court of Star Chamber, the author was set in the pillory at the Palace Yard, Westminster and then Cheapside with 'a paper on his head declaring the nature of his offence'. On each occasion one of his ears was partially cut off and copies of his huge volume burned by the hangman – a novelty suggested by continental precedent to reflect the text's 'strangeness and heinousness'. So intense was the smoke that apparently Prynne was almost asphyxiated.^[41] Prynne's associate the physician and pamphleteer John Bastwick also had an edition of his refutation of Popery *Elenchus religionis Papisticae* ordered burned by the court of High Commission on 12 February 1635. In addition, Bastwick was excommunicated, fined and imprisoned.^[42]

Figure 1. Eustache Le Sueur, 'La Prédication de saint Paul à Ephèse' (1649). Louvre, Paris. Inv. 8020

Figure 2. Burning of magical books at Ephesus (Acts 19:19). Unknown illustrator. Woodcut from Tommaso Agostino Ricchini, *Index librorum prohibitorum* (1758)
[<http://www.pitts.emory.edu/woodcuts/1758Inde/00002561.jpg>]

Figure 3. Detail from 'St Dominic and the Albigenses' (c.1495) by the Spanish painter Pedro Berruguete showing the burning of heretical Albigensian books in the early thirteenth century. Tempera and oil on wood. Prado Museum, Madrid
[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Image:Santo_Domingo_y_los_albigenses-detalle.jpg]

Figure 4. Suns & Book Burning. Image from Hartmann Schedel, 'Nuremberg Chronicle' (1493), XCIIv. Copy in the possession of Beloit College
[<http://www.beloit.edu/~nurember/book/images/Miscellaneous/big/Suns%20&%20Book%20Burning%20XCIIv.jpg>]

Figure 5. A 'roundel' window made in the Netherlands (1510–30), using silver stain and vitreous paint. Installed in the 'Late Gothic Hall', The Cloisters, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
[http://faculty.goucher.edu/eng211/pillaging_and_bookburning.htm]

Figure 6. 'Martin Luther burning the Papal Bull at Wittenberg' (1853) by Carl Friedrich Lessing
[http://www.allposters.com/~sp/Martin-Luther-Burning-the-Papal-Bull-Posters_i1589160_.htm]

Figure 7. Image depicting the burning of Martin Bucer's and Paul Fagius's bones and books at Cambridge on 6 February 1557. Woodcut from John Foxe, *Actes and Monuments of these latter and perilous days* (1563), facing p. 1548

Figure 8. Burning of the so-called Book of Sports in London on 10 May 1643. One of the locations was where Cheapside Cross had been pulled down eight days before. Engraving from John Vicars, *A Sight of ye Trans-actions of these latter yeares Emblemized* (1646), p. 21

8. The literature on book burning begins shortly after the French Revolution with an essay by Isaac D'Israeli published in *Curiosities of Literature* (1791). During the nineteenth century the theme was taken

up by the correspondents of *Notes & Queries*, as well as in two works cataloguing the phenomenon and a volume that denounced the barbarity of censorship by fire.^[43] This notion of the struggle for the freedom of the press likewise characterized treatments of the subject written during the first half of the twentieth century.^[44] Since then there have been studies of Lutheran books burned in England during the 1520s and, more recently, Cyndia Clegg's reconsideration of the practice of Elizabethan and Jacobean press censorship by re-contextualizing government documents and examining the rhetorical strategies of censored texts.^[45] Furthermore, David Cressy has discussed book burning in Tudor and Stuart England from 1521 to 1642. He argues that it developed from 'a rare to an occasional occurrence', suggesting through attention to 'participation, spectacle, and dialogue' that it was both 'medium and message', indeed that 'the public rituals of censorship formed part of the communications repertoire of the early modern state'.^[46] Intimately connected with these debates is the role of censorship between the calling of the Long Parliament and the Restoration.

9. In Christopher Hill's view 'censorship collapsed' in November 1640. On 5 July 1641 the secular court of Star Chamber and the ecclesiastical court of High Commission were abolished by act of Parliament. Few mourned the passing of these prerogative courts. With the removal of Star Chamber the Stationers' Company monopoly 'broke down', while the end of ecclesiastical control was 'the most significant event in the history of seventeenth-century English literature'. The ensuing months and years brought rebellion in Ireland, Civil Wars in Britain, regicide and republican rule, a period terminated with the de facto restoration of the monarchy in May 1660. According to Hill these turbulent times were an age of 'freedom', 'brief years of extensive liberty of the press' when relatively cheap and portable printing equipment may have made it easier than ever before – or since – for radical ideas to see the light of day. Nonetheless, he added the caveat that though 'intermittent and rarely effective' during the 1640s, censorship was 'gradually restored' during the 1650s only to break down again in 1659.^[47] There would appear to be plenty of evidence, some of it provided by Hill, to substantiate these claims. Among the works written before 1640 but not published in England – sometimes posthumously – until after the calling of the Long Parliament but before the Restoration are, court memoirs and domestic histories by Sir George Buck, Sir Robert Naunton, Francis Osborne, Michael Sparke, Sir Anthony Weldon and Arthur Wilson; a foreign history by Gregory Abû'l Faraj; a work on diplomacy by Sir Dudley Digges; a biography by Fulke Greville; a study of the Church of England by Sir John Harington; heraldic treatises by Johannes de Bado Aureo, Henry Estienne and Nicholas Upton; Sir Edward Coke's commentary on Magna Carta; theological controversies concerning the Sabbath, the altar and predestination, including works by George Abbot, Richard Bernard, Charles Chauncy, George Hakewill, Arthur Lake, Hamon L'Estrange, John Ley, William Twisse and George Walker; sermons by Tobias Crisp, John Eaton, John Everard, Samuel How and Robert Towne; biblical exegesis by Johann Heinrich Alsted, William Ames, Thomas Brightman and Joseph Mede; intra-puritan disputes involving John Etherington, John Wilkinson and others; poems and plays; medical treatises by William Harvey and Hans Jacob Wecker; astrological treatises by Claude Dariot, Jacques Gaffarel and Sir Christopher Heydon; alchemical writings by Afonso V of Portugal, Clovis Hestean, Heinrich Nolle, Thomas Norton, Michal Sedziwój, Basil Valentine and Blaise de Vigenère; some of John Dee's writings concerning the invocation of spirits; writings on magic by Gabriel Naudé and Giovanni Battista della Porta; Robert Fludd's treatise on Mosaic philosophy; a work about Rosicrucians by Michael Maier; writings on chiromancy and physiognomy by Johannes ab Indagine; prophecies by Paul Grebner and several attributed to Merlin; English translations of writings by Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim, Hendrik Jansen van Barrefelt, Jakob Böhme, Tommaso Campanella, Johann Crell, Oswald Croll, Petrus Cunaeus, Jean d'Espagnet, Sebastian Franck, Nicholas of Cusa, Simeon Partlicius, Samuel Przyckowski, Johannes Trithemius and Valentine Weigel, as well as those ascribed to Hermes Mercurius Trismegistus and Solomon; and English versions of the Koran, *Theologia Germanica* and *Racovian Catechism*.^[48] This is a seductive argument, which has often been echoed. Even so, it is an oversimplification.

10. It has been estimated that between 1640 and 1660 some 33,086 titles were published in the British Isles or by English speakers elsewhere in the world. This figure represents roughly 26% of the total number of such publications between 1475 and 1700.

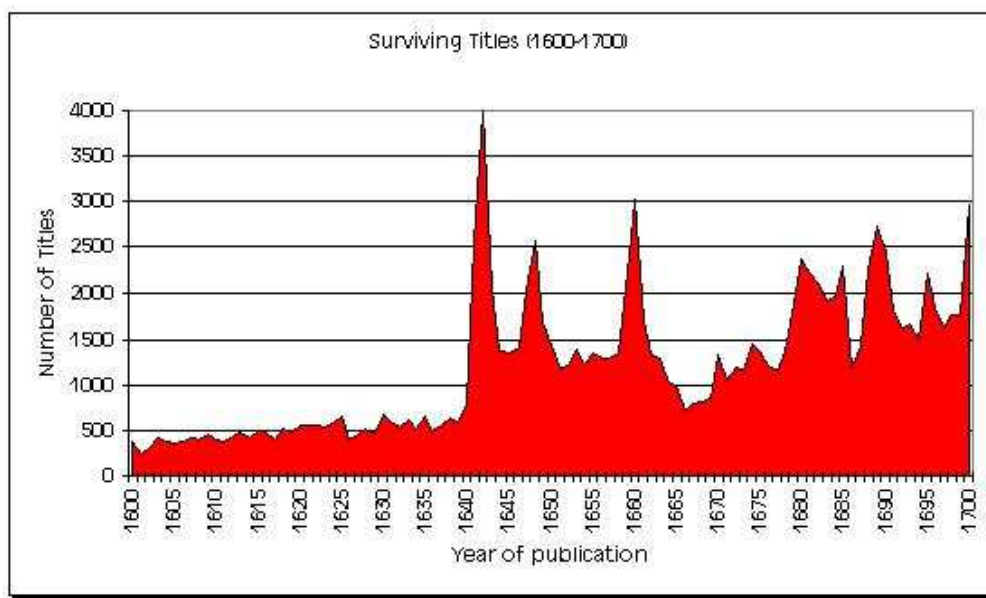


Figure 9

[Source: Alain Veylit, 'Some Statistics on the Number of Surviving Printed Titles for Great Britain and Dependencies from the Beginnings of Print in England to the year 1800' <http://estc.ocr.edu/ESTCStatistics.html#WING>]

In the 1630s between 600 and 700 titles were usually issued each year. This climbed to almost 900 titles in 1640, over 2,000 in 1641 and above 3,500 in 1642 – when more titles appeared in a single year than at any time before the eighteenth century. Thereafter, however, there was a comparatively sharp fall: less than 2,000 titles in 1643, less than 1,250 titles in 1644 and 1645. Then followed a gradual increase from roughly 1,300 titles in 1646 to a high of about 2,250 titles in 1648. Next came a dip to just over 1,500 titles in 1649 and about 1,400 titles in 1650. Between 1651 and 1658 less than 1,000 titles appeared each year except for 1653. Then a dramatic rise occurred with over 1,750 titles in 1659 and more than 2,200 titles in 1660. While these figures remain approximate (partly because some titles are still coming to light and others are no longer extant or have had dates assigned to them) the general trend in output is now well-known.^[49] Moreover, this impression is reinforced by an analysis of the London bookseller George Thomason's extensive collection of printed works.

11. Probably begun in 1641 and not abandoned until 1663, Thomason's collection by his own estimate consisted of nearly 30,000 pamphlets. Even so, there have been disagreements about its actual size. G.K. Fortescue, who compiled a published catalogue, put it at 22,255 items, while University Microfilms enumerated 23,926 items contained in 2,142 volumes (including newsbooks but excluding over 145 lost pamphlets). Using another count still, which divides the collection into 14,724 pamphlets and 7,120 newsbooks, it is possible to provide estimated yearly totals. Thus Thomason is reckoned to have acquired 22 books and pamphlets in 1640, 717 in 1641 and 1,966 in 1642. Thereafter, however, there was a comparative decline in volume: 1,091 books and pamphlets in 1643, 692 in 1644 and 694 in 1645. Then followed a gradual increase from 804 books and pamphlets in 1646 to a high of 1,408 in 1648. Next came a dip to 777 books and pamphlets in 1649 and 481 in 1650. Between 1651 and 1656 Thomason usually acquired just over 400 books and pamphlets, the exception being 598 in 1653 and 526 in 1654. Subsequently he obtained 306 books and pamphlets in 1657 and 282 in 1658. After that there was a surge, with 652 books and pamphlets in 1659 and 976 in 1660.^[50]

Estimated output of publications, 1640-1660

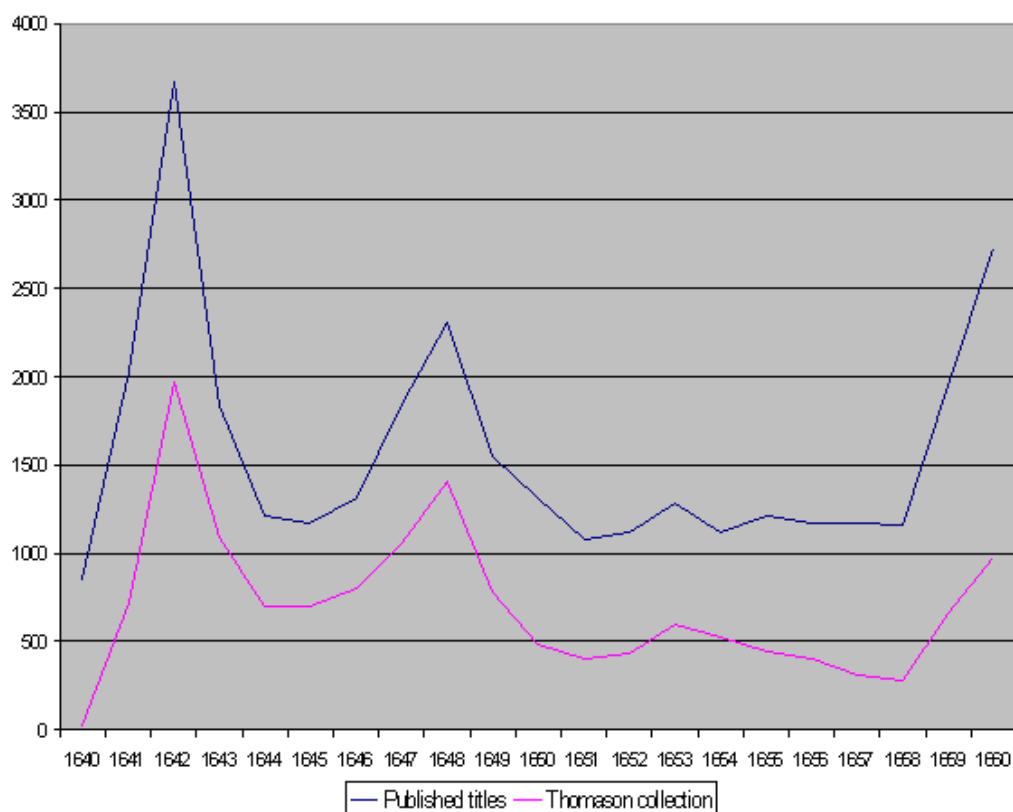


Figure 10

12. The publication of weekly newsbooks tells a similar story. Known in an earlier incarnation as corantos and modelled on Dutch examples, the popularity of these brief and inexpensive reports coincided with the Thirty Year War. In October 1632, however, the Privy Council ordered publication of them to stop and they did not reappear in this form until December 1638.^[51] It has been calculated that there were 2 newsbooks in 1640, 3 in 1641 and 59 in 1642. Between 1643 and 1644 the number dropped to the 40s, with a further reduction into the 30s between 1645 and 1647. Next came a peak of 70 newsbooks in 1648, falling to 49 in 1649, 26 in 1650 and 21 in 1651. Between 1652 and 1654 there were 30 newsbooks, but this decreased to 12 in 1655, 3 in 1656 and 5 between 1657 and 1658. Then there was a surge, with 23 newsbooks in 1659 and 34 in 1660.^[52]

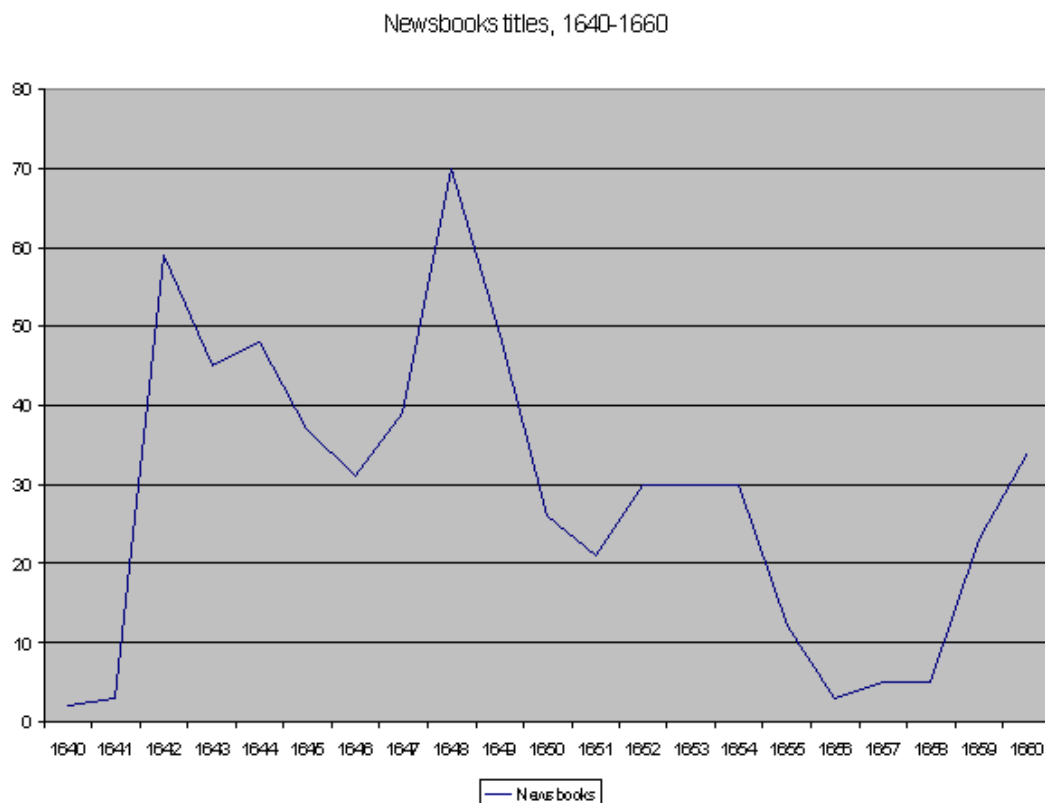


Figure 11

There are many ways to explain this broad trend in output of books, pamphlets, broadsheets and newsbooks in England between 1640 and 1660. One approach is to correlate the data with notable political, military, religious, economic, cultural and Continental developments. On this reading the growth in titles from 1640 to 1642 corresponds to the rebellion in Ireland and outbreak of Civil War, while the comparative decline matches the years of intense fighting. The increase from 1646 to 1648 reflects negotiations with the defeated king, the increased power of the Army and programmes for new forms of government. The gradual dip in 1649 and 1650, which becomes more pronounced after 1651 mirrors the growing confidence of the Commonwealth as it began defeating internal and external enemies. The small peak in 1653 is connected with the dissolution of the Rump Parliament, the excitement associated with the Barebones Parliament and the beginnings of Quaker printing. The relative trough between 1654 and 1658 relates to the establishment of the Protectorate, while the surge in 1659 and 1660 reflects the reassembly of the Rump, army intrigues and the restoration of the monarchy. Though crude, this helps give a sense of the bigger picture.

13. Another method involves comparing the evidence with civil, military and ecclesiastical attempts to regulate the press. In March 1641 members of the Stationers' Company and the House of Lords committee on printing held meetings and, following a petition by a group of Presbyterian ministers for a new licensing system, a printing bill was read in July 1641. On 26 August 1642 alarmed by the 'late great disorders and abuses by Irregular Printing', Parliament issued a special order for the suppression of all 'false and scandalous' pamphlets. After that came an order empowering the Committee for examinations to appoint people to search, seize and imprison those engaged in producing 'Scandalous and lying' pamphlets (9 March 1643). Then there was an order for suppressing 'false forged, scandalous, seditious, libellous, and unlicensed papers, pamphlets, and books' (14 June 1643), which John Milton denounced in *Areopagitica*.^[53] Further attempts to control the press came with an act of Common Council prohibiting hawking pamphlets in London (9 October 1643), and a Parliamentary ordinance (28 September 1647).^[54] The Commonwealth also issued an act against unlicensed and scandalous books and pamphlets (20 September 1649) giving the master and warden of the Stationers the power to search for unlicensed printed material as well as enabling the Lord Mayor of London to apprehend hawkers and ballad singers.^[55] This legislation was subsequently revived, amplified and clarified (7 January 1653).^[56] A further act against printing unlicensed and scandalous books and pamphlets was issued during the Protectorate (28 August 1655).^[57] Setting these measures against the general trend in output of titles it appears that press regulation was partly successful – notably, as is now recognized, in 1643.

14. Clearly, even after the calling of the Long Parliament the desire to censor remained in many quarters. There were three effective ways in which this could be achieved: through pre-publication censorship, post-publication censorship and self-censorship. The keystone of pre-publication censorship had been the licensing system. During the 1620s and 1630s the licensers – Georg Rudolph Weckherlin, Latin secretary

to the Privy Council, the Bishop of London's chaplains and university professors – had worked in partnership with the Stationers. It has been demonstrated that in practice this procedure was not always effective. Licensers were often overworked and perhaps only had the opportunity to glance at certain texts. Thomas Wykes, for example, licensed 631 books between 1634–1640 (that is an average of one book every four days). Nor could they always prevent authorial intervention after a text had been approved and the copyright entered in the Stationers' register. Consequently, several scholars have suggested that the government lacked the determination, ability and personnel to exercise anything more than punitive measures on a handful of troublesome individuals. Even the restrictive Star Chamber decree of 1637 has been regarded as a sop to the Stationers, granting them legal protection from piracy and foreign competition. This view has been convincingly challenged and replaced by a more nuanced appreciation of the ways in which licensers could exert a moderating influence through sympathetic handling of a text. Yet their endorsement was only one side of the coin. For it is also evident that though the number of publications interfered with or suppressed remained small, pre-publication censorship, particularly of religious literature, was used to increasing effect by both 'Calvinists' and 'Arminians' in the 1620s and '30s.^[58]

15. By the beginning of 1641 the licensing system was in disarray. Despite initial Parliamentary attempts to reassert control by examining those considered responsible for committing abuses in printing and licensing, and subsequently through legislation, pre-publication censorship had largely collapsed – much to the detriment of the Stationers' Company. Though works continued to be genuinely licensed, notably fast sermons and parliamentary speeches, the Stationers' register became increasingly used to protect the publisher's copyright rather than to indicate official approbation.^[59] Moreover, as has been shown, the appointment of more than 25 licensers in June 1643 suggests a continuity of Laudian policy, if not particularly of personnel – which reflected factional interests.^[60] Indeed, lack of a universally agreed strategy and uniform practice was a characteristic feature of licensing in the later 1640s and 1650s. Thus James Cranford promoted Thomas Edwards and other Presbyterian authors critical of Independents, while John Bachelor allegedly assisted the production of Independent texts.^[61] Yet it was the elderly divine John Downham who best illustrates how an individual licenser could grant an imprimatur (a brief official statement printed within a book authorizing its publication) that did not always meet with official approval. Among the works licensed by Downham was the second edition of *A confession of faith* (1646) by seven London Baptist congregations, which the Commons ordered to be seized and suppressed. He also licensed *Eikon Basilike* and extracts from it entitled *Apophthegmata Aurea*. In addition, he approved an English translation of *The Alcoran of Mahomet* (1649) from the French version of André du Ryer. This resulted in the apprehension of the printer and Downham's appearance before a committee of the Council of State.^[62] Afterwards Downham granted an imprimatur to TheaurauJohn Tany's *THEAURAUJOHN His Aurora in Tranlagorum in Salem Gloria* (1651). Though 'Licensed according to Law and Command', the author was nonetheless brought before the Westminster Assembly of Divines and eventually convicted of blasphemy.^[63] Other noteworthy titles entered in the Stationers' register include an English version of Isaac La Peyrère's *Prae-Adamitae*, which had been condemned to be burned at Paris and Rome, and the Familist text *Mirabilia opera Dei* (1656).^[64] Without an equivalent to the Papal Index of prohibited books, an English *Index expurgatorius*, pre-publication censorship appears to have been almost entirely at the licenser's discretion.^[65] As such it was utterly ineffective.

16. Although Parliamentary orders, ordinances and acts failed to stop the publication of scandalous, seditious, libellous and blasphemous pamphlets, papers and books they enabled civil and military officials to search and seize unlicensed material, to demolish and remove presses, and to fine or imprison authors, printers, publishers, booksellers and hawkers. These measures were enforced by Parliamentary officers and their deputies, the Lord Mayor and Militia of London, the two Wardens of the Stationers' Company and others specifically appointed for the task, with the assistance of magistrates, army officers, parish constables and beadles. Outside the City the burden fell upon Justices of the Peace, sheriffs, mayors, customs officials and soldiers, aided by paid informers and spies. Post-publication censorship proved most effective when implemented by those with intimate knowledge of the printing trade. Stationers therefore benefited by protecting their copyrights and patents. Moreover, though the Stationers' Company had been unsuccessful in preventing the break-up of several monopolies it had exercised before the abolition of Star Chamber, the act of September 1649 rewarded compliant company members by safeguarding their commercial interests from competitors.^[66] This partnership between State and Stationers was at times fairly effective in suppressing illicit printed material.

17. Company politics, particularly disputes concerning the management of the English, Latin and Irish Stocks (trading partnerships for producing and distributing lucrative books such as Psalms, primers and almanacs), as well as social inequalities and religious divisions, suggest the level of disunity among Stationers would have made it difficult for the company hierarchy to respond efficiently to Parliamentary pressure to regulate the press.^[67] Nevertheless, between 1644 and 1646 they were instrumental in locating Nicholas Tew's press at Coleman Street, which had printed some of John Lilburne's pamphlets; William Larner's press at Goodman's Fields, which had also issued some of Lilburne's writings; and Larner's press in Bishopsgate Street, which had printed Richard Overton's anti-monarchical *The Last*

Warning To all the Inhabitants of London. By his own account the stationer Joseph Hunscoth played an important role in shutting down these secret presses, afterwards petitioning Parliament to provide him with protection from law suits and financial recompense.^[68] Hunscoth was also responsible in December 1649 for apprehending both the author and printer of the royalist newsbook *The Man in the Moon*.^[69] Another printer whose activities came to the attention of the authorities was Henry Hills. A member of William Kiffin's Baptist congregation, Hills printed works for the New Model Army at Oxford, as well as a 'very dangerous' book seized at his press over against St. Thomas's Hospital, Southwark in January 1648. He later vowed not to print any seditious or unlicensed material, providing a bond of £300, and was rewarded in May 1653 with appointment as co-printer to the Council of State.^[70] Like Hills the publisher and bookseller Giles Calvert, who was also appointed co-printer to the Council, had been involved in the publication of unlicensed pamphlets such as Richard Overton's *A Dreame: Or Nevves from Hell* and *The Last Warning To all the Inhabitants of London*. Calvert, however, was soon in trouble again when in February 1655 his new stock of Quaker books was seized on Cromwell's orders and taken to Westminster for examination.^[71] Furthermore, in April 1656 a deputy of the Commission for regulating of printing presented information against Calvert for selling the Quaker Edward Burrough's *A Trumpet of the Lord sounded out of Sion* (1656), a work thought to be 'scandalous and preudicial to ye Comonwealth'. For issuing this and some other books 'reflexive upon the present Government' Calvert was ordered to appear before the Council of State in May 1656.^[72] Similarly, Calvert's former apprentice Richard Moone was examined by John Thurloe for his part in the publication of *A short discovery of His Highness the Lord Protector's intentions, touching the Anabaptists in the army* (1655).^[73]

18. Excluding corrupt translations of the Bible imported from the United Provinces, Catholic primers, missals and a liturgical devotion to the Virgin Mary,^[74] 60 identified printed books, pamphlets and broadsheets, and 3 newsbooks were ordered to be burned by civil, military and ecclesiastical authorities in England between 1640 and 1660.^[75] In addition, Parliament ordered a number of letters, notably those maligning its military commanders, to be burned.^[76] Capuchin vestments and utensils belonging to the alters and chapel of Somerset house and 'superstitious' pictorial representations of God the Father, Christ the Son, the Holy Ghost and the Virgin Mary were also ordered to be burned.^[77] English book burning reached its height in 1642 when 13 books and pamphlets were consigned to the flames. Yet with the exception of a significant peak of 9 titles in 1646, during the remainder of the period no more than 5 books and pamphlets were ordered to be burned in a single year. Indeed, as significant as the occurrence of authorised book burning is its absence in 1649, 1653, 1657, 1658 and 1659.

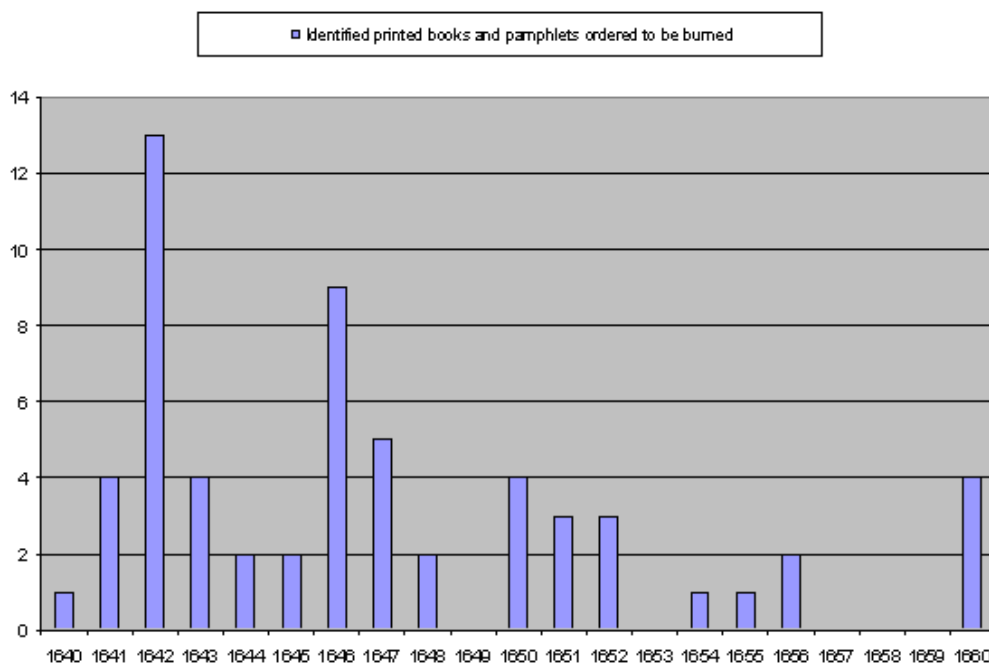


Figure 12

19. Among the works incinerated in 1641 and 1642 were; John Pocklington's *Sunday no Sabbath* (1636) and *Altare Christianum* (1637);^[78] Lord Digby's speech on the Earl of Strafford's attainder;^[79] a ballad against Marie de Medici, the Queen Mother;^[80] a collection of speeches made by Sir Edward Dering;^[81] petitions by citizens of London and Kent;^[82] forged or genuine letters from Henrietta Maria, Lord Paget and Lord Falkland;^[83] a relation of military proceedings in Ireland;^[84] and the so-called Book of Sports, which was condemned by the Commons in November 1642 for authorizing profanation of the Sabbath, and then again by the Lords on 5 May 1643 for the same offence.^[85] Between 1643 and 1645 a further 8

titles were condemned, including Roger Williams's *The Bloody tenet, of Persecution, for cause of concience* (1644) and Robert Ram's *The souldiers catechisme: composed for the Parliaments Army* (printed for J. Wright, in the Old-Bailey, 1645).^[86] The book that attracted most attention, however, was John Archer's posthumously published *Comfort for Beleevers about their Sinnes & Troubles* (printed for Benjamin Allen, and are to be sold at his shop, at the Crown in Popes-head-Alley, 1645). This was denounced by the Westminster Assembly of Divines for maintaining the heretical doctrine that 'God is and hath an Hand in, and is the Author of, the Sinfulness of his People; and that God is more in their Sins and their Sorrows, than they themselves'. Accordingly the Lords resolved that the book 'be damned in the most public Manner' by having it burned by the hangman.^[87] In January 1646, responding to what appears to have been an Independent initiative a Commons committee investigated David Buchanan's *Truth its Manifest*. This work of Scottish Presbyterian propaganda was subsequently ordered to be burned, its author declared delinquent and a swift response issued through the press.^[88] Another tract attributed to Buchanan met the same fate in April, 'The State of the Question concerning Propositions of Peace' published in *Some Papers of the Commissioners of Scotland* (printed for Robert Bostock, dwelling at the sign of the King's-Head in Paul's Churchyard, 1646).^[89] Also dispatched to fire that year was George Smith's newsbook *The Scottish Dove, sent out and returning Bringing intelligence from their army*,^[90] and pamphlets written by John Lilburne, Richard Overton and Henry Marten.

20. Lilburne, who was brought to the bar of the House of Lords on 11 June 1646 and afterwards committed to Newgate, had more of his writings burned in England between 1640 and 1660 than any other author. Among them were *The iust mans iustification* (1646), *The Free-Mans Freedome Vindicated* (1646) and *A just Reproof to Haberdashers-hall* (1651).^[91] Like Lilburne, Overton had two of his works burned in 1646; *A Defiance against all arbitrary Userpations or Encroachments* (1646) and *An vnhappy Game at Scotch and English* (1646).^[92] Furthermore, Overton's *A Pearle in a Dounghill* (1646) was examined by a Commons committee, as was William Walwyn's *The Just Man in Bonds* (1646). In January 1647 the Lords ordered *Regall Tyrannie discovered* (1647) to be burned for containing 'much treasonable and other insufferable matter'. The author(s) – probably Lilburne and Overton, printer and publisher were also to be apprehended.^[93] On 20 May two petitions addressed to the Commons were likewise sent to flames, prompting Walwyn to issue *Gold Tried in the Fire; or, The Burnt Petitions Revived* (1647).^[94] As well as writings by or associated with Lilburne, Overton and their supporters, which form the largest group of books burned during this period, two royalist newsbooks – *Mercurius Elencticus* and *Mercurius Pragmaticus* – were also ordered to be burned on 27 November 1647.^[95]

21. Another important category of writings consigned to the flames was antitrinitarian publications. Thus in July 1647 after an ordinance for hanging Paul Best had been read twice to Parliament, the Commons ordered his 'horrid blasphemous' pamphlet *Mysteries Discovered* (1647) to be burned. Similarly, John Biddle's 'blasphemous' *Twelve arguments drawn out of the Scripture* (printed by Elizabeth Gosling, 1647), written while its author was imprisoned in the Gatehouse at Westminster, was condemned to be burned by the Commons on 6 September 1647.^[96] The House proved equally severe with one its own members, John Fry, who was charged with a breach of Parliamentary privilege and disabled from taking his seat. His tracts *The Accuser Sham'd* (printed for John Harris, and are to be sold at his house on Addle hill, 1648) and *The Clergy in their Colours, or a brief Character of them* (printed for Giles Calvert at the black-spread Eagle at the West end of Pauls, 1650) were ordered to be burned on 22 February 1651.^[97] Most serious of all was the licensed publication of an English translation of *The Racovian Catechisme* (Amsterdam, printed for Broer Janz [= London?], 1652). This too was ordered to be burned on 2 April 1652 for asserting that 'in the Essence of God, there is only One Person; and That One Person is That One God'.^[98] Then in August 1653 Richard Moone was committed prisoner to the Gatehouse for selling and publishing seditious books. These probably included Biddle's 'blasphemous' *The Apostolical And True Opinion concerning the Holy Trinity revived and asserted* (1653) and Samuel Przyrkowski's *The Life of that incomparable man Faustus Socinus Senensis* (1653). Upon his release Moone took care to have the copyright of his next two antitrinitarian publications entered in the Stationers' register: Przyrkowski's *Dissertatio de Pace* (1653) and Biddle's *A Twofold Catechism* (1654). Even so, in December 1654 he was questioned by the Parliamentary Committee for regulating printing together with the printer James Cottrell and again committed prisoner to the Gatehouse. The Commons ordered Biddle's two books to be burned by the hand of the common hangman at the Old Exchange, London and in the New Palace, Westminster, thereby condemning them to the same fate as his earlier work.^[99]

22. A third type of dangerous book such as Pocklington's *Sunday no Sabbath*, the so-called Book of Sports and James Ockford's *The Doctrine of the Fourth Commandement, deformed by Popery* (printed by G. Dawson, and are to be sold by John Hides, 1650), concerned profanation of the Sabbath, which the Lords had condemned in April 1644.^[100] Moreover, three 'Ranter' writings were ordered to be burned in 1650; Abiezer Coppe's *A Fiery Flying Roll* ('printed in the beginning of that notable day', 1649), Jacob Bothumley's *The Light and Dark sides of God* (printed for William Larnar, at the Black-more in Bishopsgate-street, 1650) and Lawrence Clarkson's *A Single Eye All Light, no Darkness* ('Imprinted at London, in the Yeer that the Powers of Heaven and Earth Was, Is, and Shall be Shaken, yea Damned, till

they be no more for Ever’).^[101] Yet it is also noteworthy that no works advocating adult baptism or any titles by Quaker authors were burned by authority. Even the republication of several of Henrick Niclaes’s books did not result in an official order consigning them to the flames. This apparent religious toleration went too far in the eyes of several Presbyterian ministers and stationers. The latter issued *A Beacon Set On Fire* (1652) to call Parliament’s attention to Popish and blasphemous books. It was followed by Michael Sparke’s *A Second Beacon Fired by Scintilla* (1652), which contained a reference to Acts 19:19 on the title-page: an unmistakable demand to burn offensive books.

23. The use of the hangman in book burnings had been introduced to England in 1634. By 1640 his presence had become a familiar aspect of a scene of street theatre designed to frighten onlookers. The locations selected for these ritual mock executions by fire were invariably large open public spaces in the Cities of London and Westminster and the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge; Cheapside, Smithfield, Paul’s churchyard and the Old Exchange in London, the New Palace at Westminster and the Market Place in Southwark. In a country where the bodies of heretics were no longer consigned to the flames but the Pope and other prominent Catholics were still burned in effigy, these book burnings were akin to a Protestant *Auto da Fé* by proxy.

Burning books was an effective way of destroying particular printed texts, but not of eradicating them. The Roman Inquisition burned thousands of copies of *Trattato Utilissimo Del Beneficio Di Giesu Christo Crocifisso* (1541), yet it remains extant. In the same way it appears that at least one example survives of every book, pamphlet, broadsheet and newsbook ordered to be burned in England between 1640 and 1660. Indeed, there is evidence that book burning sometimes stimulated demand for condemned works by arousing the curiosity of collectors. As Daniel Defoe was to remark, he had heard a bookseller in the reign of James II say that “if he would have a book sell, he would have it burnt by the hands of the common hangman”.^[102] Perhaps this was one reason why George Thomason acquired so many titles that were made a bonfire of. Even so, his ownership of these works raises another question – were the authorities aware, and if so, why did they connive at it?

24 Public book burning was the most dramatic method of post-publication censorship in early modern England. As an aspect of legislation designed to regulate the press it worked in concert with Parliamentary efforts to suppress religious dissent through the Committee of Examinations, the Committee for Plundered Ministers, the ordinance of 2 May 1648 for punishing blasphemies and heresies and the act of 9 August 1650 against the same offence. Together these measures created a climate in certain circles conducive to self-censorship. There are numerous instances of authors not putting their names to inflammatory printed works. Printers, publishers and booksellers were even more cautious. Even when these risks were run by committed individuals printing remained an expensive business. It did not become more affordable in the 1640s and 1650s for it seems that only the rich or those with wealthy benefactors or organized group support had the means to publish their writings. Moreover, the 1630s had seen a sudden and sharp rise in book prices and, if the complaints of stationers are to be believed, prices remained high in the succeeding two decades.^[103] If this was an age of freedom, it was a strictly limited one.

25. On 26 January 1661 the bodies of Oliver Cromwell and Henry Ireton were disinterred from their graves in Westminster Abbey. A few days later, on the anniversary of the execution of Charles I, their bodies with that of John Bradshaw were hung at Tyburn. In May 1661 the restored monarchy continued with its expurgation of the Commonwealth and Protectorate by ordering the Solemn League and Covenant and several Parliamentary acts – for erecting a High Court of Justice, declaring the people of England to be a Commonwealth, for subscribing the Engagement, renouncing and disannulling the pretended title of Charles Stuart, for the security of his Highness the Lord Protector – to be burned.^[104] The nineteenth-century German poet Heinrich Heine famously had a character remark in his tragedy *Almansor* (1820–22) that ‘where they have burned books, they will end in burning human beings’. During the English Revolution and long after the Restoration, however, the contrary was the case: where they could no longer burn people they could still burn their books.

Notes

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